



EDUCATE | A CASE STUDY FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Where does a nonprofit organization that wants to prioritize diversity and inclusion begin?

Sue is the new CEO of a nonprofit arts organization. One of her first actions as CEO was to review their board composition and governance practices. She created a dashboard to track term limits, demographics, and diversity metrics. Alarmed by the results, their makeup was 13% minority and 33 % female. For their organization, diversity and inclusion are critical to those they serve through their mission to advance the arts throughout the community. Sue realized they have the same problem with their staff. Sue identified that these two problems stemmed from recruiting from within their established networks. It was clear her organization needed help to make meaningful strides towards building inclusive and diverse leadership. As she began to think through this issue, she proposed that her organization search outside their own networks and establish partnerships with other organizations to build intentional relationships. The organization started by having an intentional conversation around what type of composition they wanted to have on their board. Through this conversation, they identified a composition more accurately reflective of the community. Sue, key staff, and board members identified the census as a productive guide to benchmark metrics. Although it seemed like there had been meaningful progress towards intentional change, Sue has begun to notice some of the long-standing board members become resistant to looming changes. Sue knows her organization needs to prioritize diversity and inclusion, but she doesn't feel this new direction is fully supported by several influential members of the board.

What does the research say?

BoardSource the national leader on board research highlights four key points in their *Leading with Intent* study:

1. A board that is homogeneous in any way risks having blind spots that could result in strategies that ineffectively address societal challenges or even reinforce them.
2. If an organization is facing issues due to a lack of board diversity, chief executives should help the board understand these issues rather than continuing to make the case for diversity without the board fully understanding what is at stake.
3. Boards must define what the ideal board composition looks like – not just in terms of diversity, but also in expertise, experience, and networks – and be vigilant about finding it through focused board recruitment.
4. The composition of a board is a reflection of its organizational values. Clearly articulated values on diversity are a signal the board has thought through what diversity means to them and why it matters to the mission.