

SO YOU NEED MORE DIVERSITY...

marco.a.benavides@state.or.us

Getting new people involved in an organization is exciting. Whether as an employee, or a committee member, it is an opportunity to share what is special about the organization with someone “new”. New people have enthusiasm and energy that hasn’t been dampened by poor results and great frustration. When given the opportunity to actively participate, their enthusiasm can be infectious, serving to motivate others in the group.

If you have looked around your organization lately, wondering why it is always the same people who do everything, then it is time to seek out new people to be part of your group and to get them involved.

The term “new” will be useful for the first meeting. Nobody wants to feel like a “new employee or new member” for an extended period of time. A goal to strive for is to make everyone a part of the organization, feel welcome, and involved; make people feel that they have an important role to play. Give them the opportunity to learn and to take responsibilities.

One of the dangers when we want to incorporate more diversity into the organization is expecting that the “new” person will be a representative of his/her base community i.e., a Native-American person speaking for all Native-Americans.

I recommend to any organization, committee, board, task force, etc., wanting to increase their diverse membership, to become familiar with some of the critical diversity issues prior to the outreach process.

It is advisable to make contact with the new member(s) a few days after he/she has participated in the first meeting. Ask for feedback and answer any clarification questions.

WHY NEW PEOPLE ARE NEEDED

People move, their interests change, they have a new job, their family life changes, they get burned out, etc. In other words, there are as many reasons as there are people involved.

There are several other reasons which influence the need to incorporate diversity. For example, the end result or the services generated by the organization will impact a diverse broad community. Sometimes, some or the total monetary support for the organization comes from a source that asks for diverse participation. In other cases the organization has a real commitment to be inclusive in every aspect and at every level.

WHERE TO RECRUIT

At general or executive board meetings, while talking with friends, through your organization's newsletter, in the local and ethnic newspapers and radio, after an article about your organization, at diversity conferences and events, ...Anywhere you can find people who might be interested in your organization or people who can develop some tie to your services, mention your recruitment effort.

If the organization is perceived in the community to be an inclusive organization, diversity recruitment and involvement by the diverse population will flow naturally.

HOW TO RECRUIT

To be more effective in trying to involve a diverse participation a subtle approach will be needed. After you identify a potential person who you believe will be an asset to your organization, involve his/her expertise little by little. For example, you can ask for input in one of the organization's projects, maybe a phone call asking for suggestions, maybe a document critique, etc. This approach allows the person to know more about the organization and the seriousness of your commitment to diversity. Also, build a friendship between the target person and one person of the organization. If possible, the target should be approached by someone from your organization who has established some previous contact with the person.

A key factor is getting people involved in your organization in different forms or at different levels. After people have an interest or can relate to an issue of the organization, they will be more receptive to becoming involved.

Let people know they are needed, how they can be involved, and why you have singled them out.

RECRUITMENT PLAN

The key element of a successful diversity recruitment program is that it is an on-going effort supported by organizational policies and a budget. Every recruitment effort should include these elements:

1. Identifying individuals to contact for potential involvement. Ask the current members for names.
2. Determining how to approach them. Finding out what's important to them is a good start.
3. Asking them to participate (use the subtle approach explained above under the subject "how to recruit"). If they say no, ask if they would be interested in another assignment or at another time or if they know someone else who might be interested.

Most people will volunteer some time if they know the following:

- They have information about the organization and its purpose. Also identify projects/issues of the organization and the organization's commitment to diversity.
- They know what is expected of them and how much time it will take.
- They know how the involvement proposed relates to their interests and abilities. (Do not hesitate to share with them how it might relate).
- They receive orientation/training on exactly how to do the job.
- They receive some status, recognition and/or satisfaction from their involvement in the organization.

CONCLUSION

Whenever you are serious in your commitment to involve people from a diverse background to be part of your organization or part of your staff, avoid a "tokenism approach". People will perceive your true intention and you can burn a valuable bridge between your organization and the base community. Never invite people to be there only as a quota number – "being seen but not heard".

After an "inclusive approach", expect some friction to develop. Whenever people from a diverse cultural background meet, cultural differences can arise. Let these differences be an asset to your organization and not a roadblock. "Value diversity" means embracing and sustaining a different way of doing business.