

Intent versus Impact

Yolanda Coentro & Shaheer Mustafa 04 December 2017



Students at the Institute engaging in a lively classroom discussion with faculty member, David Howse.

Photo Credit: Isometric Studio in NYC

Our sector has a problem with race. According to the Building Movements Project recent Race to Lead report, the number of Executive Directors/CEOs of nonprofits who identify as white has remained virtually unchanged over the past decade despite a pointed focus to improve representative diversity at the highest levels of the sector. In fact, only 10 percent of nonprofit CEOs are people of color and only 16 percent of Board members and 10 percent of Board Chairs are people of color¹. As our nation

confronts race and inherent bias, we need diversity and equitable representation in the leaders of our civil society to help us achieve equality.

The reality is, talk is cheap. Too many organizations have echoed hollow platitudes about the value of diversity while taking few meaningful steps to actualize those same ideas. Intention only gets you so far. At the end of the day, organizations should be judged on their impact, so why does this continue to present such a challenge to a sector that positions itself as a moral authority?

Organizations have largely failed to make the business case for diversity.

In today's complex world, we need innovations that can only be found by convening diverse groups of problem solvers. Whether your organization is addressing community violence, hunger, or degradation of the environment, traditional technical solutions are not moving the needle at the scale required. There is an established body of evidence to support the claim that diversity in problem solving groups trumps individual ability². Homogenous groups, even highly effective ones, ultimately reach an innovation barrier. We need the best and the brightest from all corners of the diaspora to convene and tackle our society's most vexing problems. While the moral imperative has served to underpin the values often held for diversity and equity, it is the articulation and subsequent executive level ownership of

the business case that will call the sector to action.

One strategy to deliver on the business imperative is targeting financial investments in leadership and talent development. The Center for Creative Leadership writes, "investments in leadership development improve bottom-line financial performance, attract and retain talent, drive a performance culture and increase organizational agility, especially in challenging times³." In a field where people are our most valuable resource, this can serve as a key differentiator in the marketplace. Yet, despite this widely accepted knowledge and proven return on investment, less than one percent of foundation dollars annually are directed towards leadership development.

While all of this is true, isn't one of the key arguments in support of diversity, equity, and inclusion that we ought to question traditional models of leadership and organizational structure that are built upon white, male archetypes? Why don't we tilt the sector on its ear and build an altogether new model that better actualizes the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion? These are valid and legitimate questions to consider, but revolution is not the only path forward. Despite our attempts to diverge from our capitalist economic roots, experience teaches us that it is the organizations that are able to create change "from within," and build best in class teams of diverse talent that are most agile and prepared to solve the challenges facing our communities.

Still, many in the sector are under-resourced and less likely to invest in talent development when “more critical” business needs are on the line. They view investment in staff as a privilege, not a choice. In many ways, these organizations reflect the communities they serve: it is about surviving, not thriving.

But what is the excuse for the scaled, robust, financially stable nonprofit that continues to be led by a disproportionately white executive team and Board? Systemic barriers continue to exist which limit the opportunities that people of color have to fill top leadership roles. Whether it is the real or perceived limitation of social networks key to fundraising⁴ or the fact that people of color believe they need to have more demonstrated leadership experience to break through implicit bias in hiring processes⁵, there is a more insidious systemic challenge before us.

The Institute for Nonprofit Practice (INP), suggests exploring innovative approaches to creating a nonprofit sector in Boston and beyond which is exponentially more equitable and ultimately more effective. Boston is in the midst of a seismic leadership transition as the baby boomers retire en masse. According to a 2017 report by Third Sector New England, 78 percent of nonprofit leaders in Boston say they will leave their jobs by 2020⁶, and the nonprofit sector makes up a whopping 17 percent of the state’s workforce⁷.

For 10 years, INP has leveraged the opportunities presented by both the succession crisis and our rapidly diversifying metropolis to support a nonprofit sector which is better equipped to address the challenges of today by ensuring more equity at top levels of leadership. We do this by training and building meaningful connections among emerging, mid-career, and executive nonprofit leaders, 50 percent of whom are people of color, through our year-long, academically distinguished and highly affordable certificate programs.

INP envisions a world where society's most complex problems are solved by the most talented people. Through its two year-long certificate programs -- the Core Program, designed for current nonprofit leaders, and the Community Fellows Program, a prestigious fellowship designed for the most promising emerging community and nonprofit leaders -- INP fills the leadership development gap that has prevented social sector organizations from reaching their full potential for impact. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are emphasized throughout the program experience with a focus on mitigating the barriers to entry and advancement in the sector for people of color and women. To do this, our programs take a comprehensive and nuanced approach.

Building Fundamental Skills

The Management Seminar in both the Core and Community Fellows Programs includes weekly classroom

sessions over an academic year covering a range of fundamental topics, including leadership and self-awareness, recruiting talent and managing high-performing organizations, financial management and fundraising, governance and the role of boards, impact measurement, coalition building, and succession planning. The Institute's exceptional faculty, 64 percent of whom are people of color, are experienced, practicing nonprofit professionals who bring their real-world perspective to the classroom.

Putting Skills into Practice

As a companion to each Management Seminar session, program participants break out into smaller Practice Seminar sessions. In these groups, students apply what they have learned, examine their current leadership challenges, and problem-solve with a diverse group of leaders representing various organizations and fields within the sector.

