

A Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion in Academic Fundraising

by Zaina-Sophie Salibi

According to a recent article published in the Council for Advancement and Support of Education magazine, 9% of the workforce in advancement offices in Canada and in the United States identify as “non-white”¹. In the context of this article, “non-white” is the description used to describe Asian, Aboriginal, Black, Hispanic, as well as multiracial heritages. A Middle-Eastern heritage does not figure in their analysis.

The article also reveals 11% of members of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) also identify as non-white.²

Why does the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) want to talk about diversity in philanthropy in 2016?

These numbers prove there is a clear dichotomy between the composition of advancement offices in North America and the diverse population of North American urban areas, as well the body of students and researchers for whom they solicit donations day-in and day-out.

But diversity can mean so much more than your phenotype or genotype. It’s safe to say that on any given day on a campus in Canada, one can see a strong diversity in political opinions, economic backgrounds, physical health and ability, age and preferences of all kinds.

Even major technology firm Blackbaud Inc. conducted a survey on philanthropy in the United States in October 2014 and reported : “America is in the midst of a dramatic cultural shift, but evidence suggests that organized philanthropy may be stuck in the past. As the nation becomes more ethnically and racially diverse, it is more important than ever to consider whether the fundraising playbook is due for an overhaul. Do our current fundraising efforts reach the full spectrum of Americans who might support them? Are we speaking the language—literally and figuratively—of tomorrow’s donors?”³

Every day spent working in fundraising is a day we are trying to include our current, as well as prospective, donors to affect change by the use of their time, their advice and their monetary resources for the good of society.

Philanthropy also has ripple effects—generations can lift themselves out of poverty thanks to insights gained through education, the chance to have an internship abroad, or through a visit to a medical clinic in a rural setting established by your donors.

¹ Lydia Lum, “Mission Possible: Finding and hiring advancement staff of color is not as difficult as it seems”, *CURRENTS: Council for Advancement and Support of Education*, (July/August 2014): 22

² *ibid.*

³ <http://institute.blackbaud.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/DIG.pdf>

Wouldn't it thus make sense for advancement offices, in a country where half of the inhabitants of our biggest city were born outside Canada, to establish inclusive practices as an integral part of their vision?

The following paper seeks to follow in the footsteps of AFP's strategic goal of "connecting communities around the world by promoting diversity to donors, boards and fundraisers"⁴, but with a focus on how this could be practically achieved within the academic setting in Canada.

A Diverse Leadership Board

In academic institutions, the Board of directors are volunteers who oversee the management of the organization. There is a wide-spectrum of reasons why someone will agree to join a Board – ranging from a desire to make a difference at their *alma mater*, to the prestige he or she feels this volunteer position may confer.

Given the demographic shift seen in Canada in the last 25 years⁵, and given that Board volunteers are often asked to access their social networks for the good of the cause they represent, "making a *theoretical* argument" for increased diversity in your Board of Directors is often the easiest part in your institutions' path to inclusiveness.

But beyond making the argument, gaining influence on this issue and implementing a diverse Board policy is often where the challenge lies and where discouragement may set in.

Surface-level diversity: diversity of observable attributes such as race, gender, ethnicity and age.

Deep-level diversity: diversity of attributes that are inferred through observation or experience, such as one's values or personality.

Source: Jason A. Colquitt et al., *Organizational Behaviour. 2nd Canadian Edition* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2013)

The considerable challenges a fundraiser can experience when trying to populate and work with any Board can be even more pronounced when they purposely seek to establish a diverse one. The best candidate might not be available or willing to commit and all non-profit professionals understand great board members are far and few in between. It is essential to know that, if managed correctly, a properly functioning *diverse* team will often be more effective than a team comprised of members who all possess virtually the same background.

According to organizational behaviour experts, "diversity in teams is beneficial because it provides for a larger pool of knowledge and perspectives from which a team can draw as it carries out its work. (...) Research has shown that these benefits of diversity are more likely to occur when the team includes members who are able and

⁴ <http://www.afpnet.org/Publications/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2777>

⁵ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm>

willing to put in the effort necessary to understand and integrate different perspectives.”⁶

Furthermore, the same researchers who have studied team diversity and organizational behaviour claim teams who are composed of individuals who possess *surface-level diversity* may see initial misconceptions and stereotypes dissipate once “surface differences are replaced with knowledge regarding underlying characteristics that are more relevant to the social and task interactions.”

