



RACE IN THE BOARDROOM

The challenge of moving “beyond tokenism” was one of the key issues discussed by panelists and participants in a session that was among the liveliest and most interactive of the conference. Spelman College President Beverly Daniel Tatum, the session moderator, asked participants to join the conversation with a “shared recognition of the persistence of structural racism, of the fact that race still matters, and that there is evidence of this in the legacy of philanthropy.”

“How does our understanding of race and our understanding of the continuing presence of racism in our society intersect with our stated purpose to improve foundation effectiveness?” and “What are the dynamics of race in the boardroom as you have experienced them?” Tatum asked.

Seated informally in a circle, participants shared stories of their experiences, unearthing several themes:

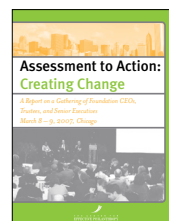
- **Racial diversity adds value.** When boards are inclusive, diversity makes for richer and more productive conversations and creates more democratic institutions.
- **Diversity among people of color is unrecognized.** Too often people of color are recruited to boards to represent “their people” and not for their expertise beyond racial issues. As one participant pointed out, “We can’t be so narrow in thinking about the experiences of people of color. There are a lot of people of color who have skills in business, finance, and investment – not just in the programmatic work we do.”
- **Tokenism is unproductive.** CEP’s research reveals the perils of tokenism. Analyzing a survey of 550 trustees from 53 foundations, CEP found that people of color who are members of foundation boards with two or fewer people of color rate the

equality of opportunity lower than do whites – or people of color on boards with more diversity. I noted one participant, “We invite one person [of color] at a time and that doesn’t make for a healthy conversation about race because it puts people who are invited in a very peculiar spot.”

- **Change is difficult.** Adding racial diversity to a board requires a commitment from current board members to understand their own values and those of the other members and to change the way they do business. According to one board member, “Often we make grants to organizations that look like us [white] to serve people of color, thereby not building the capacity to have people [of color] take those roles We have a great responsibility to make sure that grants are going to those people that we say we care about.”

The group concluded that board diversity is not just nice to have, it is a necessary part of board effectiveness, and that foundations must connect their social change missions to the way they structure their organizations. One board member commented, “There has been social exclusion of people of color from virtually every aspect of life in this society, historically and currently. For foundations and their boards – where social justice is part of our mission and work – to be more effective, we have to match our mission to expansion of opportunities for people of color [to sit on these boards].”

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