

Increasing Diversity in University Advancement: Lessons from Leading Development Programs



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Executive Summary

Increasing diversity among development staff has long been a persistent challenge for college and university advancement leaders. CASE has periodically surveyed members on compensation and diversity since 1982.

In 2015, CASE surveyed chief advancement officers of 35 of the largest development programs in the U.S. about efforts to achieve greater diversity among their staffs. In 2016, CASE conducted follow-up interviews with 35 staff leaders of eight institutions identified in the survey as having valuable perspectives on increasing staff diversity. Interviewees included senior leaders, staff with tactical responsibility in hiring and retention, and staff from diverse backgrounds within the fundraising divisions at these eight universities.

In the interviews, diversity was defined as encompassing race, ethnicity, sexual orientation/gender identification, disability, veteran status, and other dimensions. Leaders strongly affirmed the need for staff diversity as a moral imperative, as a manifestation of institutional diversity objectives, as a reflection of increasingly diverse student and alumni populations, and in the belief that a diverse staff is stronger and more innovative. They did not, however, believe that frontline fundraisers always had to be matched, demographically, with prospective donors. Development staff from diverse backgrounds expressed concern about the existence of a rigid “color ceiling” at the director level and above and a desire to see more diversity among senior leadership in development. Diverse development officers also identified informal career networks made up of non-minority professionals as an ongoing obstacle for diverse professionals seeking promotion to the leadership level.

The survey and interviews identified the following practices for increasing staff diversity in university development:

- Set an agenda and tone for diversity at the highest level of leadership.
- Provide frequent, focused staff development and training related to diversity.
- Use analytics about diversity in past hiring to inform all future searches.
- Supervise each search with a diverse hiring committee rather than a single manager.
- Have an in-house recruiter serving only the needs of the development division.
- Require that every search interview at least one diverse candidate.
- Build a pipeline of current and future candidates (many options identified in the report).
- Consider behavior-based instead of experience-based job qualifications.
- Use blind applicant review to emphasize abilities regardless of background.
- Re-direct diverse applicants to other positions to maximize their fit to the job.
- Improve procedures for onboarding (many options identified in the report).
- Enhance and formalize professional development and “career ladders.”

The research also identified four crucial steps to be taken by institutions seeking to affirm staff diversity as a human resources priority:

1. Announce an official diversity strategy.

2. Adopt a formal policy on diversity recruitment.
3. Appoint a specific internal staff group focused on diversity.
4. Allocate a budget specifically for diversity recruitment.

Key Findings from the 2015 Survey of High-Performing University Development Programs

The 2015 survey, which collected data submitted from chief advancement officers of 35 public and private universities with fundraising programs that generate more than \$100 million in gifts per year and employ in excess of 100 staff, revealed a pattern of well-intentioned efforts to recruit diverse fundraising candidates but ultimately disappointing achievements. While institutions established various policies and deployed specialized recruiting tactics, most lacked a concrete diversity strategy, a formal policy on diversity recruitment, a specific internal staff group focused on diversity, and an official budget dedicated to diversity recruitment. Among the 35 institutions:

- Almost one-third of advancement offices consistently incorporate a focus on diversity into recruiting practices for fundraising staff.
- Approximately half of the advancement offices lack either a formal or informal policy addressing diversity issues in fundraising; roughly half model their ideal staff diversity profile on their alumni base; and a little over one-quarter aim to mirror the U.S. population.
- Advancement office policies most often address ethnicity and gender (94 and 88 percent, respectively), and just over half of institutions also address sexual orientation, national origin, age, and disability.
- Only a small number (12 percent) maintain an official budget for recruiting diverse fundraisers.
- Among those with a policy (formal or informal) addressing staff diversity in fundraising, 77 percent reported identifying some diverse applicants for fundraising positions but being unable to consistently assemble representative pools of viable candidates.
- 56 percent of institutions track the current number of diverse fundraising staff and 44 percent track the number of diverse candidates who apply for open positions. Surprisingly, one-third of the institutions did not measure the effectiveness of diversity recruitment efforts.
- 19 percent consistently assembled representative pools of viable candidates but weren't able to draw from those pools to fill as many fundraising positions as expected.
- Only 3 percent consistently assembled representative pools and placed them into fundraising positions at a rate meeting their expectations.
- While women occupied a majority of fundraising positions, they were underrepresented in leadership positions.
- Non-Caucasians occupied less than 10 percent of all fundraising positions, and more than one-third of institutions did not have any non-Caucasians in senior leadership positions.

