



UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

Developing a Nonprofit Board for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
An effective tool for measuring a Boards vulnerability, integrity, and readiness

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Abstract

Nonprofit Boards, even those with well-meaning members and leaders, often fall short in terms of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies, practices, and procedures. This is partially because Boards lack adequate tools to effectively assess themselves for DEI. This research culminates in the development of a survey-based DEI self-assessment tool that measures Board readiness, vulnerabilities, integrity, and personal biases. The creation of the assessment tool was informed by an examination of the literature and expert interviews with those in the field. A comprehensive list of indicators in the categories of readiness, vulnerabilities, and integrity were compiled and offer Boards a new framework for understanding DEI within their organizations. A case-study was conducted whereby Board and staff members of a small community-based nonprofit organization (CBO) completed the survey and their results were tabulated and compared. Post-interviews were conducted with a sampling of those who took the survey and the results from the interviews were found to be consistent with the survey results. The developed tool offers valid information about an organization's DEI readiness, vulnerabilities, and integrity and serves as an initial step for organizations who aim to improve their DEI policies, practices, procedures, and culture.

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Section 1. Introduction

Nonprofit Board of Directors serve as the brain of an organization. Guiding strategy, stewarding resources, and ensuring that the needs of the communities served are met, Boards dictate an organization's ability to meet its mission. Boards are tasked with a big ask, to be an objective voice for all those served by an organization. To do this effectively, Boards should be a diverse collection of varied individuals who bring unique perspectives to the work. More often than not however, this is not the case. According to the Alliance for Board Diversity 82% of nonprofit Board members are Caucasian, 57% of nonprofit Board members are men, and 59% are over the age of 50. Furthermore, only 23% of nonprofit Chief Executives report satisfaction with the diversity of their Boards (BoardSource, 2012).

These telling numbers should be motivation enough for nonprofit Boards to take an active and intentional approach to Board diversity. Sadly, the research demonstrates the opposite - most Boards remain passive about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within their membership and their larger organizations. Even with well-intentioned leaders and members, Boards struggle to prioritize DEI in the perpetually under-resourced environment that many nonprofits find themselves in. Additionally, Boards are responsible for making decisions around many competing priorities and because DEI can be such an ambiguous and abstract undertaking, Boards are fearful to engage in the process. Many Boards fail to ask themselves the difficult questions about Board DEI and become complacent. Without a focus on DEI however, Boards open themselves up to the vulnerabilities of personal biases. They run the risk of making decisions for their organizations and communities that do not serve their constituents, and in even more extreme cases can cause them harm. If Board members are not representative of those they serve, how can they truly know what is best for them?

Board DEI has also become more of a necessity for nonprofit organizations due to increased scrutiny from funders. The San Francisco Foundation is an example of this. With a bold equity agenda, Board DEI is a crucial requirement in their grantmaking process. Boards are being forced to take DEI more seriously in order to gain new funding and to maintain current sources of funding. Under this pressure, many Boards are unsure of where to begin and lack the tools, trainings, and general understanding of DEI.

This research recognizes a need for adequate and effective assessment tools to support Board development in regard to DEI policies, practices, and procedures. Board self-assessment should be a routine practice for Boards, yet the tools for DEI specific assessment focus primarily on the demographic composition of a Board and leave out equity and inclusion. Diversity has long been oversimplified and assessments can leave Boards with a false understanding of how to prioritize DEI for their organization. This research culminates in the development of a self-assessment tool for Boards and organizational staff that reveals personal biases, readiness, vulnerabilities, and areas of integrity in regard to DEI.

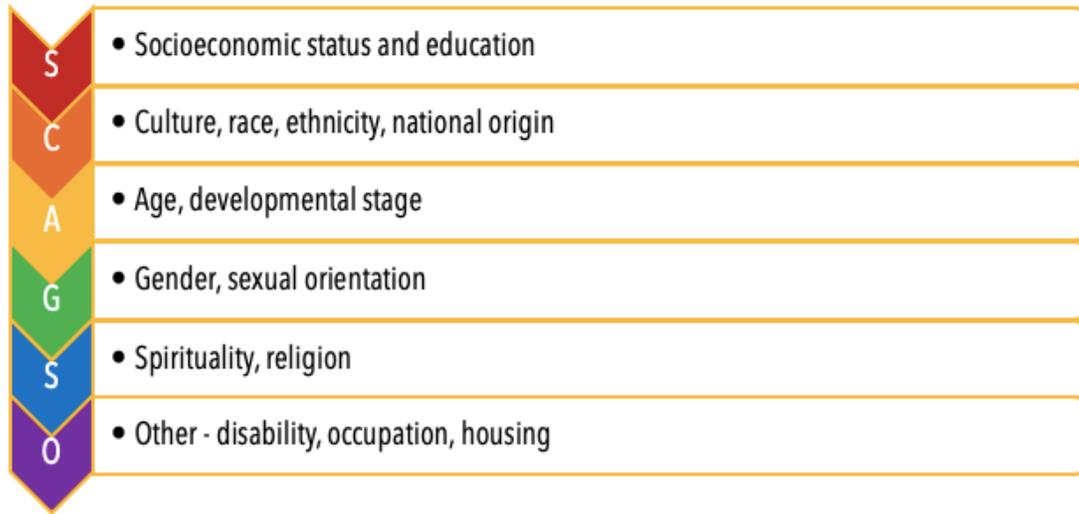
This research first examines the existing literature to gather DEI best practices and current themes and trends. From this, a list of semi-structured interview questions were developed and experts in nonprofit governance, leadership, and DEI were interviewed to create a list of indicators in the three categories of readiness, vulnerabilities, and integrity. An initial version of the tool was developed using the indicators gathered via interviews and a case-study with a small community-based nonprofit (CBO) was conducted. The results of the survey were tabulated and post interviews with the participants were completed to gain feedback into the tools overall effectiveness. These data inform a comprehensive list of organizational recommendations, ideas for improving the tool, and suggestions for further research in the field.

Section 2: Literature Review

A nonprofit Board of Directors holds an incredible responsibility within nonprofit organizations. “In theory, Board of Directors are supposed to be the ultimate guardians of institutional ethos and organizational values” (Chait, Ryan, Taylor, 2005). Boards accomplish this through review, approval, and oversight. They help to guide strategy and ensure compliance while upholding the mission and vision of an organization. Rutledge (1994) argued that although nonprofit Board composition is often the result of “serendipity, inertia, and happenstance,” effective Boards rarely result from anything other than careful thought and planning (Rutledge, 1994). This is especially true in regard to building a Board of Directors for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Diverse Boards that are representative of the communities they serve are not accidental, they are carefully and intentionally built.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are often seen as abstract concepts with multiple different meanings and interpretations. It is true that for Boards and nonprofit organizations, leadership must define what DEI means to them and what aspects of DEI are most important for their organization. For instance, a nonprofit organization serving LGBTQI youth may prioritize sexual/gender orientation and age above socioeconomic status and race, while an organization serving an inner-city homeless population would have opposing priorities. Daley (2002) stated that Boards can and do decide which dimensions of diversity are significant to them. For the purpose of this research, the definition of diversity used by the California Board of Behavioral Science (BBS) will be used. The BBS uses the acronym SCAGSO to highlight various types of diversity. Figure 1 defines SCAGSO and for the purpose of this research, SCAGSO will be used as the operational definition of diversity.

