

Voluntary Sector Leaders

Overview of Research

In Canada, the voluntary sector consists of 180,000 non-profit organizations of which approximately 80,000 are registered charities. The sector employs over 1.3 million people in communities across Canada and includes 6.5 million volunteers (Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2009). These organizations often provide services to the community which supplement government efforts and play a major role in the economy (Barr et al., 2006; Hall et al., 2004).

Given their critical role in Canadian society, it is important that the executives of these organizations understand the myriad of interests and needs of their stakeholders and clients. In addition, boards of directors play a pivotal leadership role in this sector as they assist in developing the strategic direction of the organization. Non-profit boards play an important role in establishing the legitimacy of the organization and commitment to the communities they serve (Abzug & Galaskiewicz, 2001). Having a diverse board enables an organization to be more responsive to its stakeholders and also is tied to both fundraising and social performance or community member attitudes towards the organization (Brown, 2002). Overall, research on this sector is uneven, in part due to a lack of consensus on the definition of “non-profit organization.” A recent survey (Bradshaw et. al. 2009) of non-profit organizations across Canada collected responses from 240 relatively large organizations and found that that, on average, White/Caucasians accounted for 87.6% of board members. The study also identified a range of recruitment strategies to increase diversity on boards and suggested that there was a relationship between board performance and the degree of diversity in its composition.

While non-profits include a wide range of organizations from professional associations to advocacy groups, for the purposes of this study, we focused specifically on charities and foundations registered in the Greater Toronto Area.

Methodology

To assess the visible minority representation of voluntary sector leaders in the GTA, we focused on the board of directors and senior executives in 20 of the largest charities and foundations located in the GTA. The top organizations were selected by their revenue based on a search of the Canada Revenue Agency database and cross-checked with Imagine Canada’s list of the largest organizations based on assets. Individuals were identified through online searches of names and data. Because ethno-cultural foundations and charities tend to be dominated by the ethnic and cultural groups they represent, they tend to skew the results and so, on the advice of experts, they were removed from the list. Data for charity and foundation boards and executives were studied (See Appendix 3).

With regard to charities and foundations, we analyzed 285 board members and 59 senior executives representing 81% of their respective categories.

Findings

Among the large charities and foundations we analysed, 8% of senior executives and 14% of board members were visible minorities.

Table 14: Visible Minority representation in Voluntary Sector Boards and Executives

Voluntary Sector	Total Number	Total Analyzed	# Visible Minority	% Visible Minority
Boards of Directors	351	285	39	14%
Senior Executives	73	59	5	8%
Voluntary Sector Total	424	344	44	13%

The representation of visible minorities in the voluntary sector (Table 14) is higher than in the corporate sector. Representation in the voluntary sector in charities and foundations is 14% for boards of directors while it is just 3% among the large businesses analyzed. Among senior executives (charities and foundations) visible minority representation is 8% while it is only 5% for large businesses. While their numbers are still low, non-profits have developed strategies to cross-pollinate membership in order to pull more visible minorities into board positions. Corporate sector boards may benefit from drawing on individuals with experience in the non-profit sector or government.

Leading Practices

Mirroring the corporate sector, members of the voluntary sector have recently undertaken a number of initiatives as part of their strategy to address the under-representation of visible minorities in leadership positions.

For example, as a part of its commitment to diversity, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario employs a Diversity Health Information Business Unit, working to ensure practices are in place to encourage the development and advancement of visible minorities within the organization and in leadership roles (Heart and Stroke Foundation, 2009).

The YMCA of Greater Toronto recently won a “Diversity in Governance (Trailblazer)” award from Maytree in recognition of having a governing body that reflects the diversity of the people who live and work in the GTA (YMCA, 2008). The YWCA established a diversity task force to develop an integrated strategy to promote diversity.

In addition, outreach to ethno-cultural voluntary organizations has helped voluntary organizations identify potential candidates for staff and board positions.

Leadership in Action

Paulette Senior, CEO, YWCA Canada

Paulette Senior has overcome the obstacles of immigration and divorce to become a role model for her community. Born in Jamaica, she moved to Canada at the age of 11. Since her youth, Senior has been actively engaged in non-profit organizations as a front-line individual providing assistance to women and children. Senior parlayed this voluntary community experience into a leadership role; in 2006, after 20 years experience with various non-profit organizations (including 12 years with the YWCA), she came to occupy her current position, as CEO of the YWCA of Canada, the country's oldest and largest women's multi-service organization. Through the course of her career, Senior has been involved with many non-profit organizations including as the executive director of Yellow Brick House of Aurora. Other organizations to which she has contributed include the College of Occupational Therapists, Police Race Relations Monitoring Audit Board, Black Business and Professional Association, and the Rouge Valley Health System.

She is also the 2006 recipient of the Margot Franssen Leadership Award in 2006, the Black Women's Civic Engagement Network's Champion Award in 2009, the African Canadian Achievement Award, and the Matilda Van Cooten Award for Excellence in Single Parenting in 2004. She has a keen interest in the role of women in politics, and has run for municipal, provincial and federal office.

Senior graduated from York University with an Honours Bachelor of Arts in psychology and urban studies.

Senior has the experience of being an immigrant to Canada: "I grew up not really knowing where my feet were and I went through quite a period of uncertainty." But she attributes her success to determination and discipline, and says "there really is no giving up."

Senior's advice to aspiring leaders: "You have to be resilient in terms of the adversity you face, and that's what I admire in people even now." No stranger to adversity herself or to racism, she advises aspiring leaders to remember, "You cannot do anything about what people say to you. But you can control your reaction to it."

Dr. Chi-Ming Chow, Board Member, Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario

Dr. Chow is a prominent physician working as an attending staff cardiologist at St. Michael's Hospital and an associate professor in the Department of Medicine, University of Toronto. He has authored multiple peer-reviewed journal articles and presented at local, national, and international scientific meetings. He has also developed several medical education software programs which are being used by medical professionals and students internationally. He has won a number of local and national teaching awards to recognize his teaching and innovation in medical education.

Recognizing the growing threat of cardiovascular diseases to immigrants and ethnic populations, Dr. Chow has been an active participant and spokesperson for the Board of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario. He is also the Vice-President of the Chinese-Canadian Council and works on health promotion and research among ethnic Chinese. He is an editor of the quarterly Chinese Heartbeat news and created Chinese brochures and DVDs to spread the message of heart healthy lifestyles within the Chinese Canadian community.

Dr. Chow has devoted many years to improving his education—he has an undergraduate degree in computer science from Brown University, USA, an MSc in Epidemiology from McGill University (1997), and received his Doctor of Medicine (1990) from McGill University (Montréal, Québec).

He then pursued his clinical and research echocardiography fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard University, before joining the Division of Cardiology at St. Michael's Hospital in 2001. He attributes his success to very supportive family and helpful mentors.

Chow's advice to aspiring leaders: “Remember the 3Ds: 1) Discovery—always think out of the box; 2) Diligence—1% inspiration, 99% perspiration; 3) Dedication—never settle for second best and never take no for an answer. Also, when someone tells you this is the way to do things, ask why. When someone tells you this is not the way to do things, ask why not.”