

## Building a Diverse Team to Address Future Needs

Many nonprofits are attempting to build greater cultural and demographic diversity in their senior ranks — not just because it’s the right thing to do, but because they believe diversity at the top is critical to their ability to serve diverse constituents and to empower diverse communities. In the words of one senior leader, “Our movement is rooted in issues of class and race...our leaders have to be diverse to sort this out.”

How nonprofits define diversity varies depending on their mission and context. Those focused on social justice within the US, for example, are often seeking to develop a more racially and ethnically diverse set of leaders, including those from disadvantaged communities. Global NGOs are more likely to wrestle with questions of expatriate versus in-country representation. Both groups may find that they have fewer women at senior levels or in certain types of roles than they would like. When executed well, all the processes discussed in *Plan A: How Successful Nonprofits Develop Their Future Leaders* can contribute to building a diverse leadership team, but the process of understanding future needs, as described in *Chapter 2 of Plan A*, is key to getting it right. Each of the following steps from Chapter 2 can help your organization go about building a diverse team with a clearly defined strategic intent.

### Related Content

- [Chapter 2: Understanding Future Needs](#)
- [Plan A: How Successful Nonprofits Develop Their Future Leaders](#)
- [Three Steps to Understanding Your Nonprofit's Future Leadership Needs](#)

- When you engage in “defining the critical leadership capabilities required for the future,” you can make a detailed statement of your diversity needs, laying out what capabilities are needed to succeed, in what roles, and in what time frame.
- When assessing leadership potential, you have an opportunity to identify where you are on track, where you need to step up development efforts to prepare internal candidates for future leadership roles, and what gaps need to be filled externally.
- In developing a leadership development road map, a vision is set for having the right leaders in key roles.

From defining capabilities to assessing potential to building the road map, your organization will be able to develop, refine, and update its diversity plan. In 2011, the National Human Services Assembly (NHSA) commissioned a study to identify practices increasing ethnic and racial diversity of senior management within Assembly member organizations. The study’s findings underscore the value of succession planning. In the NHSA’s words, “organizations that bring diversity into succession planning give themselves an opportunity to course correct and bring

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talent into their leadership pipeline.” The study also recommended several actions, which closely echo the steps discussed in *Plan A*:

- CEOs and Boards who make a business case for diversity
- Performance measurement systems that establish clear goals
- Mentoring to support diverse talent
- Accountability systems that hold senior leaders accountable for results

We are not implying that developing a diverse senior team is no different than building any other set of competencies in the organization. All over the world, we see that barriers to equity are deeply entrenched and slow to fall, and the process of increasing diversity will likely be more complex than any effort to build new functional skills or add new positions to the organization. But for nonprofits that have identified diverse leadership as mission-critical, the processes in *Plan A* should serve as a strong foundation for progress.

For more on the topics of diverse talent in the nonprofit sector and leadership development, as well as a complete list of the NHSA’s recommendations, see the NHSA’s [“Developing Senior Management Diversity”](#) and its tool kit [“Retaining and Developing High Potential Talent.”](#) Also see CommonGood Careers & Level Playing Field Institute’s [“The Voice of Nonprofit Talent: Perceptions of Diversity in the Workplace.”](#)