Figure 1. BBS Definition of Diversity - SCAGSO



The reality of Board DEI demonstrates significant gaps between how Board members think about DEI and actually implement policies and practices. According to Daley (2002), nonprofit Boards reflect limited social diversity and yet Board leaders are surprisingly passive and unreflective about diversity issues. The gaps between diversity and inclusion can be conceptualized using Daley and Angulo's 1994 model that distinguishes between demographic diversity and functional diversity. Demographic diversity is described in terms of Board composition. A Board that is comprised of roughly equal numbers of men and women and that includes members from various ethnic groups that are proportionally relative to that groups size in the community might be said to be demographically diverse with regard to these categories. On paper, demographically diverse Boards appear to be the pinnacle of DEI success. Without also examining functional diversity however, it is impossible to have a true understanding of the Boards' DEI integrity. Functional diversity refers to incorporating the various voices and perspectives into the policy process that takes place in the boardroom. Daley and Angulo stated:

If a Board included significant numbers of women, but the Board policy-making did not reflect the issues that are important to women, nor the interests and perspectives of women, that Board might be viewed, in terms of women, as demographically diverse (composition) but functionally lacking in diversity.

The gap between demographic and functional diversity demonstrates the problems in how Boards reflect on and asses themselves in terms of DEI. On the surface, most Board members, without question or concern, are committed to Board DEI. When pressed however and asked to change their functional processes to implement DEI practices, Boards often fall short, regardless of good intentions. Daley and Marsiglia (2000) conducted qualitative interview-based research with Board Members and Chief

Executive Officers to understand the views and issues of implementing social diversity on their Boards. A few major findings emerged:

1. Board members viewed enhancing Board diversity as a potential challenge and threat to the cohesion and effectiveness of the group.
2. Board members and CEOs felt that efforts to enhance and enrich Board DEI competed with other responsibilities to develop policy, secure resources, and respond to community needs. In other words, DEI was not their most pressing concern.
3. While sensitivity to DEI was apparent, many respondents failed to see the benefits of focusing on DEI and nearly all respondents did not have a systematic or intentional approach to DEI.

Daley and Marsiglia's research demonstrated the hesitant and passive approach to DEI taken by Boards and leadership. It was recognized by respondents that a diverse Board composition was a necessary first step to developing a Board process that incorporates diverse perspectives in Board decisions. Respondents also noted however that a diverse composition does not guarantee that diverse perspectives will be represented in the policy and deliberation processes. Integrating new members was recognized as a challenge and roadblock to implementing DEI. Daley and Marsiglia (2002) stated:

As new members with new perspectives and interests join an existing Board, both new and existing members may become frustrated. New members may need time to understand the complexities of Board issues and the norms of Board operations. Experienced members may find it difficult to give up traditional ways. Experienced members may view the questions posed by new members as challenges (and some may be challenges) of past Board actions. Both new and veteran members may view the early dynamics of the more socially diverse Board as a struggle for power or control.

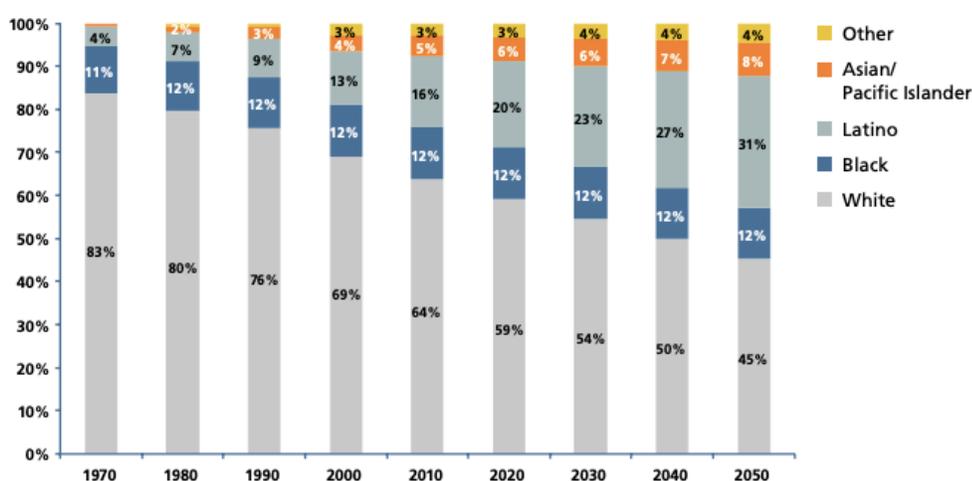
This integration seems particularly problematic in boards with substantial blocks of long-term Board members. There seems to be a positive correlation between term length and adversity to change. Ultimately, long-term members are perceived as highly trustworthy and comfortable to other members while new and "different" members represent ambiguity, change, and discomfort (Daley and Marsiglia, 2002).

Empirical research and findings on the effects of Board diversity on governance performance are difficult to unpack as diversity has been defined in so many different ways. Results and findings have been inconsistent and even contradictory of each other making it a challenge to ascertain the true impacts of Board diversity. Williams and O'Reilly (1998) analyzed 40 years of diversity research and concluded that many of these

inconsistent results might be attributed to an oversimplified approach to diversity. The varying reports on the importance and benefits of Board diversity make it hard for organizations to make a systematic commitment to enhancing their DEI efforts.

It is projected that the majority of the U.S. workforce will be composed of nonwhite, race-based minorities, including Hispanics, African-Americans, and Asians, by 2039 (Treuhaft, Blackwell, 2011), however little has been accomplished in diversifying the boardroom in either the for-profit or nonprofit sectors. Figure 2 demonstrates the population trends in the United States from 1970-2050.

Figure 2. United States Population Racial and Ethnic Trends
Racial and Ethnic Composition of the United States, 1970-2050



Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States (1970 and 1980); U.S. Census Bureau, decennial censuses (1990 STF3, 2000 SF3, and 2010 SF1); U.S. Census Bureau Population Projections, 2008 (2020-2050), adjusted using the results of the 2010 Census.

According to the Alliance for Board Diversity (2013) Caucasian men held 73 % of Board seats in the Fortune 500 companies in 2012, while minority men held 10 %, Caucasian women held 13 %, and only 3 % of Board seats were held by minority women. As of 2012, in the nonprofit sector, 82 % of Board members were Caucasian and this has not changed in the last two decades (BoardSource, 2012). 57% of nonprofit Board members are men, and 59% are over the age of 50 (BoardSource, 2012). Only 23% of nonprofit chief executive's report satisfaction with the diversity of their Boards (BoardSource, 2012).

Diversity within nonprofit Boards creates the potential that insures organizational programs and services reflect the needs and interests of the community, brings multiple perspectives into boardrooms to promote a culture of inquiry and generative thinking, and breaks the cycle of power and privilege in the United States (Ferreira 2010; Miller and Triana 2009). Yet actually effectively implementing DEI practices, policies, and behaviors eludes many Boards. DEI cannot be looked at in a

vacuum or broken apart into separate pieces. Much research has primarily focused on Board composition related to Board performance, which leaves out the key aspects of inclusion behaviors and organizational commitment to DEI through policies and procedures. Board diversity policies and practices are procedures adopted by Boards with the intent to promote diversity. Bernstein and Bilimoria (2013) conceptualized this as:

Practices and procedures that are commonly believed to enhance diversity and improve the experience for minority group members, such as diversity statements, policies, committees or task forces dedicated to diversity and inclusion, diversity training for Board members, and integration of diversity into the core mission and values.

In addition to policies and practices, a Board's inclusion behaviors must be examined when considering how DEI affects Board performance and effectiveness. Inclusion behaviors are far beyond Board composition but are specific actions that Board members take to enable members from marginalized, minority communities to feel valued and engaged in the governance processes. These behaviors include "...the intragroup communication, influence and power interactions that the dominant members of small groups engage in consciously or unconsciously which signal the authentic inclusion of diversity" (Bernstein and Bilimoria 2013). Buse et. al (2016) found that Board diversity policies and practices as well as Board inclusion behaviors dictated how and when Board diversity impacted Board governance effectiveness. When these aspects were absent Board diversity had a negative effect on Board governance performance. There was a lack of group cohesion and thus the ability of the Board to make effective decisions in regard to strategy and oversight was diminished. When there was a presence of Board diversity policies and practices as well as inclusion behaviors, Board diversity increased Board governance performance (Buse, 2016). This research again highlights the significant gaps that exist between demographic diversity and functional diversity.

