



BOARD DIVERSITY & INCLUSION: FINDING DEEPER INSPIRATION

FOR BOARDS OF DIRECTORS AND THEIR ASSOCIATIONS, THE BENEFITS OF EMBRACING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ENCOMPASS BOTH HIGH LEVELS OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND THE REWARDS THAT COME WITH PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL GROWTH.

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To navigate

the challenges of a world experiencing profound transformation, association boards must act decisively to create a different future of governing. At the heart of this different future is the imperative to seat boards of directors that are both diverse in composition and inclusive in approach.

Associations derive a series of benefits when they embrace greater diversity and inclusion, including stronger board and organizational performance. Another benefit is more personal to you as a board member: You discover the deeper inspiration you need to become the best version of yourself as both a director and a human being.

ASAE's new D+I strategic plan defines diversity as “the composition of a group of people from any number of demographic backgrounds, identities (both innate and selected), and the collective strength of their experiences, beliefs, values, skills, and perspectives.” At a more personal level, diversity is about appreciating and respecting the unique combination of characteristics of every individual. For you and your board peers, consistently demonstrating this kind of appreciation and respect is integral to translating an expressed interest in diversity into an authentic and sustainable commitment.

Intimately connected to diversity is inclusion, which is created by adopting approaches to ensure that all individuals and groups have appropriate opportunities to participate and contribute to an organization's work.

Association boards need both diversity and inclusion. Building a more diverse board will not take care of itself. Legacy governing documents can place unnecessary constraints on eligibility for board service. Individual and organizational orthodox beliefs—the deep-seated assumptions we make about how the world works—may unintentionally disqualify potential directors who can bring new and valuable perspectives. Additionally, without genuine inclusion, even a highly diverse board will find it challenging to realize its full potential. You and your peers must agree on a clear course of action for ensuring greater board diversity and inclusion, in which you invest organizational resources and for which you accept shared responsibility.

NURTURING DIRECTORS AS PEOPLE

With powerful forces of societal transformation rapidly reshaping every field of human endeavor, the complex demands of association board service will continue to grow. Under these challenging conditions, the benefits of board service for you and your peers also must increase, but not in a way that is about pure self-interest. Instead, board service must offer the potential for ongoing growth as a director and as a human being.

Building a more diverse and inclusive board will facilitate this outcome in three substantial ways.

A more diverse and inclusive board will make all directors smarter. Artificial intelligence and automation are helping to reinvent the future of work. As the capabilities of these and other technologies expand, human beings need to develop new capacity of their own.

When your association's board is more diverse and inclusive, you will have the powerful opportunity to deepen your thinking through exposure to ideas, insights, and perspectives from peers with life and work experiences quite different from your own. In addition, as your board strives to understand, anticipate, and prepare your association for the future, the enhanced richness of your continuous process of sense-making, meaning-making, and decision-making will have a lasting impact on you as a learner, a director, and a person.

A more diverse and inclusive board will make all directors more empathic. One of the most valuable skills for directors (and human beings) to develop is empathy—the ability to see the world through the eyes of other people. Your work with a diverse and inclusive board will strengthen your ability to be empathic as you reflect on the plausible impact of societal transformation on both current and future stakeholders, especially those who are unknown to you personally and who are not already connected to your association.

As your participation in a diverse and inclusive group bolsters your empathy, you will be better able to recognize and examine your own assumptions and biases, demonstrate humility, and appreciate the unique

personal narratives of everyone you serve, including your peers at the board table.

A more diverse and inclusive board will make all directors more collaborative. An association board composed of impressive individuals is insufficient to meet the challenges that societal transformation creates. Boards must operate within a robust team dynamic, which requires each director to make a personal commit-

ment to collaboration. The choice to be collaborative involves a willingness to put the good of the group ahead of your own priorities and interests and to generate new and different solutions.

Over time, as you and your board peers nurture your empathy, you will develop an increasingly allocentric mindset. Allocentrism is about acknowledging the value and importance of others. When you are allocen-



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WHEN YOUR ASSOCIATION'S BOARD IS MORE DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE, YOU WILL HAVE THE POWERFUL OPPORTUNITY TO DEEPEN YOUR THINKING THROUGH EXPOSURE TO IDEAS, INSIGHTS, AND PERSPECTIVES FROM PEERS WITH LIFE AND WORK EXPERIENCES QUITE DIFFERENT FROM YOUR OWN.

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tric, you can see the need to acknowledge what matters to other people and to listen closely to the voices of those not routinely heard in the boardroom. With this mindset, you will nurture a truly interdependent approach to building your association and preparing stakeholders to thrive in the years ahead.

DISCOVERING DEEPER INSPIRATION

Having a well-defined course of action for building a diverse and inclusive board—including resource investment and a clear understanding of the board's responsibility for making it happen—is simply the first step toward discovering the deeper inspiration that will arise from fulfilling this critical commitment. There are other important issues that your board will have to work on together to maximize the personal and professional growth of every director.

Being intentional. In this context, being intentional means fully integrating the importance of diversity and inclusion into every aspect of the director experience. From the identification, recruitment, and selection of new directors to the orientation, preparation, and development of all

directors—as well as other phases of the experience that come throughout a director's term—consistent communication and action around the commitment to diversity and inclusion are necessary. Once the commitment is shared, the association and the board must follow through even when resistance emerges.

Recognizing limitations. As your board strives to become more diverse and inclusive, both the association and its directors must recognize their limitations and work to overcome them. For example, artificial barriers to identifying candidates who bring greater diversity to the board must be removed, including bylaws and other governing documents that may fail to reflect a contemporary understanding of the world in which your association operates. For you and your board peers, the limitations are likely to be more personal, and you will be challenged to access the emotional and intellectual openness required to fully embrace the opportunities afforded by seating a diverse and inclusive board.

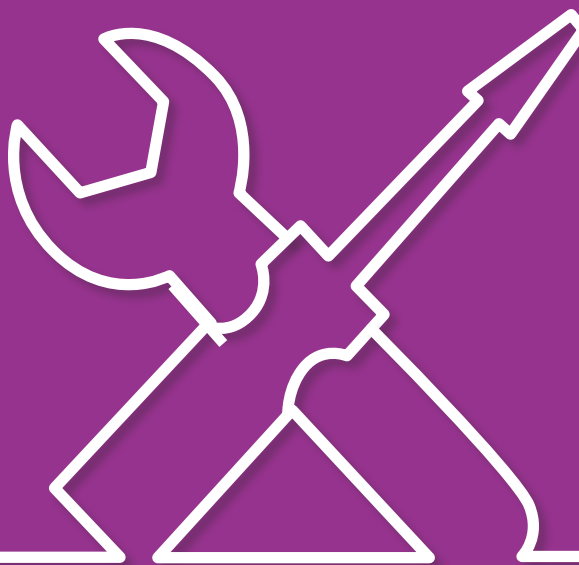
Acknowledging mistakes. To prevent any errors in judgment or practice from undermining the effort to improve board diversity and inclusion, it is essential to acknowledge any mistake without delay. This acknowledgment should be followed by a heartfelt request for forgiveness and a sincere promise to learn from the mistake to avoid repeating it. Expecting failures to occur is not an admission of weakness but an act of prudence as you and your peers seek to address the challenge of building a diverse and inclusive board with maximum skill and sensitivity.

By ensuring greater diversity and inclusion within your board of directors, you and your peers will do much more than give your association the opportunity to thrive in a world experiencing transformation. You will be a part of something much larger than yourself, and in the process, you will become the best version of the director and the human being you want to be. There can be no deeper source of inspiration than that.

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