Insights on diversity from development leaders and staff of eight major university development programs

To identify practices with demonstrated potential to help institutions build more diverse fundraising staff, CASE initiated a qualitative research project examining diversity practices at eight institutions that had reported tangible success in diversity recruitment and retention in the 2015 survey. All eight had made diversity an official organizational priority. This group had sufficient recent experience with diversity recruitment and retention practices to provide an in-depth assessment of the effectiveness of practices addressed in the 2015 survey. Open-ended interviews also uncovered additional practices not specifically examined in the quantitative survey and drew on the experience and perspectives of talent management staff and development professionals from diverse backgrounds.

These eight universities include four public and four private institutions—three in the Northeast U.S., three on the West Coast, one in the Midwest, and one in the South. Three of the universities are in relatively rural or small town settings and the other five are in, or adjacent to, major urban centers.

CASE selected Devereux Consulting of Silver Spring, Maryland, to conduct interviews of key informants at these eight universities and prepare a preliminary and final report on the results of those interviews. Use of an external consultant was motivated by the need to ensure confidentiality for the key informants and to gain access to additional research expertise related to key informant interviews.

Interviews were conducted in two phases. For the first phase of the project, CASE invited the leadership in advancement at all eight universities to participate in key informant interviews, and to nominate at least one other person who had detailed, tactical-level knowledge of diversity recruitment and retention practices to be an additional key informant. For the second phase, the eight advancement leaders were asked to recommend up to two persons working in development at each university who represented some form of diversity on the staff.

CASE staff worked closely with the consultant to develop two structured interview protocols ensuring consistency and comparability across the key informant interviews. These protocols included both strategic and tactical questions, and provided guidance for including or excluding questions based on the position of a key informant at each university. Copies of both protocols are found in Appendices B and C of this paper.

Phase one interviews with the advancement leaders and talent management professionals were conducted by phone in June of 2016 by the consultant and were observed by a CASE staff member. Interviews were scheduled to take 60 minutes or less.

For phase two, the consultant interviewed advancement staff of diverse backgrounds by telephone without any additional observers present. This was to encourage the key informants to speak freely about potentially fraught issues related to diversity in the workplace without

concern regarding confidentiality. CASE and the consultant guaranteed complete confidentiality to all informants. None of the findings presented in this paper are associated with an individual or an institution, in order to ensure confidentiality.

As a potential indicator of the importance of the research topic for the key informants, only one person among all of the informants cancelled an interview. Otherwise, every scheduled interview occurred as planned, including those of top leadership in advancement at all eight universities.

Analysis of the Interview Results

The phase one interviews with advancement leaders were designed to identify specific practices in use at the eight universities but not to assess the prevalence of, or quantify the effectiveness of, those practices. There was a very high degree of agreement among advancement leaders and talent management staff on many aspects of diversity recruitment and retention. The phase two interviews with diverse advancement staff offer alternative perspectives on the specific practices and the general environment for diversity in university advancement careers. Where applicable, content from the phase two interviews is juxtaposed with that from phase one.

Diversity as a Goal and a Practice: Three Takeaways

1. University advancement leaders strongly agree on the reasons for increasing diversity

All of the senior advancement leaders strongly agreed on four primary reasons for seeking more diversity in the advancement staff:

Moral imperative: Achieving staff diversity, put simply, is “the right thing to do.” Achieving greater diversity is as much a moral issue as it is anything else.

Pragmatic imperative regarding university-wide goals: Most universities are positioning diversity as a top goal for recruiting all students, faculty, and staff.

Pragmatic imperative regarding future donors: Over time, university alumni and the current student body are becoming increasingly diverse. Future donors will expect to see diversity on staff. Both the quantitative survey results reported in July 2015 and the phase one interviews found that alumni and current student bodies are the primary reference populations for assessing staff diversity.

Pragmatic imperative regarding staff capacity: A diverse staff is a stronger, more innovative, more successful source of talent to achieve university advancement.

As will be noted in greater detail later, the senior leadership generally rejected any direct connection between staff diversity and the building of relationships with specific donors or groups of donors (i.e., “tracking” of staff based on demographic characteristics of donors).

