

Fortifying nonprofit sector governance through diversity

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More and more nonprofit organizations are seeking volunteers from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds to serve on their boards of directors, according to a local firm that matches potential board members to nonprofit organizations.

MAP for Nonprofits (MAP) operates the Twin Cities' only nonprofit board member recruitment program, called Best on Board®. Best on Board® functions much like a headhunting agency, except that it recruits voluntary board members, rather than paid staff. Nonprofit organizations tell MAP what skills and attributes they're seeking in new board members and MAP's recruiters go to work.

According to Judy Sharken Simon, who manages the Best on Board® program, nonprofits still want their board members to bring professional skills, like fundraising, finance or legal skills; and they're increasingly looking for younger board members to complement older board members. But the predominant theme MAP is seeing is that nonprofits want board candidates who bring a unique point of view that can only come from having a diverse ethnic or racial background.

"More and more nonprofits want the people governing their organization to reflect the community," explains Simon. Many of the organizations MAP works with want their boards to reflect the community they serve and they want governance decisions to be influenced by diverse perspectives.

Damaria Moore of Edina was referred by MAP to the board of directors of Friends of the Mississippi River. Moore has now served on the board for ten months. She said she has broadened her experience through her board service and has added to her skills by learning about fundraising.

Nmandi Njoku of Maple Grove was referred by MAP to the board of directors of Cedar Riverside People's Center. Njoku, who has served on the organization's board since June of 2009, says he has learned what it means to be an integral part of a board; and that he "understands more about board service, health care, healthcare fiduciary responsibilities, and the courage to give back to the community."

MAP conducted a survey in 2010 of the 240 candidates of color in its board candidate pool to assess their experiences with MAP's program. Sixty-two percent of respondents had accepted and been placed on a board through MAP, and of those, 60 percent said that the boards they serve on believe that having a diverse board has significantly improved their customer service and community efforts. Survey results also indicated the board members feel they are personally benefitting from the board service, according to Simon.

MAP's research has confirmed for Simon that boards are truly valuing the diversity they're seeking from MAP and its recruitment program and that all parties are benefitting from increased diversity on their boards. Individuals interested in serving on a nonprofit board can begin the process by completing the volunteer application at www.mapfor nonprofits.org.