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THE MEANING AND IMPACT OF BOARD AND STAFF DIVERSITY IN THE PHILANTHROPIC FIELD: FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL STUDY

Research Questions

- The research project examined how racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and disability are represented among foundation staff and trustees; the differences in tenure and earning patterns among foundation staff and trustees and the level of foundation funding to populations of interest to each of the co-sponsoring groups; and the impact of foundation board and staff diversity on grantmaking priorities.

Findings

- Philanthropy has evolved from a field dominated by white men to a field where women are the majority and a fifth of the staff is people of color. Persons of color went from 13% of professional staff in 1984 to 19.3 percent in 1998. Also, persons of color represented 6% of CEOs in 1998. . . . a significant increase from 1.6% in 1982. However, Boards of Directors have not changed significantly in their diversity. (Data are presented for Native Americans, Asian Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans.)
- Program officers who are women of color earn less and oversee smaller grants than their white colleagues. They are less likely to move into senior staff and CEO positions, or to be involved in governance and hiring. Men of color hold a much smaller percentage of CEO positions than their white colleagues. They are highly concentrated in large independent and community foundations.
- A relatively large percentage of people indicated spending no time on issues affecting American Indians and Asians, and relatively few indicated spending no time on issues affecting Blacks and Latinos.
- The research identified as a next step the following research question: “Does greater diversity on the staff and board levels lead to greater diversity among grantees, or in the target populations of foundation programs?”

Methods

- Data were compiled from salary and management surveys conducted by the Council on Foundations in 1992 and 1997. Also, a survey sponsored by the Joint Affinity Groups in 1999 garnered 500 responses. Twenty-nine foundations participated in in-person interviews and case studies which were utilized as the basis for a qualitative analysis of foundation types: independent, community foundation and grantmaking public charities, and corporate foundations.

Conclusions

- Among the conclusions were the following: foundation culture must change for diversity to be successful; there is a need for continued education in the field about the need for and benefits of diversity; diversity is a conscious, on-going process; and one should expect substantial change if a foundation’s programs or structures become more diverse.

