



Talent Update

Opinion

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Focusing on Diversity in the Good Times and the Tough Times

By Stephen Bauer

Prior to the recession nonprofits were looking at the future optimistically and engaging in discussions around bigger issues such as diversity and inclusion. However, now that we are in a recession, many of those national discussions around diversity seemed to have grown quiet. Understandably, executives are concerned more with finances and increased demand of services, but the sector must be challenged to focus now, more than ever, on re-tooling and re-thinking our diversity and inclusion strategies.

A recent Chronicle of Philanthropy survey found that CEO's of the top 400 philanthropies were slightly more diverse than their fortune 500 counterparts. While this may be heartening to an extent, the reality is that the overall percentage of leaders of color in the sector is well below the national demographic diversity of our country. The nonprofit sector must improve the diversity of not only our leaders but professionals and volunteers at all levels.

Time and time again, we hear that many organizations want to be more diverse but previous efforts have resulted in little or no effect. True change has to become a goal of the entire organization. Michael Watson, Senior Vice President of Human Resources for the Girl Scouts of the USA and Chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the Nonprofit Workforce Coalition, shared in an article published in the Chronicle of Philanthropy that to make diversity work, organizations must take a multi-faceted approach:

- **Demonstrate the commitment to diversity of the organization's CEO** - Chief executives must do all they can to make sure that their senior teams are diverse and to require that all searches for senior officials emphasize a commitment to seeking multicultural candidates.
- **Go where the talent is** - Recruiting diverse talent is not a passive activity. Nonprofit groups have to be willing to move beyond traditional hiring sources and learn to recruit in different places and use different techniques.

- **Focus on retention of minority employees** - Retaining diverse talent requires many of the same actions that are important to retaining employees in general, including providing all employees with clear goals and expectations, complete orientations to the organization and one's role, as well as rewards and recognition based on merit, coaching and feedback on performance from a skilled supervisor, and opportunities for development and advancement.
- **Urge board members to make diversity a priority at the board level** - Boards of directors set a tone for an organization.

Organizations that are promoting these strategies in their planning will see benefits in employee recruitment, retention and engagement long after the economic recovery. National organizations should not only focus on diversity and inclusion at headquarters but should also find ways to offer resources around these strategy points to their affiliates. As with any initiative, proper staffing and resourcing is essential. Nonprofits should invest in diversity and inclusion planning and staffing. Without it, the sector will see many more years of lofty ideas and good intentions with no results.

An initiative of American Humanics, the Nonprofit Workforce Coalition (of which the National Human Services Assembly is a leading member) was created in 2006 to tackle diversity and inclusion as well as other workforce issues on a sector-wide scale. The Coalition believes that there are differences between diversity, inclusion and cultural competency and that organizations need to focus on all three to ensure a truly rich organizational culture. The Coalition's primary work in this area has focused on three program points:

- **Public Proclamation** - Development of a Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Compact that organizations join to publicly prioritize diversity, inclusion and cultural competency
- **Support Structures** - Creation of a support structure for Compact signers comprised of peer learning groups and shared resources
- **Collaborative Recruitment and Awareness Building** - Convening joint panels and recruitment sessions at key professional gatherings of diverse communities

To date over 20 organizations have signed the Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Compact.

Work is currently underway to initiate the peer learning groups to assess needs and develop resource sharing and learning. In September, National Assembly and American Humanics members Boy Scouts of America, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Girls Inc., Girl Scouts of the USA, National Urban League, NeighborWorks America and YMCA of the USA joined forces to hold the first-ever major session on nonprofit issues at the Congressional Black Caucus Annual Legislative Conference in Washington, DC. Over 250 participants attended a special panel on African-American nonprofit Leadership and hundreds visited our collaborative recruitment exhibit booth that discussed careers in the nonprofit sector and with partner organizations. Video of the panel can be viewed at www.humanics.org/media. All of this was done with minimal cost to the participating partners. There are already plans to replicate this model at other major

meetings and increase the number of partners that want to take advantage of this collaborative recruitment event.

Even though 2010 is projected to be a difficult year for the nonprofit sector, there seems to be a gradual change in our feelings from despair to cautious optimism. Nonprofit leaders should look at this point in history not as a challenge but as an opportunity to ensure that they emerge from these tough economic times better prepared to address the issues ahead. Now is not the time to disengage from big ideas and big discussions, but rather embrace change and motivate your workforce to help put positive changes in place.

Stephen Bauer, MS is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Workforce Coalition at American Humanics®, Inc.