However, implementing the concepts of diversity and inclusion on Boards for maximum efficiency, just like in any type of team work, does carry its shares of potential risks. The same research warns us that, on occasion, “informal subgroups develop on the basis of similarity in surface-level attributes”⁷.

It is also critical to know that, “in contrast to the effects of surface-level diversity, time appears to increase the negative effects of deep-level diversity on team functioning and effectiveness. Over time, as team members learn more about one another, differences that relate to underlying values and goals become increasingly apparent. Those differences can therefore create problems among team members that ultimately result in reduced effectiveness”.⁸

As one sociology professor explained to me at a fundraising event: “assembling a diverse Board is complicated. Not everyone you feel is a right fit is available and willing to commit, and of course there is the issue of intersectionality”.

When making the case for D&I at the Board-level for the benefit of our academic institution, it is possible you may encounter a desire (from those less open to the concept) to focus on other immediate priorities of the Advancement Office: after all, we tend to gravitate to what is comfortable for us. As D&I researcher and speaker Hamlin Grange explains: “Diversity inertia happens when well-intentioned diversity and inclusion programs and initiatives are stalled because of competing priorities and the desire to maintain the status quo or remain in zones of comfort”.

In this instance, an excellent way to lead from within and pursue your quest for diversity and inclusion at the Board is to compile and present the evidence showing that a diverse Board will enhance the value proposition of your service and will better fulfill the needs your diverse client and donor base!

Inclusive Human Resources Practices in the Development Office

A statistic from 2012 related by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) found that while 75% of employers say they have successful programs to

“It’s all about creating an inclusive meritocracy” —Mr. Yezdi Pavri, Vice Chairman, Deloitte

Source: <http://triec.ca/deloitte-2010-winner-toronto-star-award-for-excellence-in-workplace-integration/>

⁶ Jason A. Colquitt et al., *Organizational Behaviour. 2nd Canadian Edition* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2013), p. 276

⁷ Ibid, p. 277

⁸ Ibid.

integrate immigrant professionals, only 49% of immigrants surveyed believed their places of employment are welcoming to newcomers to Canada.

High employee turn-over is a constant worry in the fundraising sector due to the competitive marketplace for development talent. Over the years (and for many types of organizations, not just charities) HR practitioners have found that the “on-boarding” process is absolutely key to employee retention.

To cite the example from world-class business leader Deloitte, whose detailed D&I strategy is available for public consultation online⁹, international hires find themselves greeted on their first day by a “buddy” (an organizational peer) assigned to him or her, who will act as a guide during their orientation period.

This process is also recommended by TRIEC, who suggests that assigning an on-boarding partner (ie. the “buddy system”) does effectively help new immigrant employees navigate both the written and non-written culture of your non-profit organization or academic institution.

The HR office should also schedule regular check-ins with the new hire to obtain feedback, and orientation should take place for an extended period rather than the typical period of a few days.

Since it can take up to one year for a new development officer to be fully functional in his or her new role, making the case for inclusive HR practices is a win-win for any non-profit organization. Academic, charity or business leaders who integrate inclusive best-practices in their management structure and HR policies will likely see a higher retention rate of their Development staff, which of course will save any organization time and money.

You can develop your own on-boarding action plan with the help of this tool from TRIEC:

http://www.trieccampus.ca/ScormPlayer/Frameset/Content.aspx/0/57146/Onboarding_Action_Plan.pdf

Hiring and effectively integrating fundraisers from a diverse background might also help promote effective relationships with our diverse donor base.

Experienced fundraisers have undoubtedly seen how differently donors may react to any given solicitor. As explained by social psychologist Donn Erwin Byrne in his 1971 book *The Attraction Paradigm*, the theory of similarity-attraction states that we naturally favour interacting with those who we perceive as more similar to us in order to reduce the possibility that we may find ourselves in uncomfortable or awkward situations or confrontations. However, most donors I have spoken with reject the notion that they would feel more comfortable dealing with a fundraiser of the same background: it is the *nature* — the core essence — of the person they prefer, not his or her origins or surface-level diversity.

Hiring a diverse fundraising team entails so much more than having anti-discrimination policies and

⁹ <https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/topics/global-diversity-deloitte-is-diversity.html>

adhering to provincial and federal regulations. For example, does your organization make a conscious effort to design their job classifications in an unbiased manner?