Engaging with Mentors

As an extension of their immersive Management and Practice Seminars, program participants engage with a mentor during the academic year. Mentors are seasoned nonprofit and private sector executives who serve in a one-to-one coaching role, providing a sounding board and offering guidance to students as they internalize and put into practice what they are learning through the

Institute.

Building Durable Networks

Of crucial importance to any leader is the ability to call on professional networks to access resources, make important organizational connections, cultivate community support, and collaborate with thought partners to collaborate and solve problems.

A frequently referenced barrier to racial equity in the sector is the real and perceived networks of leaders of color as compared to their white peers -- networks leveraged for a variety of business goals, perhaps most notably fundraising. INP closes that gap by intentionally building a community of support that students can access while in the program and for years to follow. It is these lasting relationships with trusted peers that may represent the most valuable impact of INP on supporting the success of leaders of color.

In addition to depth of skill and renewed confidence, all participants earn a certificate from the Jonathan M. Tisch College at Tufts University upon program completion. It is all too common for leaders of color to be held to impossibly high standards where a singular misstep can result in the downfall of a promising career. INP supports leaders' ability to take risks in service to their mission, critical to any innovative breakthrough, by offering credibility to their decision-making. Dignity and credibility

for the sector and its talent are essential to dismantling structural racism and implicit bias.

Finally, we consider that the cost of investing in talent represents a barrier for smaller nonprofits. INP raises funds to keep the cost of tuition low for Core Program participants and free for Community Fellows.

INP offers real, practical, and diverse solutions, by and for real, practical, and diverse leaders. As we scale nationally, our programs remain grounded in their local communities while positioned to learn from a broader network of thought leaders across the country. It is this balance that allows for innovation, inspiration, and cross pollination which benefits everyone involved, most notably the communities served by their representative organizations.

It is true, the sector has a race problem. But the conversation doesn't need to stop there. Bright spots exist. Organizations like INP that understand the business case for diversity, equity, and inclusion can offer nonprofit leaders a proven and comprehensive strategy to actualize their values. Words alone don't deliver on the promises made by our organizations. In the final analysis, we are not judged by our best intentions but by our actions.

Works Cited:

[Leading with Intent: 2017 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices](#), BoardSource, 2017, p. 10.

Scott Paige, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies*, 2008

[Driving Performance: Why Leadership Development Matters in Difficult Times](#), Center for Creative Leadership, 2008

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld and Frances Kunreuther, [Race to Lead: Confronting the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap, Building Movement Project](#), 2017, p. 3.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld and Frances Kunreuther, [Race to Lead: Confronting the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap, Building Movement Project](#), 2017, p. 11.

[Opportunity in Change: Preparing Boston for Leader Transitions and New Models of Nonprofit Leadership](#), Third Sector New England, 2017, p. 19

[United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), 2012

Author Bios

Yolanda Coentro

Yolanda Coentro, is the President and CEO of the Institute for Nonprofit Practice. The 2012 Boston Foundation 'Out of the Blue Award' recipient and a 2017 Social Innovation Forum 'Social Innovator,' the Institute seeks to equip, connect, and diversify the nonprofit sector's managers

and leaders. Yolanda is leading the development and implementation of a plan to scale INP nationally. Prior to the Institute, Yolanda was the Chief Operating Officer at Horizons for Homeless Children where she oversaw all programs, as well as national and local training efforts focused on early childhood education and care. She also served as the Vice President for Programs at YWBoston, leading programs aimed toward eliminating educational and health disparities. She has extensive experience building and expanding organizations and programs. As a Diversity and Organizational Development practitioner, Yolanda consults with various nonprofits and state agencies with a focus on diversity and inclusion, leadership development, and organizational culture change. She has led efforts to develop a plan for building a pipeline of trained and diverse community mental health workers for the Massachusetts Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI) and chaired the Health Disparities Committee for the CBHI Advisory Council. Yolanda has served on the Board of Silver Lining Mentoring and as an advisor to the Harvard Kent Leadership Scholars. Currently, she serves as an Overseer for the Boston Children's Museum. She received a B.S. in Sociology and master's in Clinical Social Work from Boston College and is certified by the National Coalition Building Institute.

Shaheer Mustafa

Shaheer Mustafa, is the President and CEO of HopeWell, formerly Dare Family Services Inc. Founded in 1964,

HopeWell is one of largest providers of intensive foster care to youth involved with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in both Massachusetts and Connecticut and offers an array of clinical supports to families, young mothers, and individuals with developmental disabilities. Shaheer is also a Core Instructor and alumni of the Institute for Nonprofit Practice. Prior to this, he had been the Director of Areas for DCF and while there was active in addressing the Department's response to the opiate crisis in Massachusetts, co-authoring a white-paper regarding the impact that Neo Natal Abstinence Syndrome has had on local child welfare offices. Shaheer also served as the Director of the Knight's Children's Center, a residential school and treatment program of the Home for Little Wanderers, where his work was published due to the innovative and systemic approach he took in embedding family centered and strengths based practice at an organizational level. Shaheer is widely recognized for his ability to implement diversity, equity, and inclusion practices within organizational infrastructure and leverage human capital to maximize impact for constituents and stakeholders. He serves on the Boards of the Association of Children's Residential Centers and the Children's League of Massachusetts. He received both his B.S. in Sociology and master's in Clinical Social Work from Boston College and is certified as a Diversity Practitioner from Cornell's School of Industrial Labor Relations.