Given this information and clear research that calls out the difference between diversity and inclusion, the question now becomes how Boards and organizational leadership can effectively assess themselves in regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion. One important aspect of Board governance is regular assessment of the Board's effectiveness. DEI is often a part of this assessment but the tools to accurately measure the complexity of this issue are lacking. The BoardSource Diversity matrix is a common tool used by Boards to examine their Board composition and recognize gaps while recruiting (Lakey, 2007). This is a valuable tool when not used as a stand-alone assessment. This tool fails to take into consideration member's inclusion behaviors and the way the Board functionally operates in regard to DEI. Effective assessment tools require Board members to think generatively. Generative thinking strengthens the

purpose and presence of a Board's governance and provides an opportunity for Board directors to operate as a source of leadership in strategic decision-making (Chait, 2005). Generative thinking allows Boards to creatively think about issues and wrestle with ambiguities and uncertainties. In generative thinking, Boards often discuss why and how they operate and if that serves the organization in the most effective ways. Generative thinking explores and challenges norms to ensure that change is welcomed when needed. When assessing a Board's readiness, vulnerability, and integrity related to Board diversity, generative thinking is required to truly understand a Board's inclusion behaviors and the policies and procedures by which it operates.

In 2018, SurveyMonkey, the world's leading People Powered Data platform, in partnership with Paradigm Strategy Inc., a strategy firm that helps organizations build stronger, more inclusive workplaces, released a new survey template for companies to take a data-driven approach to measuring inclusion. Joelle Emerson, CEO of Paradigm stated:

You can't change what you don't measure. While a growing number of organizations have committed to analyzing and addressing diversity, there's a common misconception that inclusion can't be measured. It can. By measuring key factors like objectivity, voice, and belonging, organizations can get a clear sense of opportunities to build a more inclusive culture.

This survey template was designed with input from social science research pioneers at Stanford University, including professors Carol Dweck, Greg Walton, and Geoffrey Cohen and in collaboration with SurveyMonkey and Paradigm, to provide a set of measures to best assess an employee's sense of inclusion in the workplace. After testing the methodology and survey questions with over 10,000 people employed in the United States, the companies found three key areas that impact whether underrepresented groups feel included in the workplace. Although this research was focused primarily on employee inclusion, these themes can be applied in creating a tool to assess a Board.

1. **Growth Mindset:** A growth mindset is the belief that people can evolve and learn, while a fixed mindset suggests talent, abilities, and intelligence are fixed. A company with a fixed mindset views talent as critical to success, and where talent is either something you have, or you don't have.
2. **Belonging Uncertainty:** Belonging uncertainty is the state of wondering whether others will include, value, and respect you. Employees can feel incredibly taxed when they don't feel like they belong.
3. **Objectivity:** Objectivity is the perception that advancement is based on fair and transparent criteria.

While conducting their research, the team of researchers and corporate partners discovered that minority groups had reported significantly different feelings of growth, belonging, and objectivity. Nearly 3 in 10 Black and Hispanic employees (28 percent versus 17 percent of white workers) reported that they felt their company operated with a fixed mindset. The perception that success depends on special talents that can't be learned can hinder feelings of belonging and growth. A quarter of workers felt like they "don't belong" at their company, and that jumps to nearly one in three for black workers. While 60 percent of employees across the country said their compensation is fair relative to others at their company, less than half of black workers (48 percent) agreed with that statement. The indicators of growth, belonging, and objectivity can be used to create a comprehensive tool for measuring a Boards readiness, vulnerability, and integrity regarding diversity and inclusion and begin to close the gap in how we assess diversity.

Another noticeable missing piece of some DEI assessment tools is a measurement for implicit biases. Cusimano (2018) defined implicit bias in the following way:

An implicit bias is not necessarily against something, someone or some group compared to another. It is a tendency to disfavor or favor a person, group, or thing to another, often an assessment, judgement or opinion without evidence, information or even reason.

Implicit biases are often subtle but persuasive and concealed, even to the person possessing the bias. They develop through direct and indirect experiences and messages that culminate throughout a lifetime. Unlike explicit biases which are conscious, implicit biases do not arise from bad intent. Yet implicit biases can be equally as dangerous and permeate our culture in constant and detrimental ways. Implicit biases are especially dangerous because they can be opposite to what we might say our outward beliefs are. "They are inescapable and universal" (Cusimano, 2018). According to Cusimano (2018), everyone has implicit biases, even those whose jobs require objectivity.

The Implicit Association Test (IAT) created in 1998 by Tony Greenwald (University of Washington), Mahzarin Banaji (Harvard University), and Brian Nosek (University of Virginia) is a computer-based tool that surfaces implicit biases. "The IAT measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy). The main idea is that making a response is easier when closely related items share the same response key." The IAT has become a tool for education, training, and a launch point for conversations around DEI. Most self-report surveys simply ask questions that would reveal explicit biases but fail to get to a deeper level that prompts conversation and action around mitigating internal biases. Although the IAT is perhaps the most effective tool for individuals, Board self-assessment tools, surveys, conversations, must take into consideration implicit biases. Thomas (2018) found that implicit gender bias affected

both the director nomination process and the challenges women directors faced in the boardroom. This example demonstrates how implicit biases not only affects demographic diversity but also functional diversity. Even if women make it into the boardroom, implicit biases affect how they participate in Board processes and if their voices and interests are considered and included in Board deliberations (Thomas, 2018).

Many Boards have policies that inadvertently exclude people from participating. This is especially evident in fundraising and financial contribution requirements for Board members. For many organizations, Board members contribute a significant amount to the annual budget through personal donations and contributions. Some organizations have minimum contribution policies or “give or get” policies whereby they must either raise or personally donate a certain amount each year. These funds are typically unrestricted and support organizational operations. Minimum giving requirements however, limits Board participation to people of economic means, disqualifying from Board leadership the voices and perspectives of lower-income community members. Additionally, a member’s economic situation may change during their membership due to loss of employment and minimum requirements can create difficult situations for these people (Masaoka, 2009).

This research study aims to develop an effective assessment tool for measuring Board readiness, integrity, and vulnerability in regard to DEI practices while also assessing and revealing personal biases. The research demonstrates that there is a significant gap between demographic diversity and functional diversity or inclusion and most Boards fall short in terms of systematically and generativity thinking about and implementing DEI on their Board and in the organization as a whole. When diversity stands alone without considering equity, and inclusion, Boards run the risk of tokenizing their diverse members. Tokenization was defined at a Vanderbilt University DEI conference in 2018 in the following way, “Tokenization is the practice of doing something (such as hiring a person who belongs to a minority group) only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that people are being treated fairly.” Tokenism exists on nonprofit Boards when demographic diversity is considered to be enough by an organization. Without an active effort to include diverse voices and ensure that the same opportunities are being awarded to diverse members, Boards may be vulnerable to this type of behavior.

Using the findings from past literature as well as expert interviews and a case-study test of the developed tool, this research aims to answer three questions and deliver a new model for initial DEI assessment.

Research Questions

1. What are the indicators DEI readiness, vulnerability, and integrity?
2. How can Boards effectively identify and assess their vulnerabilities, integrity, and readiness to implement diversity and inclusion practices?

3. What are the benefits to identifying gaps between diversity and inclusion?

Section 3: Methods and Approaches

Expert Interviews. In order to understand the common challenges surrounding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on Nonprofit Boards, interviews with Board leaders, executives, and experts in the field were conducted. Table 1 details the interviewees credentials, affiliations, and accolades. Each interview was selected based on their work in the sector, their knowledge of Board governance, and their expertise in the field of DEI.

