

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee

Question:

What are your thoughts about having a board-level committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion?

Answer:

I believe it is essential to engage the board in matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for many reasons, perhaps most importantly these four:

1. The board sits at the top of the organization and has a fiduciary responsibility for oversight of leadership, mission, and resources (and DEI is central to these);
2. Boards have not only a fiduciary responsibility for oversight of DEI but also a moral and ethical one;
3. The board, and only the board, can hold the Head accountable for progress on DEI; and,
4. Boards approve budgets and budgets are a physical manifestation of values and priorities.

Having said this, I do not think it is sufficient to have a couple of board members on a committee or to simply have a DEI board committee. The board needs to “own” DEI. Until DEI (the D is easier, but without the E and I you are missing the mark) is: (1) as important to organizations as are finances and facilities, program quality and endowment; (2) as engrained in board thinking and consciousness; (3) reflected in the board’s composition and culture; and (4) embedded in board work, we are kidding ourselves about making much progress—even if DEI appears in the Strategic Plan (as it does almost everywhere and yet remains elusive).

DEI must be made explicit until it is implicit – until it is part of the culture -- “who we are” and “what we do.” This means that the board itself is diverse, equitable, and inclusive and that the board insists that the organization is, too.