



FROM 'IN PRINCIPLE' TO 'IN PRACTICE'

Notes from a roundtable on diversity organised by NPC and Green Park.

June 2018

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BACKGROUND TO THE ROUNDTABLE

- These slides present the findings of a roundtable on 14th March 2018 organised by NPC and Green Park.
- The roundtable brought together people leading the way in increasing diversity: those who understand the potential benefits, and who are working towards it in their organisations or beyond.
- During the roundtable we discussed the state of the 'diversity debate' in the sector, practical examples of organisations moving practice forward, what is preventing progress, and what might be effective in overcoming barriers and moving the debate and practice on.
- The points captured here are those of the participants at the roundtable. We have presented the full range of points made and avoided adding our own interpretation of the comments.

NPC and Green Park are grateful for the expert contributions of all those at the roundtable. Thank you.



RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS POSED BEFORE THE ROUNDTABLE

IN VOLUNTARY SECTOR LEADERSHIP WHAT DOES GOOD DIVERSITY LOOK LIKE? (1)

- ‘Boards and the senior team should at the very least mirror the people and communities we work with, society in general and the particular areas of our operation.’
- ‘Appropriately mixed to the charitable purpose of the organisation.’
- ‘Balance of gender, age, ethnicity, professional experience, ability and disability.’
- ‘Boards and the senior team should at the very least mirror the people and communities we work with, society in general and the particular areas of our operation.’
- ‘The SMT and Board should reflect the demographics of the community that we service. Any protected characteristic should not be a barrier to progression and we should take positive action to support all to have equal opportunities to progress. The SMT and board need to actively demonstrate their commitment to inclusion - senior buy in is fundamental in improving.’



IN VOLUNTARY SECTOR LEADERSHIP WHAT DOES GOOD DIVERSITY LOOK LIKE? (2)

- ‘Representation of the community and society at both board and senior management level. A wide range of voices and experiences feeding into decision making through representation in those groups but in other ways too.’
- ‘A board that has a fair representation of current society's demographic population AND is filled with individuals with a wide range of life experience as well as high competency in their roles.’
- ‘Individuals do not all think the same. Individuals have different backgrounds & experiences (both professional & in life). Ideally people with lived experience and direct understanding of the cause are brought into decision making/reflected on Board.’
- ‘Diverse individuals working collectively and respectfully, learning and valuing each others contributions.’
- ‘Visible diversity (e.g. race, age, physical ability and gender). A variety of difference backgrounds (work experience, class, education, lived experiences etc.) Openness about diversity (for it to be on the agenda in terms of celebrating or looking at ways to improve diversity).’

IN VOLUNTARY SECTOR LEADERSHIP WHAT DOES GOOD DIVERSITY LOOK LIKE? (3)

- ‘Valuing lived expertise, rather than consulting. Reflection of participants at governance level. At senior level, priority of gender, class, race diversity and then, age, sexuality, disability (depending on the purpose of the organisation). An appetite for 'beyond zero tolerance' and leadership for an understanding of the forces, like unconscious bias, that cause sexism and racism.’
- ‘When there is good representation of the different protected characteristics at Board and Exec level, but more than that. Where there is diversity in thinking style, leadership style, etc.’
- ‘Representative body of backgrounds and differing ideas.’
- ‘A diverse board and senior management team should reflect the community that they work and live and have strong personal experience of the issues that that particular charity was set up to address.’
- ‘A wide range of people from different backgrounds, who share the same core values, including promoting inclusivity in the whole organisation.’
- ‘I think it's an approach that embraces diversity of thinking as well as lived experience. Better decisions get taken that way.’

PLEASE LIST UP TO 3 BENEFITS YOU THINK DIVERSITY CAN BRING TO VOLUNTARY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS (1)

- 'Diversity brings many benefits, e.g. research supports the fact that diverse organisations see increase in financial success but voluntary organisations are values led and that should mean being inclusive, that should be our starting point.'

- 'Due to difference, there will be better discussions, thus improved performance.'
- Increase likelihood of a diverse range of talent applying to positions within the sector.
- Voluntary sector become more representative of it's service users.'

- 'Greater creativity.'
- Greater connectivity.'
- Better representation of those being served.'

