

A REPORT FROM THE PIPELINE

REFLECTIONS ON THE NONPROFIT SECTOR FROM PEOPLE OF COLOR IN METRO DENVER



THE DENVER FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

The Expanding Nonprofit Inclusiveness Initiative (ENII) is a program of The Denver Foundation. The mission of ENII is “to enhance the effectiveness of Metro Denver’s nonprofit sector by helping organizations become more inclusive of people of color.” ENII works on three different levels to accomplish its mission: the sector-wide, organizational, and individual levels. Information about ENII’s activities is available at www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org.

On the individual level, ENII seeks to help people of color become more aware of and involved in the nonprofit sector. ENII calls this work “building the pipeline.” This publication outlines some elements in the experiences of individuals of color, personally and within the sector, that may lead to increased involvement as staff, board, volunteers, and donors for nonprofit organizations, and those elements that can deter involvement.

ENII has two aims for this publication:

- To help nonprofit organizations better understand how a selected sample of individuals of color perceive and interact with the sector;
- and
- To help individuals of color consider the elements that may encourage them to increase their involvement with nonprofits.



Methodology

During the spring and summer of 2006, ENII hosted two conversational meetings with more than 100 individuals of color, and conducted a survey of 110 college students and young nonprofit professionals from communities of color. The meetings and survey questions were designed to explore the following:

- **If individuals of color are involved in the sector, what led to their involvement?**
- **What are the factors that make a nonprofit organization welcoming or unwelcoming to individuals of color?**
- **What are the barriers that keep individuals of color from becoming connected and staying connected with nonprofits?**
- **What are the characteristics of a fulfilling volunteer experience, from the perspective of a person of color?**
- **What can be done, either by ENII or individual organizations, to increase the involvement of individuals of color in the nonprofit sector?**

Much of the information collected, particularly through the conversations, is anecdotal in nature; however, several key themes emerged, which are summarized here. These conversations represent the thoughts of some members of communities of color in Metro Denver, but are not a scientifically-selected sample.

All items in quotation marks reflect comments made in discussions or survey responses.

Definitions of Diversity and Inclusiveness

Diversity describes the extent to which an organization has people from diverse backgrounds and communities working as board members, staff, and/or volunteers.

Inclusive organizations not only have diverse individuals involved; more importantly, they are learning-centered organizations that value the perspectives and contributions of all people, and strive to incorporate the needs and viewpoints of diverse communities in the design and implementation of universal and inclusive programs. Inclusive organizations are, by definition, diverse at all levels.



CONVERSATIONS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS

This section summarizes the themes that emerged during two conversational meetings conducted by ENII with more than 100 individuals of color. The meetings included grassroots leaders working primarily in their neighborhoods and in communities of color, and individuals currently active as board members, volunteers, donors, and staff in the larger nonprofit sector. Grassroots leaders also included participants and graduates from The Denver Foundation's Strengthening Neighborhoods Leadership Development Program.

What leads to connection?

Participants identified a number of key reasons for becoming involved in the nonprofit sector. They include:

- A family tradition of giving back to one's community
- A desire to set an example for future generations
- More experienced leaders encouraged involvement
- A desire to help their communities, and a belief that the nonprofit sector could play a role in meeting this desire

Many individuals suggested that their involvement was often based on seeing the community's needs, and then perceiving that the nonprofit sector was the most effective vehicle to make a difference and create social change.

"I grew up in the church, so I was involved from the get-go. Now, I'm on a number of boards."

"I was involved in the civil rights movement in college, and was always looking for some way to affect social change."



What makes a nonprofit welcoming?

Participants believed that a nonprofit that is welcoming to communities of color displays a willingness to recognize the importance and challenges of diversity and inclusiveness. Such an organization works consistently to become more inclusive in its outreach to and recruitment of individuals of color.

What can nonprofits do to become more welcoming?

Participants shared several suggestions to help nonprofits improve their inclusiveness:

- Listen to and value contributions from diverse individuals
- Clearly articulate the organization's mission and explain how people can help
- Intensify efforts to incorporate diversity, cultural competency, and inclusiveness into the values and policies of an organization
- Develop innovative outreach strategies to include the wide spectrum of ideas, perspectives, and talents of individuals of color
- Enhance relationships with and connections to communities of color
- Focus on changing the organization's culture, starting at the board level
- Identify new people to bring into the sector as staff and board members, volunteers and donors, and support these emerging leaders

Generally, participants hope that nonprofits can make concerted, sustained efforts to become more inclusive, starting from the Board and CEO level. Such practices as institutionalizing inclusive policies and seeking more input from the community would lead to a more welcoming environment.

Definition of Cultural Competency (from Georgetown University) :

Cultural competence requires that organizations:

- *have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.*
- *have the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve.*
- *incorporate the above in all aspects of policy making, administration, practice, service delivery and involve systematically consumers, key stakeholders and communities.*

Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum.



What barriers prevent people of color from getting involved with nonprofits?

Participants discussed a number of barriers for organizations in recruiting diverse board members, staff, volunteers, and donors.

