

How Nonprofit Boards Can Bridge Difference in Divided Times

Carrie C. Irvin
October 19, 2017
BoardSource Leadership Forum
Seattle, WA

Who are we?



Civil society:

A community of citizens linked by
common interests and collective activity

*“Ordinary citizens contributing to the well
being of their community”*

“Civil:”

secular, nonmilitary, polite, courteous,
affable, pleasant

Nonprofit boards





designed by  freepik.com

Diversity on boards

- Boards are getting less diverse
 - 84% of board members are white
 - 90% of board chairs are white
- Culture of inclusion
 - Least diverse boards rate their culture as the most inclusive
- Social networks are not diverse:
 - White people 91% Black people 83%
 - Latino people 64%

Nonprofit boards in public education

- Major driving force
 - 7,000 public charter schools
 - Thousands of ecosystem organizations
 - Philanthropy is driving ed reform
- Some efforts to rethink governance
 - Do huge school systems work?
 - Does political governance of public education work?
- Shifting autonomy to school level relies on strong boards for accountability

How can boards do this?

- Think carefully and be intentional about who is on the board
- Make proximity a priority
- Follow best governance practice
- Ensure inclusiveness
- Have the hard conversations
 - Have more of the hard conversations
 - And even more

Four Corners

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Tools and Guides

- Rethink your board meeting agenda
 - Leaving agenda time for open-ended, challenging discussions
 - Put more on the committees' agendas
 - Training the board to asking hard questions and not think they have to have the answers
 - Having hard conversations about race, privilege, community leadership, power, and class—regularly
 - Considering who in the community the board should be hearing from, and bringing them in
- Strategic board composition
 - Clearly defining community engagement
 - Broadening the skills matrix:

Thank you!