- Stronger decision making, partly through different perspectives about risk/opportunity.'
- Prevent complacency at a governance level.'
- Better culture, and less likely to be dysfunctional power dynamics.'

- 'Lived experience of the issues the organisation is focused on will provide greater legitimacy for the organisation.'
- A diverse organisation will attract more widespread support.'
- Having different views and experiences leads to better discussion and decision making.'

PLEASE LIST UP TO 3 BENEFITS YOU THINK DIVERSITY CAN BRING TO VOLUNTARY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS (2)

- 'Creativity and innovation - for example we are better able to engage with diverse communities and to meet different needs. Diversity of thought and experience is absolutely essential in generating new, innovative solutions to our challenges.'
- Role models and representation - having senior staff from different backgrounds can encourage staff to believe they can also progress. It opens up opportunities.
- Harmonious workplace - being inclusive and enabling all to be their best selves at work reduces conflict, sickness, stress etc. It promotes team working, empathy and understanding. People feel confident to be themselves which boosts self-esteem and general wellbeing.
- Reputation - we need to live according to our values. We need to walk the walk. This boosts the reputation of charities and helps people have trust in the work that we do. Having a positive reputation attracts funding, awards, talent etc.'

- 'Different life experience perspectives
- Alternative views on topics.
- A safety check against assumption on cultural matters.'

- 'Better discussions and strategic decisions.
- Better programme design.
- Better outcomes of the work.'

- 'Deeper social insight.
- Extended range of views.
- International reach.'

PLEASE LIST UP TO 3 BENEFITS YOU THINK DIVERSITY CAN BRING TO VOLUNTARY SECTOR ORGANISATIONS (3)

- 'Different lived experiences representing beneficiaries and communities.
- Without diverse teams, organisations can be vulnerable to biases and groupthink. Diverse groups are more inclined to challenge each other, enabling them to solve problems better.
- More engaged customers and staff.
- Staff bringing their whole self to work.'

- 'Breadth of thinking and representation of those we serve.
- Innovation and creative thinking.
- Breadth of experience which will enable us to achieve more as a result.'

- Greater understanding of beneficiary/client need.
- Better decision-taking.
- Innovation and inventiveness.'

- 'Service user insight.
- Different perspectives and personal experience.
- Different professional experience.'

- 'Freshness and breadth of perspectives.
- A legitimate/authentic claim to be 'fit' for the charitable purpose' within the operational context.
- Future proofing.'

- 'Different perspectives - content and context.
 - Demonstrating leadership to the sector and others in society.
 - Enabling real and meaningful engagement and power.'
-

IF YOU WERE TALKING TO A CHAIR OR CEO ABOUT DIVERSITY, WHAT WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE THEM TO THINK ABOUT? (1)

- ‘How different perspectives and experiences bring richness to an organisation’s work; the enormous talent that exists within the communities we are here to work with; and our moral responsibility.’
- ‘Think about why diversity is good for the organisation and for board/SMT to ask themselves if they actually believe that diversity brings benefits to an organisation.’
- ‘That diversity and inclusion cannot be optional or an add on. It needs to be embedded in to everything that we do - it is about who we are everyday.’
- ‘The endless benefits of diversity including creativity, innovation, wellbeing, profitability etc.’
- ‘Seeking other perspectives is one of the key traits of successful leaders.’
- ‘I would encourage them to think about two things:
 - 1) Consider how their organisation is seen by the public
 - 2) I would ask them to encourage debate and discussion on purpose and performance of their organisation. A diverse organisation will have people from different backgrounds who will disagree and this is to be welcomed.’

IF YOU WERE TALKING TO A CHAIR OR CEO ABOUT DIVERSITY, WHAT WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE THEM TO THINK ABOUT? (2)

- ‘Diversity characteristics are really important. Push positive action to the limit. But consider what your definition of inclusion is - it's about getting a variety of perspectives as well as providing people with engagement opportunities that enable people to give of their very best ideas.’
- ‘I'd structure the conversation at the sector level, the level of their organisation and their own responsibility for their self-awareness of bias - and taking a lead for addressing it and being courageous about calling themselves out. I'd enthuse them with examples of great progress and how achievable it is.’
- ‘Diverse groups make better decisions and when people are able to be themselves they produce their best work. It is not altruistic; it is about getting the best out of our people in the best possible environment. Increasing diversity will in turn increase innovation which in turn builds trust with the people we serve. McKinsey's 2018 report “Delivering through diversity” found that the companies that are in the top quartile for diversity experience above-average performance. Besides the business case, it can genuinely benefit the “dominant group” as well as the minority group as they are being exposed to different ideas, cultures, approaches that can challenge and improve them cognitively as well as socially.’