- A misconception that individuals of color do not have wealth, expertise or wisdom to contribute
- Looking for a “certain type” of person of color: highly-educated, or with economic and social privilege (also defined as the “A-List” or “more like the dominant culture”), particularly for boards
- Lack of cultural competence or commitment to inclusiveness
- One-time-only or special events to reach out to new communities without holistically committing to inclusiveness
- Sometimes the Metro Denver community as a whole can feel less cohesive, which affects a person’s likelihood of participating in community activities

Participants also identified some key barriers that apply to the individuals of color themselves.

- Lack of information and education about nonprofits
- Lack of time, energy, or the money that nonprofits may require board members to contribute
- A feeling of being overwhelmed by community needs



What barriers prevent people of color from staying engaged with nonprofits?

Several elements may contribute to an organization’s difficulty in retaining people of color as key constituents.

Tokenism: A person is the “only one” of a certain ethnicity or race and is asked to speak on behalf of “their” group.

Lack of cultural competency: Some individuals noted that they did not always feel that their contributions or ideas were considered valuable to some organizations. People some times feel their perspectives aren’t valued and that their ways of communicating aren’t accepted.

Lack of trust: Some individuals of color felt that their work or volunteer participation was often scrutinized more intensively than that of their white counterparts. “It is twice as hard to earn trust,” according to one participant.

Lack of personal relationships across racial/ethnic lines: Participants felt that such relationships can be hard to build and sustain, and that organizations could take a role in helping support this process.

Lack of communication, coordination, and collaboration between nonprofits and community groups: Many participants noted that the nonprofit sector in Metro Denver seems fragmented, and that more organizations need to work together, or work with groups already connected to communities of color, so as not to duplicate efforts. This fragmentation was perceived as also applying to organizations led by people of color.

Definition of Tokenism: Making an indifferent or minimal effort to hire or retain people of color as staff members to fill specific slots, and asking people to represent all members of their racial or ethnic group.

“I knew I was there because of the color of my skin. Being inclusive is more than just color, it is about having something to contribute.”

“Sometimes, the organizations are like a club and you just don’t feel like you fit in. I feel like I am not wanted there.”

“There is an urban legend that exists - that people of color are not around.”



What makes a volunteer experience fulfilling?

Participants shared many positive experiences as volunteers in nonprofits. They noted that these experiences had some common elements:

- Their contributions as volunteers, including time, perspective, and dollars, were clearly appreciated.
- They clearly understood the nonprofit's mission, goals, programs, and resources.
- The organization conducts outreach to communities of color and explains what an individual can do to get involved.
- The organization is both effective at accomplishing its mission and inclusive of many perspectives.

Interestingly, many of these elements will be present in any well-run organization. Good management principles are often key in building an inclusive nonprofit.

What can be done to increase the involvement of individuals of color in the nonprofit sector?

In general, participants expressed a belief that enhancing understanding of the purpose of nonprofits and the multiple facets of the nonprofit sector, along with how a person can get involved, are essential to enhancing the participation of individuals of color in the nonprofit sector. Specific suggestions included:

- Develop a top-down commitment to inclusiveness, including a diverse board and leadership team. This includes formal policies to promote inclusiveness, such as those related to recruitment and retention.
- Be intentional and strategic regarding outreach to communities of color through such ongoing efforts as educational sessions, networking events, and marketing strategies.
- Think about existing methods of outreach and consider whether there may need to be more face-to-face connection vs. letters and printed materials.



- Encourage a more intense connection between nonprofit boards and the communities they serve, including recruitment of individuals of color for board and other leadership roles.
- Strengthen communities of color by providing and supporting leadership development opportunities (e.g. African-American Leadership Institute, Circle of Latina Leadership, Leadership Denver, and Denver Community Leadership Forum).
- Highlight and celebrate accomplishments of individuals of color in the nonprofit sector or in a specific organization.
- Provide communities of color with access to a clearinghouse of information, resources, and services regarding nonprofits.
- Create mentoring relationships for emerging leaders (e.g. internships)
- Enhance collaboration and minimize competitiveness between organizations and between different communities to increase overall effectiveness
- Build capacity in nonprofit organizations, including building relationships internally and externally
- Frame volunteering opportunities as a practical way to broaden the volunteers' networks, increase their experiences, and to increase their opportunities
- Offer opportunities to connect in nontraditional ways, such as through shorter board committee assignments that accommodate varying schedules
- Inform the community about opportunities to serve

Many of these suggestions involve outreach to communities of color. Participants noted the need to develop appropriate messages and strategies for outreach, including efforts that move the organization out of its usual comfort zone.

“People of color are always being asked to go outside of their comfort zone.”

“My biggest wish is to make a difference and help fulfill the mission of the organization.”

“Let’s learn together. If we can’t talk about things, we can’t learn about things, then we can’t get past them.”

“Just invite them. That’s the first step.”