Table 1. Expert Interviews

Name	Organizational Affiliations and Accolades
Jane Pak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board Chair, Refugee Transitions (2016-Present) • Director of Strategy and Development, Refugee Transitions (2012-2016) • Adjunct Professor in Nonprofit Strategic Governance (University of San Francisco) • Doctorate in Human Rights Education, Stanford University
Joanne Spears	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Director, Institute for Local Government (1998-2014) • General Counsel, League of California Cities • Adjunct Professor in Nonprofit Strategic Governance (University of San Francisco and University of the Pacific)
Dr. Cio Hernandez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founder, Equity and Space (Present) • Institutional Review Board Member, Kaiser Research Institute (2004-Present) • Board of Supervisors Health Equity Staff, Marin County Health and Human Services (1995-2018) • PhD, Health Care Leadership (UC Davis)

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. Table 2 shows the set of questions used to guide the interviews. The semi-structured format was chosen for data collection because they are “well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues” like DEI (Bariball, 1994). Starting with a set of consistent questions ensured that data from the interviews could be compared and that common themes could be identified. Semi-

structured interviews however, allow for probing and clarification to ensure that the correct themes are extrapolated from the interviews. For this research, it was important to record even the tangential comments made by interviewees as these unexpected ideas may be important emerging themes not thought of by the researcher. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and common themes were identified and synthesized into three main categories, readiness, vulnerabilities, and integrity. Table 3 in the Data Results and Analysis highlights these primary themes.

Table 2. Expert Interview Questions

Interview Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In your words, what is the primary role of a Board of Directors? 2. What are the benefits of having a diverse Board? 3. What is a Boards responsibility in evaluating themselves in regard to DEI? 4. How would you define the difference between Diversity and Inclusion? 5. How can a Board effectively asses their DEI practices? 6. Are there current shortcomings in how nonprofits assess DEI? For instance, the diversity matrix, does that leave anything out? 7. What are the indicators of Board readiness to implement diversity and inclusion? 8. How can boards avoid tokenism? 9. In your experience why do organizations fail to effectively implement DEI even if they have the best of intentions? 10. What would you say to organizations who site money, time, and resources as reasons for falling short in terms of Diversity and inclusion? 11. What is the staff's role in promoting DEI in an organization? 12. Are there policies that every Board/org should have in regard to DEI? 13. What are the organizational benefits of implementing robust DEI initiatives?

Case study post interviews. Using the data gathered from the expert interviews, a survey tool was developed for both the Board and staff to measure DEI readiness, vulnerabilities, and integrity. In order to understand the effectiveness of this tool, a case study with a community based nonprofit organization (CBO) was conducted. All 11 Board members and 14 staff members were given the survey and five of each were interviewed after taking the survey. This data is important in understanding how those taking the survey felt during the process and how well they felt the tool measured their experiences. Table 4 in the Data Analysis and Results section demonstrates these results and the major themes that emerged from the case study interviews.

Table 3. Case Study Interview Questions

Post Survey Interview Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Did the survey spark conversation or action from on the Board (Staff)? Please describe. 2. Was the survey accessible to you? (i.e. was the language understandable, was the survey format easy enough to understand). 3. Were there any survey questions or part of the survey process that made you feel uncomfortable?

Section 4. Data Analysis

Expert Interviews

Jane Pak, Board Chair, Refugee Transitions. Pak is the child of immigrant refugees and this personal experience has informed her work in the nonprofit sector. Pak is currently completing a Doctorate in Human Rights Education at Stanford University and serves on the Board of Refugee Transitions as their Chair. Pak offers a unique perspective on Board governance at Refugee Transitions because of her previous staff role as the Director of Strategy and Development. As a Human Rights advocate, Pak uses this as the structural framework for her Board work. When asked what the primary role of the Board of Directors is, Pak answered, “I may see this differently than others, but I really believe that my role on the Board is to help support staff. And people who are out in the field, know what’s going on. It’s to listen and really support and work with.”

Diversity is a priority in Pak’s leadership and governance. When asked about the benefits of Board Diversity she answered:

To me it’s not about benefits, to me it’s about a necessity. We serve a very diverse population, we serve not only refugees, but immigrants, asylum seekers, undocumented, documented folks from over 50 countries around the world. It is absolutely essential that we don’t just talk the talk but that we really understand what that means at a deep level. At refugee transitions there’s a really deep commitment and knowledge and sense of solidarity with communities in transition, that it’s not just us serving, you hear this a lot with nonprofits, it’s not just about serving a beneficiary.

Pak describe Diversity being integrated throughout the organization, not just as an infrequent conversation but as a “multi-dimensional” approach that permeates the culture from all directions. According to Pak, Diversity is not a top-down approach but a collaborative effort that integrates various viewpoints.

Refugee Transitions does not act as a savior for their beneficiaries. In fact, Pak stated, “The worst thing we could do, not the worst, but I think it would be problematic if we brought somebody on who was well-meaning but unintentionally... well you see this right, sort of the savior approach and that is not who we are as an organization.” This is why Pak highlighted the importance of having people on the Board who “have experienced forced migration.”

In regard to Board readiness to implement DEI practices, Pak stressed the importance of having a shared understanding of values. Beyond checking boxes that are required for some grants and contracts, Pak has worked to create an environment of inclusion. This began at Refugee Transitions by changing the Board agreements and contracts to reflect the organization's commitment to DEI. Pak shared:

So, a lot of Boards as you know use give and get or give or get policies, and over time we developed a very soft give or get policy. And then upon feedback from our Board members, and just our own thinking about it, that's not possible for a lot of people. So, we need to create an environment where we really do embrace, and we mean it, people who can't give or get but have tremendous value on different levels. What we have done over time, and this is very intentional, is really uplift those folks who can't give financially but contribute deeply in terms of frameworks of social justice, scholarship, governance, and other things. Part of it is getting it down on paper but then there is a culture around it where you have to actively uplift those voices.

As the Chair, Pak has served as the champion and leader for prioritizing DEI for the Board and the organization and having a champion of the work is a vitally important aspect of DEI readiness. Pak, because of her former role as a staff person, sees the division of Board and staff as a significant warning sign that something the organization is not working. For Pak, inclusion of staff in decision making and ensuring that the Board has a clear understanding of the staff's experience is a high priority. Additionally, Pak thinks about Board DEI as a personalized plan for each member. When speaking about a Board member, for whom English was not his primary language, Pak described meeting with him to create a solution that would bring his voice into the room. Rather than hiring a translator which was not necessary or desired by this person, Pak would reach out to this member ahead of time to solicit his thoughts and give him additional time to understand and develop his thoughts.

Pak described Board assessment as a vital part of DEI. When asked what tools like the Diversity Matrix leave out, she responded, “As soon as something becomes a checklist exercise, a limitation of that could be a temptation to just do that checklist. I struggle with those tools if they are left alone. What absolutely has to come with those tools is a commitment and culture that is built overtime. Not only do we see who we

have, we have a conversation about that and what that means for our vacant spots, our organization. DEI has to be extremely intentional.”

JoAnne Speers, Former Executive Director, Institute for Local Government.

Speers is a nonprofit executive with over 20 years of experience in the field. Her long tenure with the Institute for Local Government made her an interesting interview candidate as she has seen an organization go through transitions and a Board in various forms. Speers made the comment that “Board diversity is a journey.” Her position as a longstanding Executive Director makes her uniquely positioned to offer insight on what this journey can and should look like.

When asked what the benefits are of having a diverse Board, Speers responded:

It first enables the Board, which I often refer to as the brain of the organization, to think more broadly about the organizations mission, its programs, its strategies, and that’s sort of the positive. And then there is a preventative aspect, where one hopes that it makes it less likely that an organization would have blind spots that could cause missed opportunities, or something worse for the organization.