IF YOU WERE TALKING TO A CHAIR OR CEO ABOUT DIVERSITY, WHAT WOULD YOU ENCOURAGE THEM TO THINK ABOUT? (3)

- 'I'd ask them to consider five things:
 - 1) To look at what diversity they already have (this means measure it!)
 - 2) Be honest about what they think of that current status
 - 3) Commit to championing D&I in the organisation (whatever may be needed to shift it)
 - 4) Follow through with action, ie, Hold themselves and others accountable
 - 5) ensure they look at their culture and be honest about how inclusive it really is, as part of this work. This isn't just about diversity.'
- 'Understanding social shifts in society.'
- 'How to get people with lived experience of their issue onto their Board. How to recruit people who are not in their own image/background. How to encourage diversity of views to be heard in Board discussions.'
- 'Who they want to be and what they want their organisation to represent. What kind of leader do they want to be and why? How can they as leaders share their power and privilege?'
- 'Involve service users as the top priority.'



INFORMATION FROM THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

CONTEXT TO THE DISCUSSION

The discussion focused around two key questions:

- What are the barriers to increasing diversity in voluntary sector leadership?
- What are potential solutions and ways forward?

A key point that emerged many times is that **many of the barriers relate to an imbalance in power** that is historic and embedded. Where power has been established and/or achieved, there is often an unwillingness to let it go.

This underpins many of the barriers identified in the following slides. For ease of reading, we have grouped these under four themes:

- Language and understanding
- Attitudes, bias and decision-making
- Structures and systems
- Networks and accessibility

The following slides capture the input from participants at the roundtable. NPC and Green Park have aimed to present the full range of views expressed, and have not interpreted points made beyond grouping into the four themes for ease of understanding.

BARRIERS: LANGUAGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- Language really matters when we talk about diversity. It is problematic to still hear people with power in the sector talk about '*hard to reach*' communities, implying blame rather than acknowledging that the sector is not reaching out.
- Diversity is a term often used without being defined. As a result, people don't, won't, or can't articulate why they think it is important.
- There is a lack of imagination about the breadth of diversity – it is not just about visible difference, or the gender pay gap, or BAME representation (though all are important).
- When an organisation does not actively improve their diversity, it is expressed that they are 'not prioritising diversity,' rather than as sexism, racism, prejudice and discrimination.
- Gestures are bland and unconvincing, bringing us back to the idea that diversity is 'a good thing' or a priority amongst many.
- Tokenism as a solution: many still see diversity as a tick box or numbers exercise rather than an opportunity for cultural change and organisational improvement, or a business imperative.
- The very term 'diverse' implies difference from an established norm, ie, white, male.
- Awkwardness discussing the topic and a fear of saying the wrong thing. White senior leadership teams can be cautious to speak about race out of fear of getting the language wrong, or inappropriately speaking on behalf of people of colour.

SOLUTIONS: LANGUAGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Roundtable attendees discussed the following potential solutions:

- Establish more common ground in terms of the language used, so that everyone knows what is being talked about when it is raised.
- Reinvigorate the language of the debate; being more dynamic and challenging when ambiguous terminology is used. This might include challenging assumptions.
- Defining the “purpose” of diversity so as to better address questions of why we need diversity.
- Appreciate and celebrate difference.
- Don't [walk on] egg-shell[s].
- Use more “asset-based” language rather than “deficit” language. For instance, avoiding (and calling out) conversation which focuses on what candidates ‘lack’ as opposed to the difference they bring.
- Articulate the harm that a narrow leadership can cause.