SURVEY OF YOUNG LEADERS

This section summarizes the findings from an on-line survey of college students and young nonprofit leaders. These individuals were asked questions similar to those posed to more established community leaders. However, additional questions regarding demographics were also included.

Demographics

There were 110 respondents to the on-line survey. Their demographic breakdown is as follows:

Role	36% students 48% nonprofit professionals 16% both
Race/Ethnicity	43% Spanish/Latino/Hispanic 37% Black/African-American 9% Asian/Pacific Islander 3% Native American/American Indian/Aleut 8% Mixed race/other races and ethnicities
Gender	22% Male 78% Female
Age	43% Under 23 years old 27% 23 – 32 years old 30% Over 32 years old
Level of education	5% High School/GED 36% Some college or Associate's Degree 24% Bachelor's Degree 35% Graduate work, Master's Degree, or PhD/MD
Length of residency	74% More than 10 years in Colorado 26% Less than 10 years in Colorado
Experience with nonprofits	39% Served on a nonprofit board 61% Have not served on a nonprofit board



What are the barriers that prevent people of color from getting involved and staying involved in the nonprofit sector?

Mixed responses: More than half of the respondents felt that the nonprofit sector is relatively welcoming to people from diverse backgrounds. However, respondents noted that the nonprofit sector does not pay competitive salaries and that people of color are typically underrepresented in the nonprofit community.

Similarly, though respondents did indicate that it is particularly difficult for people of color to obtain leadership and board positions, they were virtually split regarding whether there is a lack of opportunity or limited growth and learning potential within the sector.

Education/Language: Roughly 60% of respondents felt that lack of fluency in English and lower educational levels (below a college graduate) were barriers to more engagement.

Other barriers: Tokenism was mentioned as a significant barrier by this group, as well. They also generally believe that there is a lack of commitment to cultural competency and sensitivity in the nonprofit sector. However, respondents were split as to whether they believe institutional racism exists.

"We need to tell the multicultural history of Denver more richly and invite more participation among people of color."

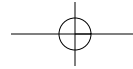
"This is what we've lost – we don't often speak to our neighbors so how can we know what's happening in our world."



What factors would promote involvement in the nonprofit sector?

Most of the respondents indicated that the following elements would be very useful or somewhat useful in terms of enhancing the involvement of individuals of color in the nonprofit sector. The following items are ranked related to how many “very useful” responses they received.

- Educational scholarships related to nonprofit work
- More outreach to people of color to provide information about opportunities for work or leadership in the nonprofit sector
- Internship opportunities within the nonprofit sector
- Networking opportunities for professionals of color working in the nonprofit sector to connect with one another
- Mentoring programs
- Efforts to improve diversity in the nonprofit sector
- Cultural competency training to help nonprofits better respond to and incorporate the perspectives, needs, and strengths of various racial and ethnic groups
- Training for boards on the importance of organizational inclusiveness
- Job fairs or a job bank that target people of color
- Conferences providing information about working in the nonprofit sector or developing leadership skills for nonprofit work
- Written documents with information about opportunities in the nonprofit sector



CONCLUSIONS

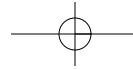
For Organizations: The reflections collected in this report offer important insights for organizations seeking to become more inclusive of people of color. Individuals from communities of color, young and more experienced, are seeking to become involved in organizations with cultural competency. Many are also concerned about tokenism and wish to be valued for all of the assets, skills, and talents they bring to the table. Many look for organizations that reach out in creative ways to diverse audiences. Visit www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org for access to information, resources, and links that can help your organization more effectively connect with individuals of color as board members, staff, volunteers, and donors.

For Individuals of Color: Do you hear your voice reflected in these pages? If so, this document can be a powerful tool to help a nonprofit you work with to become more inclusive. This report could also help you in assessing the nonprofits with which you might want to share your time, energy, and resources.

For ENII and The Denver Foundation: Many of the people who shared their thoughts through the conversations and the survey want more opportunity for networking, connection, and collaboration between nonprofits and community members. They are also looking for leadership development opportunities and more information on the nonprofit sector. Among ENII's upcoming activities:

- In partnership with the Community Resource Center (CRC), ENII is creating a program entitled “Connecting with opportunities in the Nonprofit Sector” for emerging community leaders in communities of color.
- With CRC, ENII will co-host its second conference on inclusiveness and diversity in the fall of 2007.

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- ENII will develop a tool-kit of materials for individuals, available at www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org, explaining how the nonprofit sector works and detailing ways that people can get involved.
- For organizations seeking to become more inclusive, ENII and CRC will create a training series on specific topics such as board leadership, fundraising, and organizational culture.
- The Denver Foundation is piloting an internship program in the summer of 2007 for students from diverse backgrounds.

For more information, visit www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org or contact the staff of the Expanding Nonprofit Inclusiveness Initiative at 303-300-1790.

About The Denver Foundation

The Denver Foundation is a community foundation working with local donors to improve life in the seven-county Denver metropolitan area through philanthropy, leadership, and strengthening the community.

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For more information about ENII: www.nonprofitinclusiveness.org



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