



Leadership and Governance Toolkit

18: Gaining Political Buy-In for your DEI Strategy

Performative support rarely results in leadership or boards buying into the organization's DEI strategy.

Actions that will help leaders build buy-in from a leadership team and board members can include:

1. Collecting data around diversity is often seen as a required starting point for DEI work. Although data is important, its collection should not become a barrier to starting DEI work. A simple scan of your organization by level will allow you to see if those making the decisions look different from those implementing the decision. This imbalance likely points to a DEI challenge. Leaders must be careful that collecting DEI data does not become a barrier to starting DEI-related work. This consideration is especially important for small more resource constrained community-based organizations.
2. Data around the role of DEI in improving organizational performance needs to be clearly communicated with leadership and the board. For large organizations performance data is already being reported and correlations need to be hypothesized and tested relative to different measures of diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, for smaller community-based organizations this link between DEI and performance is one that must be made through story telling and examples of successes achieved.
3. Leaders and boards need to see interest and action around DEI from key internal and external stakeholders. DEI Leaders must have individual and small group meetings with key stakeholders to discuss the state of DEI at the organization, what needs to be changed, and why those changes are necessary to the organization's mission. This information must then be shared with the leadership team and the Board.
4. Board members must be encouraged to put DEI on the organization's agenda.
5. Stories need to be shared about the role of DEI in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service access for key beneficiaries and how the current DEI context affects employee engagement and inclusion. Stories are highly effective in helping leaders understand DEI challenges from the perspective of those on the



ground who deliver and receive services; this is key in motivating leaders to move agendas forward.

6. Data should also be shared about how other similar community-based organizations are working on DEI initiatives and where the organization stands relative to these leading organizations.

BOARD TOOLS

Board members have three key responsibilities: (1) Duty of Care – ensuring the organization's assets, people, and goodwill are used with prudence and care. (2) Duty of Loyalty – ensuring leadership is committed to advancing the organization's mission. (3) Duty of Obedience – ensuring the organization operates per the laws of the land. Do these responsibilities do a good enough job of creating a sense of duty toward supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion?

How a Board sees DEI affects - if and how - they prioritize it.

It depends on how board members see DEI. Even if they support DEI, if they see it as an add-on or something

nice to have, it will never become a key concern for the board and will never be a priority for leadership. But suppose the Board's perspective is one where DEI is germane to the organization's mandate and mission. In that case, the Board can play a key role in supporting and promoting DEI and holding the organization accountable for DEI development and progress. Critical to this role is the relationship between the Board Chair and the CEO or Executive Director. This relationship needs to be value creating, i.e., the more efficiently and effectively the Board Chair and the CEO can get on the same page around strategic directions, strategic plans and strategic initiatives, the more time the senior leadership team can focus on achieving its goals. Board Chairs and CEOs or Executive Directors must be aligned when it comes to the organization's approach to DEI. However, the other side of this equation is accountability. It's the Board's job to hold the one person they hire, the CEO or Executive Director, accountable. When that accountability does not include DEI, things don't change. When the CEO or Executive Director's performance reviews don't include DEI goals and performance measures, things don't change. Boards can balance between being supporters of DEI while also be the vicegerents of accountability by using three key tools: (1) Ensuring DEI remains a top priority for the organization – Tool 19, (2) Holding organizational leadership accountable to DEI progress – Tool 20, and (3) Providing guidance around DEI challenges and progress – Tool 21 (see Figure 20).

FIGURE 20: THE ROLES BOARDS PLAY IN CREATING POSITIVE DEI CONTEXTS

Ensuring DEI Remains a Top Priority for the Organization	Holding Organizational Leadership Accountable for DEI Progress	Providing Guidance around DEI Challenges and Progress
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ENSURING DEI REMAINS A TOP PRIORITY FOR THE ORGANIZATION

FIGURE 21: THE ROLES BOARDS PLAY IN CREATING POSITIVE DEI CONTEXTS – PRIORITIZING DEI

Ensuring DEI Remains a Top Priority for the Organization	Holding Organizational Leadership Accountable for DEI Progress	Providing Guidance around DEI Challenges and Progress
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