Several of the diverse staff members interviewed during phase two had a more nuanced perspective, noting that in some instances, a match between the backgrounds of donors and that of major gift officers would help to achieve advancement goals.

Phase two informants mostly referenced the pragmatic imperatives of mirroring the diversity of future donors and contributing to a more effective fundraising team through diversity. These informants consistently stressed making overall performance of the fundraising team the highest priority, and connected increased diversity with performance.

2. Diversity remains an elusive goal

All of the senior advancement leadership expressed ongoing dissatisfaction both with current diversity within the staff and with existing practices intended to increase diversity. Two of the institutions appeared to have reached a “tipping point” regarding diversity on staff, which appeared to help in recruitment, but that optimism was tempered by concerns about the talent pipeline, general issues with retention, and the investment required to achieve diversity.

The phase two informants consistently expressed concerns about the absence of diversity at the leadership level (directors and above) within university development staff. The phrase “color ceiling” was used to summarize a feeling that there was a persistent resistance to hiring diverse persons (predominately defined in terms of race and ethnicity) in leadership positions. This was seen as the result of hiring processes that were driven mostly by informal career networks rather than by formally announced job qualifications. A sobering reality is that informal career networks in the U.S. are highly segregated in terms of race and ethnicity. As discussed further below, the phase two interviews strongly supported achieving leadership diversity as a key to pursuing overall diversity objectives.

3. Advancement leaders are frustrated with the talent pipeline for diversity and with churn among diverse advancement staff

Many of the senior leaders and talent management staff expressed fatigue combined with exasperation with the current pipeline for hiring in university advancement. This extended beyond diversity to all aspects of hiring and retention. As discussed below, all eight universities are exploring ways to grow the pipeline, often through participation in CASE internship and residency programs as well as management and leadership programs. Finding ways to greatly enlarge the talent pipeline and make it more diverse emerged as one of the most important overall goals for these universities. Nearly every university had a leader discuss the collective unhappiness with “passing around a limited pool of talent” from one institution to another as fundraising staff sought out career opportunities. Nearly every university also mentioned that talented staff from diverse backgrounds could move from university to university at will, but that process was not helping to grow the talent pipeline overall or make the pipeline more diverse.

Recommended Practices for Increasing Diversity in University Advancement Personnel

The following practices are not presented here as “better” let alone “best.” There are no metrics available at this time for establishing such claims. Rather, these are practices either in current use or about to be implemented at the eight universities examined in the research described above and that their leaders believe can help to improve diversity in recruitment and retention.

Set the agenda and tone for diversity, equity, and inclusion at the very highest levels of university leadership

The highest level of leadership at the university as a whole and within development specifically must make diversity a top objective. This may be expressed through high visibility appointments focused on diversity and inclusion, creation of a strategic planning process specifically around diversity, and consistent reference to diversity in all aspects of messaging from the leadership. All eight universities have very high-level appointments for promoting “diversity and inclusion” on campus (usually at the vice provost or similar level), and all units on campus are expected to participate in campus-wide planning related to diversity.

In keeping with the findings of the quantitative survey, development leaders can support diversity initiatives by implementing four specific components:

1. Announce an official *diversity strategy*.
2. Adopt a *formal policy* on diversity recruitment.
3. Appoint a specific *internal staff group* focused on diversity.
4. Allocate a *budget* specifically dedicated to diversity recruitment.

The phase two interviews with diverse development professionals below the senior leadership level consistently recognized a general commitment to diversity and support for diverse staff among the top leadership in development on each campus. This was tempered by the ongoing lack of diversity (racial and ethnic) among the leadership at the director level and above. While messaging was important, these diverse fundraising professionals hunger to “see more people like me” in their leadership. Several of the key informants in the phase two cohort shared examples of ways they believed leadership positions had been reconfigured/ to create additional obstacles for hiring diverse persons into those positions. The disjunction between messaging about diversity and the demographics of fundraising leadership was connected to problems with morale among the existing staff of diverse backgrounds, and to the decisions by former staff (colleagues of the informants) to leave a campus for another job.

Provide frequent, focused staff development and training for diversity and inclusion

All staff in general, and staff responsible for recruitment and retention in particular, should be offered routine mandatory and optional training and professional development related to diversity, inclusion, and cultural competence.