BARRIERS: STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS

- Blindness to structural causes of lack of diversity.
- Reluctance of current leaders to let go of power.
- White privilege and male privilege: there is a need to look at how behaviours, attitudes, systems and structures developed in a predominantly white culture have a negative impact on groups other than this 'norm'. They can be excluding and exclusive.
- Institutional racism and historical power imbalance.
- It is easy to be “paralysed by the enormity of the issue” and can take years to change culture and behaviour.
- Giving an individual responsibility for diversity leads to marginalisation and disillusionment. Diversity needs to be owned across the organisation at every level.
- Asking only the Chair/CEO to think about diversity can reinforce the power set-up, so people across the organisation need to be involved.
- Recruitment practices are poor, through from advertising to decision-making. Organisations do not know how to recruit differently.

SOLUTIONS: STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS

Roundtable attendees discussed the following potential solutions:

- Avoiding being paralysed by the enormity of the issue—instead start to pilot, model, change and iterate.
- Bringing the regulatory community into the debate to ensure “diversity” forms part of their assessment frameworks (eg, auditors, Charity Commission).
- Regulatory, umbrella and infrastructure bodies must diversity to act as role models.
- Pressure on funders and commissioners into prompting, encouraging and supporting greater diversity in programmes and supply chains.
- Show examples of where successful change has happened. Change the organisations that act as role models.
- *Targets set through an organisation which links performance, attitudes, behaviours and actions, devolving responsibility throughout an organisation rather than pushing it into a corner.*
- *Change to recruitment processes, linking performance and/or pay to diversity/inclusion KPIs.*
- *A baseline, kitemark or standard for diversity and inclusion recruitment and retention.*
- *Demand more from head-hunters with regard to legitimate, authentically diverse candidate lists. By the same token, head-hunters should challenge clients more on their definition and understanding of “diversity,” including having the integrity to NOT place diverse candidates into alienating or toxic environments.*

BARRIERS: ATTITUDES, BIAS AND DECISION-MAKING

- There is defensiveness about bias (unconscious as well as conscious) and a lack of scrutiny of behaviour.
- Too many in the voluntary sector are defensive on the issue – “we’re altruistic and liberal” so there’s an unwillingness to confront prejudice or ignorance.
- Funding and funders’ preferences are set up with inherent bias.
- Decision-making processes are exclusive and narrowly focused. Boards often run along very traditional lines which suit the majority and the established structures. Meetings can be alienating.
- Getting Boards out of their comfort zone in terms of ‘fit’, ‘looking like us’ or ‘culture’ needs a more compelling approach.
- There is often a culture within organisations where decisions are made informally by a minority of people, and many people are not part of these.
- Lack of authentic belief that diversity is the right thing.
- Risk aversion.
- The view that diversity can make working with others more harder.
- There can be a degree of complacency once people think they’re doing it ‘right’.
- People can view working with more diverse groups can be more difficult initially as it marks a change from the norm of ‘business as usual.’

SOLUTIONS: ATTITUDES, BIAS AND DECISION-MAKING

Roundtable attendees discussed the following potential solutions:

- Support people to be consciously aware of biases, and to encourage others to be.
- Ensure appropriate training and robust and consistent usage of unconscious bias training during all recruitment.
- Recognise that it's ok to talk about failure, or not getting things quite right, and to act with humility that mistakes are being made.
- Set targets for diversity throughout the organisation. Devolve responsibility.

BARRIERS: NETWORKS AND ACCESSIBILITY

- How do you reach people you don't know about and don't know how to reach? Accessing the right networks to find more diverse people can be a challenge.
- Organisations don't know how to recruit differently.
- Self-exclusion takes place – eg, “I won't fit in on that board.”
- There remains an expectation for diverse candidates to step forward or take the lead.
- Perception of those who are 'external' of structures of privilege and positions that are unobtainable.
- Lack of good role models.

SOLUTIONS: NETWORKS AND ACCESSIBILITY

Roundtable attendees discussed the following potential solutions:

- Trustees to enable candidates different from themselves to access board roles.
- Trustees to take responsibility for identifying diverse candidates to fill the role the extant trustee will leave at the end of their tenure.
- Organisations to ensure there are appropriate measures for inclusion, not just diverse attraction and recruitment.
- Organisations to highlight practice that works – charities will emulate charities that are succeeding.
- Charities to look beyond what they already know to create new networks with individuals. Use targeted strategies to reach different communities.
- Organisations to recognise that diversity doesn't stop with one or two people, it is an ongoing process.
- Mentoring schemes to get people into senior roles.

**THANK YOU TO ALL THE PEOPLE WHO
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