Consistent with the findings in the literature, Speers recognizes the importance of addressing implicit biases and by having varied perspectives on a Board, each person’s biases can be challenged and better avoided.

Speers offered legal perspective on Board composition and what policies should and do dictate Board and organizational diversity. According to Speers, some organizations have specifics around Board diversity written into their bylaws that dictate Board composition to ensure representation of their constituents. There are obvious laws that prohibit discrimination, however how this looks in a functional practice varies from organization to organization. In both the organizations that Speers worked for she stated that “the organizations made significant strides in diversity because of defined categories of Board membership.” These categories were defined in the Bylaws and recruitment was guided by this policy. The 990, the United States Internal Revenue Service form that provides the public with financial information about a nonprofit organization, includes a section on governance. The form however does not have a required or best practice policy that focuses on Board diversity. Speers highlighted that many organizations have informal agreements around DEI but knows of no required legal policies for Board diversity.

Speers offered unique insight on the financial and resource struggles that many nonprofits face. She stated, “Nonprofits are perpetually under-resourced, and Board members have a responsibility to financial stewardship. There are tensions between competing good values and not enough resources to act on things.” When asked what she would say to nonprofits who cite money, time, and resources are reasons for falling short in terms of DEI Speer shared:

Like any other issue in nonprofit management and governance issue, it's how do you eat an elephant, one bite at a time. It is absolutely true that there are never enough resources to do all the things that would be great to do for most nonprofit organizations. So, the management challenge for staff and the governance challenge for the Board is to make steady progress. I think actually, steady progress and ongoing commitment is part of the process issue that addresses tokenism.

Speers was aware of the practical challenges in addressing DEI on a Board. First of all, there must be vacant spots in order to diversify. Additionally, without Board members who have an authentic interest in Board DEI, the process will be stalled. Speers stated that the governance committee must prioritize education and intentionality around DEI to communicate the benefits to the organization. There must be a champion(s) for the issue. Board self-assessment is considered a best practice for Boards and Speers shared that in her experience, "the self-evaluations always included a component where we reflected on the composition of the Board and whether it was sufficiently diverse and inclusive. That was another way we kept our attention on the issue."

Dr. Cio Hernandez, Founder, Equity and Space. Dr. Cio Hernandez founded Equity and Space in 2019, a DEI consulting-based nonprofit. Hernandez brings a unique frame to DEI work. As a licensed mental health practitioner and a 22-year staff member for the County of Marin in the health equity space, Hernandez views Board DEI as a community health issue. Hernandez stated, "Communities need to come up with treatment plans that address community wellness, just as in the mental health space individuals follow a personal treatment plan." According to Hernandez, Boards must consider human diversity in the decision-making process to ensure that the right treatment plan for that community is implemented. When asked about indicators of Board readiness to do DEI work, Hernandez used a therapy acronym, ERRCEPT (empathy, respect, rapport, curiosity, education, personal biases, and treatment) to frame Board readiness. Hernandez shared the following framework for Board readiness:

- 1) Have empathy for everybody, but especially the person in front of you that you are serving.
- 2) Respect for the person in front of you and the community that they represent.
- 3) Build rapport, so actually building relationships with people from a Boards perspective is an opportunity to become more inclusive because you're taking an interest to actually meet the people who aren't represented and who aren't necessarily already thought of from a Board perspective.

- 4) Curiosity, just being curious about what are the needs of each of the communities, and not just the assumptions about what we think they need.
- 5) Education, we must look at in three ways, we are going to educate ourselves, we are going to have diverse populations educate us, and then we might educate diverse populations in things that may be beneficial to them that they may not know about.
- 6) Personal biases, if we look at our Board being willing to look at our own personal biases, that's just going to make it stronger, because it gives us language for others around us to also look at their personal biases. Boards who are willing to look at their personal biases and actually voice them are going to be stronger than those who aren't willing to look at their personal biases and are too afraid to share those.
- 7) Treatment plans, we must develop plans that actually consider human diversity needs if the people that we serve. For a Board that treatment plan would be around programming, policy making, and decision making and stuff like that.

Hernandez also highlighted recently increased requirements around DEI from funders. "Realistically the biggest job of the Board is to figure out how to bring money in to be able to pay the bills for an organization and if you aren't talking about and prioritizing Board and organizational DEI, you're not going to get funded." For Board members who cite money, time, and resources as reasons for not effectively implementing DEI, understanding the financial implications of not prioritizing DEI may have a large impact and reframe the issue.

As a Latina woman, Hernandez had a lot of interesting commentary on how Boards can avoid tokenism, noting that at times, she felt that she was being asked to join certain Boards because her heritage filled a Board diversity quota. She shared:

I kid you not, I have been asked by at least 15 Executive Directors if I would be on their Board. But let me just put this clearly, I am the whitest brown person you could possibly find. I am educated, I'm a homeowner, I grew up in all white schools, I speak white, I don't speak brown, like you can't get that much whiter than me, so having me on the Board is hardly having a brown person. But I am comfortable to Executive Directors because they know that I crossover very well.

Hernandez did not feel that she was the best voice for the Latino population and because of this it felt clear to her that her race was being tokenized. Hernandez stated, "Tokenism is extremely layered in our own personal biases. Avoiding tokenism requires one, looking at your personal biases, and two you have to look at your functional

purpose in bringing diversity to the Board, is it to say that you have a diverse Board or is it actually to start making decisions that are equitable.” Hernandez provided two powerful questions to ask a new and diverse member to avoid tokenism:

- 1) What would it take to feel welcomed and included in the community and on the Board?
- 2) Who do you feel that you are representing on the Board?

Oftentimes, the person who is being tokenized on the Board doesn’t even identify with that group or feel that they are bringing that voice to the table. In addition, by asking these questions, you can begin to create personalized plans for ensuring that each member feels included in a way that feels good to them.

Synthesizing the Interview Data. The expert interviews were transcribed and coded. Consistent themes emerged and were placed into three categories of DEI: readiness, vulnerabilities, and integrity. These categories were created upon synthesizing the results and establishing a pattern of data. Table 4 lists the indicators.

Table 4. DEI Indicators in three categories: Readiness, Vulnerabilities, and Integrity

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Indicators		
Readiness	Vulnerabilities	Integrity
Champion(s) for DEI	Division between Board and Staff	Frequent opportunities for Board/Staff shared contexts
Ability to embrace ambiguity and discomfort	Fear of “messing with a good thing”	Willingness to adapt when needs of the Board change
Understanding and agreement of shared values	Worry that DEI measures will decrease existing Boards privilege	Creating personalized plans for DEI with each person (what works for one person won’t necessarily work for another)
A learning and growth mindset	Thinking that DEI solutions are one-size-fits-all	Board limits that allow for regular changes and reassessment of Board DEI
An understanding of variance in privilege	When checklists, matrices, etc. are used in isolation	Regular generative thinking/conversations around DEI

A shared understanding of DEI and an agreed upon framework for discussing and evaluating	Using lack of resources as an excuse for not implementing inclusion practices	Treating DEI as a living, breathing, and evolving practice
An ability to uncover and discuss personal biases	A lack of Board involvement or understanding of community served through programming	Implementation of DEI policies for the Board and Organization
Empathy, respect, and curiosity for other cultures	Having a strict fundraising requirement to serve on the Board	Defined categories of Board membership

Using these indicators as well as information gathered in the literature review, a survey was developed to adequately assess a Board for DEI readiness, vulnerability, and integrity. Two versions of the survey were developed. The first version is intended for the Board to complete, while the second included five additional questions and is intended for the staff of an organization. The additional questions on the staff survey focused on the staff's perception of and connection to the Board. It was highlighted through the interviews and the literature that a disconnect between the staff and Board is a DEI vulnerability and these additional questions aim to assess this. Additionally, many of the questions aim to uncover implicit and personal biases. Questions about various diverse populations are included to uncover any area where implicit biases may exist.

