

Successful Strategies to Diversify Your Board

Lee Draper, Ph.D.

This article focuses on one of the themes that Lee will be addressing in her stimulating CONNECT workshop, Building an Active and Effective Board of Directors. [See sidebar for details.]

The number of nonprofit organizations in the U.S. now exceeds 1.5 million. Given the average board size of 17 members, the nonprofit sector needs more than 25 million people to serve in board leadership roles. Each year nonprofits struggle with the challenge of identifying and recruiting new board members who will become active and effective in planning, fundraising, and contributing to the organization's long-term success.

Traditionally, nonprofit leaders tap into their current board's networks to recruit new members. But what do you do when their networks are tapped out, or when you are at risk of creating a board where new members are nearly carbon copies of current members? How do you fill strategic needs for diversity when no one on the current board has the appropriate connections?

Here are some practical steps to take to help you leap frog out of your current networks into expanded prospects for excellent, diverse, and willing-to-work board members.

1. Begin by defining your board's key gaps. Does it include younger as well as older members? People who work in diverse industries? Individuals who reflect the ethnic diversity of your community and your organization's clients?

2. Once you've identified your gaps, have current members think about who they know who would make good *conduits* or *connectors* to help you fill them. Conduits are well-connected members of the community who, although they might not be appropriate for or interested in serv-

ing on your board, have strong networks among people who could be a perfect fit.

The best conduits are those who have regular interaction with up-and-coming leaders who aren't as visible or over-committed and might be looking for opportunities to get involved in the community, assume a volunteer leadership role, or "give back" at this point in their careers. Some examples of conduits are: corporate executives or upper managers, elected officials or their deputies, membership directors at chambers of commerce, active community leaders or philanthropists, or officers of professional or alumni associations.

3. Stay focused on your key gaps. Open up the board's brainstorming by relieving the pressure of having to think of people who would be willing to make an investment of time and resources to your organization. All you are asking the conduit to do is to help identify people who might share your mission and enjoy the opportunity of exploring a volunteer leadership role. Hopefully the conduits are aware of your organization, but they only need to have a friendly relationship with someone involved.

4. It is important to do the following in order to take full advantage of conduits' time and networks in the effort to recruit new board members:

Prioritize your list of connectors. Start with the top five and only reach out to the next group of five when you've completed all the steps below. This will help you avoid getting stretched too thin and not following through effectively.

Call the connector and ask to schedule a 30-minute meeting at a convenient place (usually his or her office or home). Keep the phone conversation simple, indicating that you hope to gain his or her input on some important developments at your or-

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Come join us!

Building an Active and Effective Board of Directors

Workshop presented by Lee Draper, Ph.D.

When:

July 24th
9:00AM–12:00PM

Where:

Orangewood Children's Foundation
1575 E. 17th St.,
Santa Ana, CA

Cost:

\$65

(Fee waived for grantees of the Children and Families Commission of Orange County)

Register:

Click Here to register online.

A Model for Collaboration

EDUCATION CORNER



In their model, Gidron and Hasenfeld discuss four hierarchical levels of collaboration. While each successive level must be successfully implemented before moving up to the next, they point out that not all collaborations need to seek to reach the highest level

1. **Referral** – At this level, agencies understand and trust the quality of work the others are doing and freely refer clients to each other.
2. **Coordination** – Agencies have an institutionalized connection with each other often involving a formal liaison who refers clients to specific agencies within the collaboration depending on clients' needs. The liaison also functions to aid communication and understanding between the organizations.
3. **Coalition** – Organizations work together developing the coalition and engaging in mutual creative efforts to improve services to clients. Partners represent each other with outside entities. At this level resource dependency is in play, however, this can be a temporary condition in an effort to achieve a common goal.
4. **Joint Ventures** – At this advanced level of collaboration an entirely new entity is created that incorporates aspects of each of the composite units.

Gidron, B. & Hasenfeld, Y. (1994). Human service organizations and self help groups: Can they collaborate? *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 5(2), 159-172.

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ganization. You don't want the phone call to take the place of the meeting.

Meet with your connector. Two people from your organization should attend, one of whom being the executive director, so that you can capture all the input and build a deeper relationship with the conduit. Come prepared with a packet of concise, compelling information about your organization and a board member job description. Address your goal for searching for great board members and emphasize how the board is playing a central role in shaping the future of the organization. Clearly and directly state the gaps you are trying to fill so that the conduit can focus on those to help you where you need it the most. Make sure to address the following questions for each potential board member s/he suggests:

- How does the connector know the individual?
- Why does the connector think the person would be effective on your board?
- Why does the connector think this person would want to be on your board?

- Could the connector play a role in making the preliminary introduction (e.g., send an email, place a phone call, or participate in the first in-person meeting)?

Follow up immediately with your conduits thanking them for their valuable input and advice.

Additional follow up. Make sure to close the loop with your conduits and provide updates about their recommendations (e.g., whether their referrals led to new board members, donors, volunteers, or other connections).

Using conduits is an effective way to ensure that your board will be diverse, engaged, and continually drawing in new energy and resources. Furthermore, not only do connectors assist you in filling vacancies on your board, but they also expand your networks of contacts and advocates for your organization.

Lee Draper is President of Draper Consulting Group, which provides management services to grantmakers and nonprofits including strategic planning, board development, and fundraising (major donors, capital campaigns, and grantsmanship). Visit www.drapergroup.com for additional information.