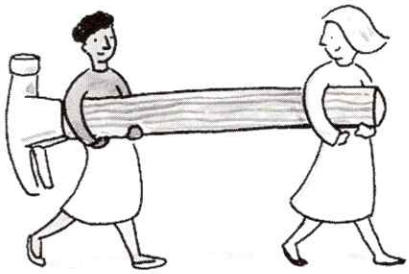
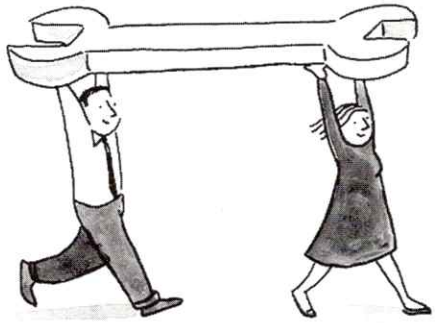
Workshop

Building Diversity

All of Us Together Can Work Wonders





Diversity. It's a loaded word—one that makes many people and organizations feel uneasy, a little defensive, maybe even a bit guilty. It's also a word that holds much hope for the future. By embracing and nurturing diversity, we break down barriers and face the possibility of sharing our strengths. Diversity is all about inclusiveness—it goes beyond the obvious (race, culture, gender, religion) to incorporate the subtle. Practicing diversity is one sure way of using the power of individuals to bring about renewal in our communities. Our guest editors talk about what diversity means and offer ways in which you can foster diversity in yourself and your organization. ■

Workshop, a standing feature in *Volunteer Leadership*, offers how-to tips and valuable insights on selected topics. If you'd like to be a guest editor or want to suggest topics for future coverage, write to Volunteer Leadership Workshop, The Points of Light Foundation, 1737 H Street NW, Washington, DC 20006; fax: 202-223-9256.

For more information on trainers and consultants included in Workshop, contact the Foundation.

Diversity: A Shared Responsibility

By Nora Silver and Gwen Wong

Imagine tomorrow. You awaken to find yourself standing before a classroom of beings from another time and planet. It is 2110 and you are their guest speaker. These beings are of all ages and backgrounds; they represent all planets in the universe. They are studying the United States, 1996, on the planet Earth. "What happened?" says one of the students. "How could such a promising civilization with all the potential for inclusion become so divided that it self-destructed?" You ponder the thought as you drift back to your own place and time. Inclusiveness—it is a necessity for our survival. But, how do we recognize it, and how do we foster it?

Leadership

We need leadership to call forth the best in people, to build bridges between groups, inspire our youth and energize our institutions. Effective leadership means we must be able to work well with a great variety of people, both individually and in groups. Creative ideas and solutions evolve from the synergy of groups that have diverse perspectives. Our leaders must remind us that our promise lies in our people and that we must engage all our resources and talents to survive and adapt to an ever so fast-paced and demanding world.

Business

The Industrial Revolution gave us technology—a faster, more efficient way to produce more. But in an ever-changing world, how do we continue to produce, sell and offer? People are our market; we need to include all of them in our ventures. Eighty-five percent of new people in the workplace will be women and people from ethnic communities. Our future depends on how well we work, as colleagues, staff and volunteers, with the diversity of our incoming, diverse and young work force.

Community

Communities are being mobilized. Our model neighborhoods engage their residents in community affairs and local community problem-solving. The complexity and interdependence of our world requires that we be creative and think "outside of the box." Issues like environmental waste disposal, violence, and elder care affect us all in so many ways. Entrusting these concerns to a small group working in isolation will cripple every community.

Personal Commitment

Feel the exhilaration of experiencing something new and different, something that pushes us beyond the familiar. A rich mosaic of people and customs awaits us, ready to enlarge our scope and expand our horizons. Likewise, we each offer unique perspectives, talents and skills that enrich others. Let us not squander our gifts.

In leaving people out, we sow the seeds of our own destruction. We render ourselves less powerful, more hopeless, with less to gain and less to lose, and with little reason to "follow the rules" and strive for greatness. And we wonder why we start running red lights, arming ourselves, shooting family members, former bosses and colleagues. We pay a steep price for excluding people, and for tolerating systems that are demoralizing and inequitable. And we—each and every one of us—share the burden of the results.

