Report: Racial, Gender Barriers Confront New Jersey Non-Profits

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Mercerville, NJ – New Jersey’s non-profit community is facing the same racial and gender biases confronting non-profits and employers across the country, according to a new report released by the Center for Non-Profits.

The New Jersey Non-Profit Diversity Report was compiled from the responses to a broader survey of non-profit compensation, composition and governance practices conducted in late 2018. The report is based on responses from 204 New Jersey 501(c)(3) organizations.

The report indicates that diversity and equity problems documented elsewhere in the country are “all too apparent” in New Jersey:

- Persons of color are underrepresented in board and staff leadership positions when compared with the overall makeup of staff in surveyed organizations. Four-fifths (79%) of chief executives in the organizations surveyed were white, compared with 64% of staff overall. Surveyed organizations also reported that 79% of their board members were white.

- Staff composition in the survey pool is somewhat more diverse racially and ethnically than the New Jersey adult population as a whole. However, there are clear distinctions in racial and ethnic diversity between organizations that primarily serve communities of color and those that don’t. Organizations that primarily serve communities of color are markedly more diverse in their board, executive and staff makeup.

- Notable gaps in compensation existed in leadership positions when compared by race, and gender disparities in executive pay were seen as well.

- Diversity is not prioritized in the governing documents of many respondents. Many don’t address diversity in their bylaws at all, and few reported requiring specific levels of representation to advance diversity goals.

“It’s clear that diverse and equitable workplaces and boardrooms foster innovation, better decision-making and improved economic results,” noted Linda Czipo, president and CEO of the Center for Non-Profits. “Beyond that, as mission-driven organizations, non-profits also have an ethical responsibility to lead with our values and advance an equitable, just society. This report confirms that we have more work to do.”

“The Center for Non-Profits’ report examining inequities within 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations in New Jersey parallels the data from our Race to Lead survey of non-profit workers across the country,” said Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, co-director of the Building Movement Project, a national research and social change organization that has conducted groundbreaking studies documenting racial bias and other barriers to leadership in non-profits.

A web briefing accompanying the release of the report offered a series of resources and suggested action steps for organizations. A key starting point is getting a firm leadership commitment at the board level to
Making diversity, equity and inclusion a priority on a systemic basis: in bylaws, strategic plans, values statements, organizational policies and practices, and resource allocation, and building in concrete measures of accountability. Other steps include conducting an organization-wide assessment to identify and address areas of bias; broadening outreach and communications circles; committing to the ongoing, difficult conversations and changes needed to address endemic racism; and recognizing that change is a long-term process.

Commenting on the report’s release, several organizations also reaffirmed their commitment to advancing diversity and equity. Said Sandra Toussaint, president & CEO, United Way of Greater Mercer County: “United Way strives to be a model of diversity and inclusion. Our board of directors, staff and volunteers reflect the many faces, cultures and walks of life that proudly make up our community. Today, diversity and inclusion remain vital to achieving our mission of propelling individuals and families to reach their fullest potential.”

The report is part of the Center for Non-Profits’ broader commitment to advancing diversity and equity in New Jersey’s non-profit community. Along with the report, the Center’s website includes a list of resources to connect organizations to information, tools and insights, and the Center is inviting suggested additions to that site. The Center will also be working with partners on training and tools for non-profits, and exploring other ways to be supportive of the work being led by others in this field.

“Their many factors contribute to a strong and effective board and staff leadership, the board of the Center for Non Profits welcomes the complexity and enhanced innovation that results from a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion,” said Gina Plotino, board chair at the Center for Non-Profits. “We are determined to model those values for our sector and as we move the mission of the organization forward.”


The Center for Non-Profits is New Jersey’s umbrella organization for the charitable community. Founded in 1982, the Center exists to build the power of New Jersey’s non-profit community to improve the quality of life for the people of our state. The Center provides professional education, advocacy, resources, training and information to strengthen non-profits and help them thrive in pursuit of their charitable work. For more information, visit www.njnonprofits.org, or call 732-227-0800.

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