Table 5. Assessment tool for measuring a Board for DEI readiness, vulnerability, and integrity

* Questions 19-23 (highlighted) were only a part of the staff survey

* Key: R=Readiness, V=Vulnerabilities, I=Integrity, B= Bias

Indicator Area	Question
R	<p>1. My organization should prioritize equity, diversity, and inclusion.</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
V/B	<p>2. I am open to expanding positions, placements, programs, and decision-making power to those of lower socioeconomic status,</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>2a...even if my organization has to provide transportation</p>

	<p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>2b...even if my organization has to provide childcare</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>2c...even if my organization has to provide food</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
R	<p>3. I am aware of my own privilege.</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
R	<p>4. I am comfortable talking about my own privilege</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
V	<p>5. I am afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing.</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
V/I	<p>6. I am willing to reduce my benefits of privilege to make room for diversity.</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
B	<p>7. I am willing to give voice, make space, and honor opinions of those who are very young, middle aged, and/or older adults and make decisions based on impact on all ages.</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
V/B	<p>8. It is a value to include cultures different than my own</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>8a...including ability, accessibility, diagnosis, mobility, learning differences</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>8b...even if they think differently than I do</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>8c...even if their political stance is different than my own</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1</p> <p>Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>

	<p>8d...even if it means hiring interpreters, including many languages, making room for those to speak and contribute meaningfully</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
I/B	<p>9. I value including people who do not look like me or have my life experience...</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>9a...in Board membership</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>9b...in considering new programming</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>9c...in considering impact of decision making</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p> <p>9d...in hiring practices</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
B	<p>10. I prioritize including opinions from those with alternative living conditions from home owners, renters, multi-housed, underhoused, couch surfers, living in cars, or homeless.</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
I	<p>11. I am willing to consider opportunities that may not benefit us equally.</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
B	<p>12. I value voices of those who have lower educational experiences to the highest levels of education.</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
B	<p>13. I am happy to include the spectrum of gender and orientation from cisgender, heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersexed, fluid or others. (CHLGBTQQIF)</p> <p>5 4 3 2 1 Definitely Probably Neutral Not Really Definitely Not</p>
B	<p>14. I am open to acknowledging spiritual and religious diversity in decision making.</p>

	5 Definitely	4 Probably	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	
R	15. I am willing to be a voice of diversity for the organization/community, even if it is contrary to the majority opinion.					
	5 Definitely	4 Probably	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	
V	16. It will be difficult to make change in my organization.					
	5 Definitely	4 Probably	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	
I	17. I am proud of the work we are doing to improve equity, diversity, and inclusion.					
	5 Definitely	4 Probably	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	
RVIB	18. I am surprised at my answers and reactions to the questions.					
	5 Definitely	4 Probably	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	
V	19. The Board of Directors understands my experience as a staff member.					
	5 Definitely	4 Probably	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	
V	20. The Board of Directors is representative of the community we serve in terms of...					
	20a. Race/Ethnicity					
	5 Definitely	4 Somewhat	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	0 I don't know
	20b. Socio-economic Status					
	5 Definitely	4 Somewhat	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	0 I don't know
	20c. Gender					
	5 Definitely	4 Somewhat	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	0 I don't know
	20d. Sexual orientation					
	5 Definitely	4 Somewhat	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	0 I don't know
	20e. Ability					
	5 Definitely	4 Somewhat	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	0 I don't know
	20f. Age					
	5 Definitely	4 Somewhat	3 Neutral	2 Not Really	1 Definitely Not	0 I don't know

	20g. Occupation					
	5	4	3	2	1	0
	Definitely	Somewhat	Neutral	Not Really	Definitely Not	I don't know
V	21. I know who the Board Members are at my organization.					
	5	4	3	2	1	
	Definitely	Probably	Neutral	Not Really	Definitely Not	
V	22. I have regular interactions with Board Members at my organization.					
	5	4	3	2	1	
	Definitely	Probably	Neutral	Not Really	Definitely Not	
RVI	23. The Board of Directors prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion.					
	5	4	3	2	1	
	Definitely	Probably	Neutral	Not Really	Definitely Not	

Case Study Results – Post-interviews. A sampling of five Board members and five staff members from the organization who took the survey, were interviewed to understand the effectiveness of the tool and process. The post-interviews revealed some consistent findings and feedback. *Table 3* in the Methods Section includes the questions that were asked as a part of the post-interview process.

In response to the question, did the survey spark conversation or action on the Board (Staff), both groups reported that the survey generated a lot of personal introspection that resulted in robust conversations about DEI. The staff became aware of some “low hanging fruit” and took immediate action. An example of this was the realization that the voice-messaging system was only in English and this excluded the Latino community before they even walked through the doors. The survey sparked this conversation and a change was implemented. In tandem with taking this survey, the Board created an equity committee of both Board and staff members to be the champions for Diversity and set the priorities, a full day DEI training was scheduled for Board and Staff members who wanted further education.

The survey prompted conversations among the Board about why DEI was being prioritized. Some members felt that the Board was working well as it was and were fearful of making a change that could disrupt that. Defensiveness emerged as many Board members felt that the organization was very inclusive, although admitted that they had never truly assessed this in a formal way. Competing priorities became a part of the conversation post survey and there was some disagreement among Board members of whether or not DEI should be at the top of their list.

In response to the second question, was the survey accessible to you (i.e. was the language understandable, was the survey format easy enough to understand), some interesting findings emerged. Some of the staff members reported that some of the concepts asked about in the survey were foreign to them. The term privilege for instance was an unfamiliar concept to some staff participants and as such felt they could

not accurately answer questions that referenced this DEI term. Additionally, some of the organizational language was unfamiliar as some staff did not have an understanding of the various levels of staff and Board or the knowledge of a typical organizational structure. The Board, all of which are educated minimally at a college level did not have a problem with the language.

One staff person with a visual impairment disability revealed that she felt very triggered by being asked to complete a DEI survey that was not accessible to her. This prompted an important conversation on the staff about how to ensure that those with varying abilities can better be included in this type of process. Alternatives like verbal surveying, larger fonts, and hearing assisted technology were discussed. This staff person chose to complete the survey verbally.

In response to the question, were there any survey questions or parts of the survey process that made you feel uncomfortable, most people described a feeling of ambiguity about how the results would be integrated into the organization. The majority of people recognized the inherent value in having these conversations, however there were varying levels of enthusiasm about the process. The staff was generally more open to making changes that supported DEI, possibly because of their more direct connection to the organization's constituents.

Quantitative Case Study Results. Mean averages were calculated for some of the questions to compare post-interview data with the actual survey findings (see Table 6). These results are consistent with interviews and the staff specific questions highlight a disconnect between Board and staff and their understandings of the organization. Most staff members felt that they have infrequent contact with Board members and that the Board did not fully understand their experiences as a staff person. Furthermore, the staff felt that the current composition of the Board did not represent the diverse community they served with SES diversity representation being the lowest (M=2.4).

Both the Board and staff reported high averages when asked about their values of including different cultures, Board (M=4.8) and staff (Mean=5). However, when given the caveat of hiring interpreters, including those of many languages, and making room for those to contribute meaningfully, both Board and staff reported lower averages, with the Board dropping one full point (M=3.8). These numbers indicate that in theory, DEI is a value of the organization but when actually pressed to make changes that would contribute to functional inclusivity, the Board and staff are less inclined to do so. The staff also reported being more open to reducing their own benefits of privilege to make room for diversity (M=4.1) than the Board (M=3.4). These numbers may indicate less openness to changing the composition of the Board to include varying perspectives and demonstrates a potential vulnerability. In some Boards, introducing diversity to the Boardroom may lead to a fear of a loss of influence. The findings from this research may point to this vulnerability. This is consistent with the post interviews where Board members were wary of "messing with a good thing" and struggled to see the value of adding a contrary or different viewpoint to the decision-making process.

