



Kansas City Area Board Diversity Research



Research Objective

Support Kansas City and the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership conducted research to begin to build a foundation of understanding about the current state of diversity in Kansas City area boards, the impact of diverse boards on the work of nonprofit organizations, and the current perspective of nonprofit leadership on board diversity.



Methodology

The study was a mixed methods design with a survey distributed to a sample of Kansas City area board members and executive leadership, and a series of in-depth interviews with individuals from the same sample.

The survey collected insights regarding organizations' focus on diversification of their boards, representation of a variety of community voices and of those the organizations serve, levels of commitment the organization has regarding diversity and representation, and the impact boards' current level of diversity has on strategic organizational work.

Respondents were asked to take part in one-on-one interviews with a researcher to explore the experiences of these topical areas. The interview format allowed for deeper exploration on the meaning of "diversity" for a board, the challenges organizations face in attracting diverse voices to their boards, and the impact diversification may or may not have as experienced by organizational leadership.



Outcomes

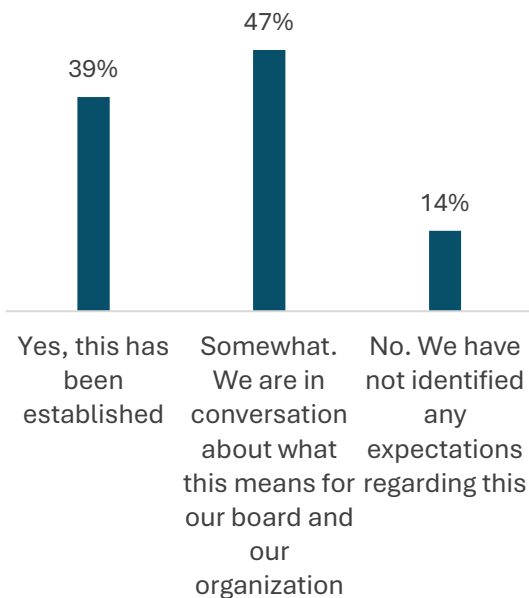
Of those surveyed, most Kansas City area board members and leadership are White. Most respondents report a strong importance (59%) at their organizations of focusing on diversity of their boards and inclusion of voices that represent the communities they serve. Most respondents feel the boards they are associated with generally represent the communities they serve (64%) and indicate a high priority on including a variety of experiences, voices, and demographic backgrounds when recruiting new board members. However, those responding also report demographics of their board members skewed white, cisgender, and more than half over the age of 45.

While the focus of diversifying boards demographically, experientially, and in representation of the communities the organizations are serving – from those receiving support or services to stakeholders that are partners – the outlook of boards is still skewed toward similar experiences and cultural backgrounds.

- On average, boards are approximately 72% White and 28% Persons of Color
- 47% of board members are within the ages of 45-64
- Nearly 95% of organizations have only Cisgender male and/or Cisgender female board members
- 45% of responding organizations have board members who identify as LGBTQIA+

Nearly two-thirds of respondents report that a formally identified expectation of what board diversity and representation would be has yet to be formally established for their board. There is consensus from respondents that this needs to be – and is – a focus for their organizations, but the formal practice appears to be less established.

Board Diversity Definition



Within the interview component of the study, thematic saturation¹ was achieved on topics relating to the importance of determining how to define diversity and representation when identifying voices needed at various organizations and the impact that may have on an organization’s strategic approach (as opposed to selecting board member without considering the person’s experience, addition to the existing leadership, as well as demographic background). Additional themes included the importance of board members’ understanding of the organizations work first-hand as essential and as important to the criteria of their participation, as well as the impact of board voices as a partner in the community.

Limitations & Future Research

Participation in this study was notably low. The survey totaled 104 responses, yielding non-significant findings. Interview participation was also low with 5 interviewees, however across the interviews several thematic findings reached saturation across participants’ experiences. Some identified areas of difference would require further interviews to achieve saturation and reliability in the findings.

It is hypothesized that the low participation could be due to several factors, including the bias to participating in an interview on this topic, similarities in the demographics of the sample due to the skewed demographics of leadership in Kansas City area boards and executives, and the timeframe in which the study was conducted. These factors and more could be explored in further research to continue growing knowledge about the composition of Kansas City’s nonprofit boards.

1. Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. *PLoS ONE*, 15.