Are you aware whether the turnover rate of underrepresented groups in your organization is in parity with the majority group?

How do your HR policies and practices rate in terms of diversity and inclusion?

Visit diversitycollegium.org for their checklists designed for rating the processes at your organization.

Increasingly Involving Donors from Diverse Cultures and Background in Academic Life and Philanthropy

Academic fundraisers who operate in the post-graduate sphere understand how important it is to instill a culture of philanthropy, especially when students begin their 3rd or 4th year of university.

Whether it is a donor who addresses a graduating class for a few minutes to explain why her or she chooses to support their *alma mater*, or whether it is through promoting student projects through Crowdfunding platforms, no resource should be spared when trying to show current students how they are directly benefiting from private philanthropy, in addition to the collective pool of tuition fees and currently decreasing government funding.

Global Affairs Canada states on their website that the majority of Canadian international students come from China ¹⁰. Reconciled with the fact that there is an increased and very visible trend of philanthropic giving in China ¹¹, and that the Chinese government has passed its first ever *Charity Law* in 2016, Development Officers must focus their efforts on the internationalization of at least part of their operations if their fundraising is to remain sustainable and worthy of a world-class institution for years to come.

Interviewed for this research paper, one Chinese international student who is studying sociology and anthropology at a major Canadian university believes creating a positive culture of philanthropy among students begins by offering them a higher chance of receiving a scholarship and, interestingly, by offering more possibilities for international students to work on-campus, even though they might initially struggle with oral communication in their second language.

She saw giving to her Canadian *alma mater* as “a circle”: according to her, if international students feel supported not just socially, but economically as well, throughout their studies, she feels he or she may be more likely to give a donation after graduation.

She was surprised to learn that graduate reunions and outreach activities by her current university had begun taking place in Hong Kong and Shanghai, and was hopeful to see further events geared towards international alumni spread across the globe. Perhaps this signals another reason why outreach targeted

¹⁰ <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/china-chine/study-etudie/index.aspx?lang=eng>

¹¹ “Corporate philanthropy in China: The Emperor’s Gift”, *The Economist* (July 16th 2016), 56

at alumni should also be seen by current students as well, as to prepare them for what they will be invited to participate in shortly after they graduate.

As mentioned in this paper's introduction, diversity means much more than citizenship or cultural background, and ensuring your fundraising and alumni outreach events are inclusive in every sense of

the word will surely leave you ahead of the pack and in-tune with your potential donor base.

Actionable Items : Tips on How to Run an Inclusive Event

- Ensure the date and timing of your event does not interfere with any major spiritual holidays. Refer to www.interfaith-calendar.org

- Seniors may not access to a private mode of transportation ensuring your venue is easily accessible by bus, or arrange for a carpool enhances the likelihood they will be able to participate.

- Due to the high demand and short supply of disability support and services agencies (sign language interpreters, translators etc.) these providers sometimes require several weeks' notice to accommodate requests.

- People with disabilities might need extra time to reserve transportation or make necessary preparations to attend your event; thus, they might not be able to attend if you schedule the event on short notice.

- Allocate a calm "interfaith space" for reflection, meditation, spiritual observance and prayer. Clarify to all participants this space is to be shared and used accordingly.

Source: *Diversity Through Inclusive Practice. An Evolving Toolkit for Creating Inclusive Processes, Spaces and Events.*
[http://www.criaw-icref.ca/sites/criaw/files/Inclusive%20Practices%20Toolkit%20\(1.0%20-%20Accessible%20Digital\).pdf](http://www.criaw-icref.ca/sites/criaw/files/Inclusive%20Practices%20Toolkit%20(1.0%20-%20Accessible%20Digital).pdf)

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women has developed a user-friendly and ever-evolving toolkit to help every fundraiser and event-organizer ensure your guests will feel included and comfortable at your event.

Fundraisers will constantly feel there isn't enough time to attempt a different strategy, to plan ahead, to take a risk that will likely yield a great outcome if executed thoughtfully and with the help of internal allies.

I hope this paper has inspired its readers to recognize the positive business and social reasons behind Diversity and Inclusion at the Board-level, in the HR sphere and in their outreach.

Now is the part where, as a fundraiser, I ask you: "will you consider joining us in this project?".