Both the Board and Staff reported generally neutral numbers when asked how difficult it would be to make change, Board (2.9) and staff (2.8). This indicates that while the process of the implementing DEI practices, policies, and organizational culture may be incremental and gradual, there is a general consensus that if the organization decides to focus and prioritize these initiatives, they should be successful.

Table 6. Quantitative Case-Study Survey Results

Question	Board Average, N=11	Staff Average, N=14
It is a value to include cultures different than my own. - Even if it means hiring interpreters, including many languages, and making room for those to speak and contribute meaningfully.	Mean=4.8 - Mean=3.8	Mean=5 - Mean=4.47
It will be difficult to make change at my organization.	Mean=2.9	Mean=2.8
I am willing to reduce my benefits of privilege to make room for diversity.	Mean=3.4	Mean=4.1
I have regular interactions with our Board members.	N/A	Mean=3.1
The Board of directors understands my experience as a staff member.	N/A	Mean=3.4
The Board of Directors is representative of the community we serve in terms of race/ethnicity, SES, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, occupation.	N/A	Mean (race/ethnicity) =3 Mean (SES)=2.4 Mean (Gender)=3.5 Mean (Sexual Orientation) =2.8 Mean (Ability)=3.3 Mean (Age)=2.7 Mean (Occupation)=2.7
The Board prioritizes DEI	N/A	Mean=3.7

Section 5: Implications and Recommendations

The research results have significant implications for the nonprofit sector, the DEI space, and Board governance practices. The expert interviews informed the creation of a Board DEI assessment tool and in the process, best practices for developing a Board for DEI emerged. This research contributes to the sector in four important ways:

1. A comprehensive list of DEI indicators in three categories – Readiness, Vulnerabilities, and Integrity.
2. A tool for assessing an organization for DEI readiness, vulnerability, integrity, and personal biases.
3. A starting point for developing a Board for DEI.
4. A demonstration of the benefits of prioritizing Board DEI.

Using the framework of the three DEI indicator areas -- readiness, vulnerabilities, and integrity -- this research provides recommendations for the Board of Directors and organizational leaders to more intentionally address DEI.

Recommendations across indicator categories.

Readiness

1. ***Identify your champion or champions.*** A clear sign of organizational readiness is a person or persons willing to be the voice for change in their organization. This may seem like a basic principle, however sometimes being a champion means being a contrarian on the Board. Survey question 15 stated, “I am willing to be a voice of diversity for the organization/community, even if it is contrary to the majority opinion.” This can seem like a daunting task for someone on the Board and can contribute to ambiguity or conflict, which Board members are often hesitant to introduce. Some Boards combat this type of conflict by forming a DEI Board committee. This allows for a small group to set the priorities for the organization and creates a larger sense of importance. Including staff members, community constituents, and other important stakeholders on this committee will broaden the views of this group and ensure that a diverse set of voices and ideas are included in this process. Staff inclusion also contributes to the integrity of a Board’s DEI by generating opportunities for shared contexts and breaking down barriers between the Board and staff.
2. ***Education and framing of DEI is key.*** Without proper education and framing for the Board of Directors, introducing DEI can create a struggle for power and control. As shared by JoAnne Speers, talking about needing diversity can make current members feel like they are not valued or needed because they do not contribute to the diversity that is desired. This can be avoided through education and framing. Jane Pak uses the Declaration of Human Rights

framework to discuss DEI because it includes generally agreed upon DEI concepts. This provides a clear pathway when beginning DEI work. Without a shared understanding of DEI and the importance for an organization, Board members may fail to see the value and continue to take a passive approach to it.

Using a fundraising and financial framework may also be a necessary way to communicate the value of DEI to some Board members. These frameworks are often more familiar to Board members and can be a less abrupt way to navigate initial conversations about DEI.

3. ***Talk about personal privilege and biases and what that means for how different individuals show up to the work.*** Boardrooms need to become a safe place where individuals can discuss and check their personal privilege and biases. Because these conversations are uncomfortable, many Board avoid these difficult conversations. There are a lot of incredible resources and ideas of how to thoughtfully discuss and introduce these topics in a way that encourages introspection rather than judgement. Framing biases as something that everyone has as a result of their experiences can eliminate the shame around this sensitive topic and encourage action.

Vulnerabilities

1. ***Rewrite Board fundraising requirements to offer alternative ways to “give” to a Board.*** Boards should remove financial contribution requirements to allow for more socioeconomically diverse membership. Financial contributions are only one way to give to an organization and alternatives should be written into policies. Simple changes in wording can make all the difference. Jan Masaoka wrote in *Blue Avocado*, that rather than requiring a certain amount, policies can say something like, “Board members are expected to make an annual financial contribution that would be considered generous for them.” This allows financial contributions to be relative to each person. Additionally, if no financial contribution is possible there should be options to volunteer or offer pro-bono services as these are forms of giving. There are scenarios however, where a person cannot give more time than is already required for Board meetings and cannot contribute financially. Perhaps a member is a single parent, working multiple jobs. This person represents a subset of the community and that representation in membership must outweigh the potential financial contribution of a less representative member.
2. ***Make DEI a recurring agenda item to encourage consistent generative thinking and conversations on how to improve (don’t be complacent because things seem to be working).*** Boards need to be constantly assessing themselves and asking difficult questions about how and why they function

in certain ways. Participating in generative thinking and consistently asking questions about DEI policies, practices, and procedures contributes to a more open environment that is welcome to change. Creating a (Board) policy to include DEI on every Board agenda makes it less likely that competing priorities will overshadow DEI considerations. Boards can ask themselves three important questions on a regular basis:

- a. Do all voices in the room feel heard and valued?
- b. What is our commitment to our community and how are ensuring that they are represented in the Boardroom?
- c. How can we improve now and in the future?

3. ***Commit to making consistent progress, even if it begins small.*** DEI is a large and multifaceted issue that requires a shift in an organization's cultural norms. This can feel like a daunting and overwhelming task for Boards, but it doesn't have to be. Even by committing to small and consistent progress an organization can begin this process. Taking a small step like changing the voicemail system to be more inclusive (as demonstrated in the case-study) is progress and demonstrates to the staff and community that diversity is a priority. Because of a limited number of Board seats and term limits, Boards are sometimes unable to instantly diversify, but this does not mean that education or conversations around DEI should stop. DEI should become a natural filter by which ALL decisions are made.

Integrity

1. ***Create more shared contexts for Board and staff.*** Most organizations do not have regular opportunities for the Board and staff to hear from each other. Oftentimes, retreats are kept separate, Board members do not regularly visit programs, and staff have little input or say in decisions made by the Board. As demonstrated in the case-study, this can lead to a cultural divide in the organization. While the Board is often referred to as the "brain" of the organization, the staff is the heart. When these two things are not communicating the organization can experience disfunction and a breakdown in systems. The staff are the boots on the ground and usually are the ones who really know the communities served. Staff input is vital. These shared contexts should be regular and more common than not. Some organizations invite rotating staff members to Board meetings to report on programs, some organizations have eliminated Board only retreats and invite important staff or even all staff to join strategic conversations. Staff should be trained to speak the organizational language of Boards, so they can contribute on a similar level while providing unique insight that only a staff person could have.

2. ***Create personalized DEI plans for each member. Do not assume that what works for one person will work for another.*** This is one of the largest and most surprising implications of this research. Much of the prior research indicates that in order to be diverse, equitable, and inclusive, an organization needs to have all potential DEI best-practices in place. According to the expert interviews this is not actually the case. DEI plans must be personalized and should not be treated as a one-size fits all roadmap. What makes one person feel included will not necessarily work for another person. Jane Pak's example of an ESL board member preferring a pre-meeting discussion to allow for more processing time over hiring a translator demonstrates this principle. For some, hiring an interpreter may actually make them feel like more of an outsider.