As you drift back to this classroom of the future, you ask yourself, What could I have done to save ourselves? Did I turn away too many times? Will I turn away now?" I reflect on a story I recall:

I was living in a peaceful town when a group of enforcers came. They came first for the immigrants. And I turned away because I wasn't an immigrant. And then they came for the poor and the ill, and I turned away because I wasn't poor or ill. And then they came for the very young and the very old, and I turned away because I wasn't very young or very old. And then, they came for me. And by that time there was no one left to turn to.

We must all make a personal commitment to build upon our vision of an inclusive community. I plan to do something. I won't turn away. I hope you will help, too. ■

Nora L. Silver, Ph.D., director of The Volunteerism Project, a program to strengthen and diversify volunteerism in the San Francisco Bay Area, is author of At The Heart: The New Volunteer Challenge to Community Agencies.

Gwendolyn J. Wong, vice president and manager at the Industrial Bank of Japan, Ltd., is chair of The Multicultural Initiative.

Attracting Diverse Leadership

By Mary Williams Stover

Since 1987, United Ways have implemented strategies to recruit, develop, train and retain Asian, Black, Hispanic, and Native American Indian volunteer leaders for local nonprofit agency boards and committees. While focusing on increasing minority volunteer involvement, they also developed strategies to recruit volunteers representing diverse groups such as women, the physically disabled and youth.

Barriers

Even when organizations commit to broadening their volunteer base, there are many challenges to attracting and retaining diverse leaders. All nonprofits have limited financial and staff resources. The constant search for dollars causes staff and existing board members to target corporate leaders with perceived clout and access to company coffers. Women, youth and minorities are often viewed as non-contributors.

Another barrier to successful volunteer diversity recruitment is the agency's image. For example, United Way is still mistaken in some communities as a "good old boys' network." It is important to conduct formal or informal research to determine how your agency is perceived by the target groups that you seek to include.

How, when and where you conduct board or committee meetings may also affect attracting and retaining diverse volunteer leaders. If your board meets only at lunch time during the week, can hourly or union workers participate? What about working parents with small children? Can neighborhood leaders get involved if your committees meet only at 7:30 a.m.? A commitment to diversity means examining your current activities and processes to identify which practices must change if you really want to be inclusive.

Mary Williams Stover is director of diversity for United Way of America.

Strategies

United Ways have developed Project Blueprint, a minority volunteer development program, to recruit and train multicultural volunteer leaders. Since Project Blueprint began in 1987, more than 3,000 volunteers have been recruited for leadership positions on boards and committees across America. Lessons learned from these programs include the following:

- Recruit a steering committee to guide your organization's recruitment efforts.
- Include representatives from your board and the target groups you hope to attract. Also include media and anyone who has been critical of your organization's diversity. These individuals should assess your agency's image and determine if any of your current practices inhibit volunteer diversity.
- Encourage staff and steering committee volunteers to attend meetings and make presentations to minority fraternities and sororities, women's business organizations, youth groups and religious clubs. Promote your agency's track record on providing services to diverse communities and the need to ensure inclusiveness in your decision-making processes.
- Use the steering committee to develop public service print or radio ads and work with targeted media to promote your organization's desire for volunteers. Recruit a spokesperson from the community you hope to attract to talk about the benefits of volunteer leadership.
- Identify organizations that will collaborate with you to provide diverse volunteer leaders in return for training or development.

For example, the United Way in Jacksonville, Florida, provides financial support to Volunteer Jacksonville to operate Project Blueprint in that community. In order to increase placement of minority volunteers to local agency boards, Volunteer Jacksonville uses volunteer internships, which allow community leaders to attend agency board meetings for several months. The volunteer leader gets exposed to the agency, and the agency builds a relationship with a new, prospective volunteer.

Finally, the best way to promote your agency's desire for diverse volunteer involvement is to use word-of-mouth referrals. Develop a list of everyone you know who may be a resource for your recruitment efforts. Send each person a letter defining the skills and qualifications of the volunteers you are seeking and ask for help in identifying potential volunteers.

By building a network of people who will serve as bridges between your agency and its prospective volunteers, you enhance your ability to "get the word out" about your desire to create an inclusive volunteer system. ■

Assessing Your Organization's Diversity

By Emily Gantz McKay

Your organization wants to be diverse, so it can effectively serve a diverse clientele in a multicultural community and nation. Before you can decide whether—and how—to increase your diversity, you need to assess your current diversity as an organization. This means:

- Deciding what you mean by organizational diversity—what parts of the organization must be diverse.
- Determining what categories of diversity are important, given your location, services and target population.
- Determining the characteristics of your target community.
- Finding out what the major components of your organization would look like if they reflected the characteristics of your target community.