Additionally, Board diversity does not have to look the same for all organizations. This idea was prominent in previous research which focused on the fact that different nonprofits may need to prioritize different types of diversity. This research follows this logic while contributes to another layer of complexity. According to expert interview testimony, Board membership is not and should not be the only avenue for diverse perspectives to make an impact in the Boardroom. In fact, Board membership and participation requires a certain level of comfort with organizational language, financial decision making, along with a significant time commitment. Other avenues for participation need to be made available for those who either cannot or do not want to participate at this level. Regular focus groups with diverse constituent groups, community needs assessments, and presentations to the Board can create other ways for diverse populations to be represented. Although this is not the same as having diverse Board members it can be one way to bring in diverse perspectives.

3. ***Institute stricter limits on Board service to foster consistent change and opportunities to diversify.*** Because Boards only have a limited number of seats, Boards can feel stuck if they do not have vacancies that give them the opportunity to recruit new and diverse members. Most organizations have term limits for Board membership that are written into the organizational bylaws, yet it is common practice for members to re-up their service for an additional term(s). The expert interviews yielded strong support for more strictly enforcing term-limits to ensure that there is ample opportunity for change. Boards with long-standing members can become complacent and change adverse which can hinder DEI in an organization. According Jane Pak, three years is an adequate amount of time for a Board member to know the organization, make an impact, and make room for others to lead. There are definitely instances where it makes sense for a Board member to stay on for

an additional term, but this decision should be scrutinized to ensure that it is what truly makes most sense for the organization.

Recommendations for improving the tool. Based on the feedback received from post-interviews, a few changes could be made to the tool to make it more accessible and effective.

1. **Define DEI jargon/terminology or use more accessible language.** The post interviews revealed that some of the terminology was too advanced and specific to the DEI space. To address this, the tool should either include definitions of specific concepts or change the language to be more understandable for all levels of education.
2. **Create alternative ways for participating in the survey to account for diversity in ability.** A self-assessment survey in print may not be accessible to those with disabilities, as was revealed in the case-study post-interviews. Understanding those that will be asked to take the survey is key in its success. Providing alternatives for data collection may be necessary. Offering the survey in larger font, creating an audio version of the survey, and providing an option to respond verbally to a neutral third party can account for various disabilities that may prohibit someone from taking the survey.

The survey was offered in both English and Spanish in the case study and organizations who have other language speaking individuals on their Board and staff should provide the survey in their preferred language.

3. **Add questions that challenges the idea of “messing with a good thing.”** The post interviews revealed a general sentiment from the Board that they felt the Board was working really well and they didn’t see the need to shake things up with different perspectives. While this was identified as a vulnerability in the literature and through the expert interviews, there was not a question that effectively probed this idea. It is recommended that the following two questions are added to the survey:
 1. Adding differing perspectives to the Board will create conflict and decrease the Boards effectiveness in making decisions for the organization.
 2. The Board is as effective as it could be.
4. **Create a guide for organizations to react to the information and implement changes.** The post interviews consistently revealed uncertainty about how to proceed with the gathered information. Adequate assessment is merely the first step in developing a Board and an organization for DEI. Using the information gathered in this research, a DEI strategy guide should be created to inform Boards and organizations on how to integrate what they have learned into action. These recommendations serve as the beginning stages of a strategy guide, but further expansion is necessary.

Section 6: Conclusions

This research demonstrates the effectiveness of the developed tool in measuring a Board for DEI readiness, vulnerabilities, and integrity. The tool successfully adds layers of complexity to DEI assessment by including caveats and clarifications that measure beyond explicit biases. Additionally, the tool comprehensively assesses for inclusion practices and made it possible to better examine a Boards values and behaviors. The tool provides a starting place for organizations who may want to take a more intentional approach to DEI. Past research demonstrated consistent passiveness on Boards when it came to DEI and this tool makes it possible for Boards to understand their readiness, vulnerabilities, and integrity. These three categories allow Boards a framework for addressing DEI and uncover areas of strength and weakness.

The expert interview data contributes to the field and provides a comprehensive list of indicators to guide organizations through their DEI process. New information was identified with perhaps the largest takeaway being that DEI will not and cannot look the same for every organization or individual within an organization. The uniqueness of the human experience means that each person will need different approaches to feel included and valued within an organization or on a Board. The same set of inclusion practices cannot be applied to all individuals.

The case-study data was consistent with the indicators identified via interviews and highlighted areas of readiness, vulnerabilities, integrity, and personal biases. The general quantitative findings indicated that the organizational staff was more open to expanding positions, sharing the benefits of privilege, and making financial commitments to DEI. The case-study also indicated that the Board was slightly disconnected from the programs and staff. The post-interviews with Board and staff members confirmed the validity of the data as similar information was gathered. Unexpectedly, the process of completing the assessment tool contributed to immediate actions at the organization and important conversations about DEI. It was stated by both Board and staff however that they were unclear about how to integrate the survey data into the organizational culture in a long-term way. A next step in the research would be to develop a DEI strategy toolkit for organizations to take action based on their survey results.

Some changes to the tool should be made based on the case-study post interview results. Because of varied levels of education on the staff, some of the language was not accessible. The next version of the tool should provide definitions of DEI specific jargon and/or reword questions in a way that would be understood by all levels of education. Additionally, the tool should be translated into more languages and offered in ways that are accessible to those with visual and hearing impairments.

Further research is suggested to compare existing DEI assessment tools with the tool developed through this research. This suggested research would demonstrate the differences in how this tool measures inclusion and equity as well as if the tool provides

more information to organizations on personal biases. Additionally, the tool should be tested at nonprofits with varying missions, sizes, and structures to truly understand the effectiveness. Many national nonprofits for instance have national, regional, and local Boards and this tool should be tested within these organizational structures and compared to data collected from smaller organizations.

While this tool was designed for nonprofits, the public and private sectors are also seeing an increased emphasis on DEI on their Boards and within their organizations. This tool can be used cross-sector however further research should be conducted to understand if modifications to the tool are necessary.

Assessment is only the first step in an intentional DEI process. If organizations cannot integrate the information learned through the assessment process, no significant and sustainable changes will occur. In order to truly change the statistics on Board diversity, organizations must look beyond demographics and ensure that diverse perspectives are truly valued in Board processes. Even an effective assessment tool is only the first step in truly making change in an organization and in the nonprofit sector.

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Author's Bio

Alexa Davidson is a strategic leader and pragmatic innovator. Davidson has worked in the nonprofit sector for over five years both as a direct care provider and as an executive leader. Her work is steered by client-centered compassion and systemic change work. With a focus on strategic program and organizational development, Davidson has been instrumental in building effective organizations that encompass the best practices of the nonprofit sector.

Davidson holds a BA in Psychology from San Francisco State and a Masters in Nonprofit Administration from the University of San Francisco. As the Strategy and Impact Coordinator for the San Geronimo Valley Community Center, Davidson has been pivotal in holistically evaluating the programs, leadership, and internal culture of the organization and guides strategic direction. Previously, as the Assistant Executive Director with Humankind Alliance, Davidson was one of the founding team members who built the organization. Davidson initiated the first ever policies and procedures for the Board of the Directors, created and implemented the organization's fund development strategy, and recruited and managed a team of over 25 volunteers and employees.

As a sixth generation Marin County native, Davidson is committed to the strength and prosperity of the County. Davidson's work on Latino Health Policy Reform as an intern with Marin County Health and Human Services and her direct service work with youth in the Juvenile Justice and Foster Care systems demonstrate her commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in Marin County.