A truly diverse organization does not simply serve a diverse clientele. Very often, potential clients will not seek services unless they see "people like me" on staff or board. If you work with disabled children, having disabled adults visible on the staff and governing board and among your volunteers can send an important message. If you provide HIV/AIDS services, you may find it hard to reach gay men of color unless your organization includes people like them.

Emily Gantz McKay is president of Mosaica, a multicultural nonprofit organization which assists other nonprofits in the United States and internationally, and helps to develop multicultural leadership.

Nonprofit organizations need to reflect diversity in at least four areas: staff at all levels; board of directors (your policy makers); volunteers (the people who help get things done); clients or beneficiaries (the people you are serving).

There is no one formula or standard against which to measure your diversity. A reasonable first question is: "What diversity categories do we need to consider?" The most obvious are race/ethnicity and gender, but characteristics such as religion, disability, sexual orientation, or place of residence can be very important. Consider the following targets or benchmarks:

- Your client population should reflect the characteristics of your service area and your targeted service population in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, and any other factors closely related to the service you provide.
- Your staff and your board should reflect the characteristics of your targeted service population. This means staff at all levels, not just direct service personnel.
- Your volunteers should reflect community characteristics as closely as possible.

Use the following steps to assess your diversity:

- Determine the diversity of your specific target community and of potential clients. Obtain census data and copies of needs assessments completed in your community. Seek out program-focused information, such as epidemiological reports on health issues, to determine the size and characteristics of your potential client population.
- Look separately at as many population groups as possible. Because of language and cultural differences, you want to know how many Mexican Americans and Central Americans, how many Hmong and Vietnamese and Japanese Americans live in your community, not just how many Hispanics and Asians.
- Identify major immigrant populations or ethnic groups that may not be part of a defined minority group but have special language and cultural needs.
- Identify other characteristics important to your work, such as religion, disability, national origin, language use, etc.
- From this information, develop a blueprint of what your client group would look like if it reflected your potential client population. List the percentage of clients who would have specific characteristics—for example, racial/ethnic breakdown, gender breakdown, etc.
- Categorize your current clients, or your clients over the past year, using the same characteristics.
- Categorize your board and staff using the same variables. Divide staff into levels, such as senior management, professionals, paraprofessionals, and support personnel.
- Categorize your volunteers, both as a total group and separately according to whether or not they live in the community.
- Make a chart that summarizes what you have learned and allows for comparisons between each component of your organization and your potential client population.

Now you know how diverse your organization is—and you can begin to set diversity objectives and work towards increased diversity where necessary. ■

Targeting Your Message

By Timothy Rose

It all seemed simple. A group of communications professionals had come together to help our community. Our youth—teens and younger—in the community were using and abusing drugs and alcohol in increasing numbers. A county commission had asked us to develop a theme and messages to stop the problem. No sweat.

The facilitator broke us into smaller working groups. The "Just Say No" campaign had been most effective. A broadcast message that spoke to the people we needed to reach. Plain, simple, direct. The message would be received, right? Nodding heads all around the table, or so it seemed. "Wait, please," said one man. "I am Jewish. The use of wine, from the Bris to the Seder, is an integral part of our religion. I can't tell Jewish youth a flat out no to alcohol. It just won't work."

A woman spoke next. "He's right. In my community, African-American youth is besieged by messages that smoking and alcohol make you sophisticated, wealthy and cool. They are told by pushers that there is a lot of money to be made in dealing crack and cocaine. Many kids see it as their ticket to fame and fortune. Just Say No? No way."

I chimed in, "What about lesbian and gay youth? Their risk for suicide is twice as high as that of other teens. Do they see drugs and alcohol as the only way of dealing with their lives—a slower suicide, but suicide nonetheless?"

The criticism being leveled was not directed at the existing campaign itself, but rather questioned our own abilities to reach unique, diverse youth communities at risk.

Clearly, this was harder than it looked. And no one at the table was under the age of 25, let alone 15. We had broken the rules about marketing our message to the people we were trying to reach. We were developing a broadcast message that would not be received by many. If we continued on in this vein, we would fail miserably. And we all realized it.

Target your message appropriately. It may seem obvious, but ask yourself who your audience is?

It was a lesson that I have never forgotten. I share it because I think it contains the basics for trying to market to and communicate within diverse communities. And no where are these tenets more important than in America's volunteer and community service organizations. Some points to consider:

■ Target your message appropriately. It may seem obvious, but ask yourself who your audience is? Consider the question and evaluate your answers. Know the differences and the diversity of the communities your organization serves.

■ Target your message to community media. Many organizations have bemoaned the lack of diversity in their volunteer force and often their own staff. My first question is always, "Where do you advertise yourselves?" If you want ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, communicate where your message will best be received. Often it is as easy as starting with community newspapers and radio. The results can be amazing. And in tight budgetary times, extremely cost effective as well.

■ Listen to other voices and tell their story. One of the best ways for your message to hit its target is using anecdotes from volunteers and staff. They often make your point better than "hired guns" or spokespeople ever could. It increases participation in and ownership of message campaigns and forms an immediate bond with the diverse communities you are trying to reach. Most importantly, it builds trust.

Broader interest in targeting messages to diverse communities is relatively new. Most of us are learning the skills necessary for this task on the job. Therefore, mistakes will be made. We are all better served, however, by the challenge marketing and communicating to diverse communities provides us with. It can be difficult and frustrating, but ultimately, our organizations and those we serve will be rewarded and grow because of it. It will also require our patience and perseverance.

In the words of poet Maya Angelou: "Success is not fame or fortune. It's picking up that burden and walking—and not letting the pain trip you up. ■

Timothy Rose is a communications manager for The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund and a commentator for RTCA's (PBS) "NewsNight Minnesota." He lives in Washington, D.C.

When Words Say Too Much

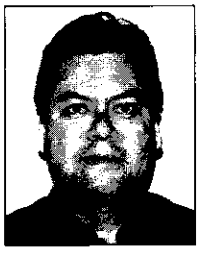
By Richard Diaz

I remember the day quite vividly. It was the first day of classes. I had just completed my Masters the previous semester and was excited because I had been accepted into the new Ph.D. program at the same university. I had met a few of the students and was excited to meet the others. This first class, an economics class, would be a challenge for me, but I always welcomed challenges. The professor had a reputation as a difficult professor and would demand a lot of work.

I walked into the seminar room, nervous. Glancing at the faces, I noted that there were no faces that I recognized, and most of all, that there were no other Latinos in the class. In fact, there was only one other person of color in the class—an African-American individual with whom I immediately struck up a conversation. Doris would become my strength in completing this class.

Singled Out

The professor walked in and distributed the class syllabus. A book a week to be read, accompanied by a paper. This was challenging, but doable. He then gave us an overview of what he thought this Ph.D. program was all about and told us he would be challenging us throughout the semester. Then, without a beat, he began to give a discourse on why he felt ethnic minorities were not Ph.D. material. I turned to Doris and said, "He is talking about us." He indicated that he felt that "minority" students are not prepared well enough academically to complete graduate programs and that they should not be in them at all. My heart sank. There was no challenge from the other students in the class. Doris and I sat there in stunned silence. Our protestations after the class brought only the comment that this is the way it was in doctoral programs.



Richard Diaz, Ph.D., is director of the United Way Kellogg Training Center, Los Angeles, California.

As professionals working with people of different backgrounds, we must be aware of our actions—conscious and unconscious—that might isolate an individual from a group.

I was born and raised in Los Angeles, the youngest of four children. My father was a factory worker, and my mother managed a family business. Immigrants from Mexico, neither of them completed high school and it was their desire that each one of their children attend college. My older siblings had accomplished this, and attaining my Masters and acceptance into the doctoral program had brought a true sense of pride to my family and a sense of self-confidence to me. Yet, I kept asking myself why I felt so alone.

It was through the support system that I developed with my friend Doris that I was able to survive the class. Studying before work, after work, and on weekends, we passed the class with A- grades. The comments of the professor on my last paper indicated that he still had his doubts about my academic ability. He congratulated me for working so hard and told me it would be a hard road for the rest of the program. He was right, and it was lonely as well.

Looking Back

Many years have passed. I have developed a wonderful career in the nonprofit sector. Yet, this incident lingers in my mind. I wonder how many other professors have thought the same but not been so blatant with their statements.

What is the lesson? There are many instances when someone—who we feel is different—volunteer or staff—may be experiencing the same feeling of isolation.

As professionals working with people of different backgrounds, we must be aware of our actions—conscious and unconscious—that might isolate an individual from a group.

We are all capable of isolating individuals who we feel are different. Becoming conscious of our behavior is important. Consciousness is the first step to change. ■