The phase two interviews suggested a wide variation in sensitivity to diversity issues among university advancement staff on the eight campuses. At some of the universities, the staff below the leadership level were highly engaged in diversity, and at others there were few signs of engagement evident to the key informants. Interviews of the phase two informants did not suggest that training and development were the “tip of the spear” for pursuing diversity in hiring and retention.

“Nudging”: Use analytics in the set-up for a search, and communicate frequently about diversity goals

“Nudging” is a concept in behavioral economics that refers to frequent reminders regarding the outcomes from behaviors. Recent research has demonstrated that such reminders alone can produce very significant changes in behavior and outcomes. In the context of staff diversity, nudging involves exposing current staff, and especially those participating in recruitment and retention, to detailed analytics about diversity, including at the leadership level. Such analytics might include the history of diversity for each position on staff, and the composition of the applicant pool for recently filled positions. Just keeping all staff focused on the analytics can move diversity up to a high priority within each employment search. This may be combined with a routine process for communicating internally about diversity goals throughout every search.

Supervise each search with diverse committees, not individual hiring managers

University advancement offices often assign each search to an individual hiring manager. Those offices that have replaced the individual with a committee that includes diverse members have found very positive impacts on the role of diversity in the hiring process.

The phase two interviews suggest that this is among the most important practices to use for increasing diversity at the leadership level of development. When hiring at the leadership level, there are many *political* pressures that reduce the likelihood of an individual hiring manager choosing diverse candidates. Leaders in development bear responsibilities that directly influence the success of annual and capital campaigns, with immediate implications for the public and private performance assessments of top university officials, including presidents and chancellors. In this highly scrutinized context, it is natural for informal career networks to play a significant role in who gets hired. The impulse to “[Build] a team I know and trust based on years of direct contact,” or “[Work] with colleagues that have proven their potential to me in the past,” can bias hiring decisions in favor of the familiar and exclude diverse candidates from top positions. A diverse hiring committee can provide crucial voices on behalf of diversity candidates, and quell concerns among junior staff that hiring for leadership positions is opaque, prone to cronyism, and reinforcing of perceived “color ceilings.”

Have an in-house recruiter for university advancement

Many of the eight universities studied have one or more in-house recruiters dedicated to assisting with all job searches. These in-house recruiters have replaced the use of external recruitment

firms and/or the universities' central human resources offices. The key informants familiar with this practice were adamant that the hiring of in-house recruiters had a tangible, positive impact on increasing diversity in the employment pipeline and otherwise ensuring diversity is a top priority in every search.

Use the “Rooney Rule”: Make diversity a requirement for the interview pool

The “Rooney Rule” in the National Football League specifies that every search for a head coach must include at least one diversity candidate. This rule is entirely legal because it does not require that a diversity candidate be hired or set any quotas. Some of the leaders interviewed for this research have experimented with the same rule, especially for “front line” development hires, by requiring that the pool of candidates interviewed for each position include, at minimum, one diverse candidate. The phase two interviews suggest that this “rule” is most important when hiring at the leadership level because it generally increases the likelihood of hiring a diverse candidate for a leadership-level position.

Build a pipeline of current and future recruits through proactive interventions

All of the eight universities are using similar interventions to grow the pipeline of applicants and increase diversity within the pipeline. These interventions are as follows:

- **Networking for recruitment in person and online.** Personal networking, that includes attending conferences, seeking referrals from various colleagues, and using social media such as LinkedIn, has become a perpetual activity for institutional advancement staff. The advancement leaders stressed that networking was their most successful practice for increasing diversity in recruitment. Many of the phase two informants were introduced to advancement careers through such networking. Development offices also need to be regularly represented at conferences to help promote their brand to diverse fundraisers.
- **Internship programs.** Whether participating in CASE's diversity internships or internal programs, these universities are seeking to greatly expand college internships as a means for reaching a more diverse talent pool of younger workers.
- **Student telefundraising/“phonation” workers and graduating class gift committees.** The students who work or volunteer for these annual fundraising campaigns often are very diverse and are gaining the core skills necessary to succeed in a development career. Several of the phase two informants had worked in the telefundraising programs at their alma maters.
- **Outreach to recent college graduates/young alumni.** As the student body becomes increasingly diverse, the possibilities for increasing diversity through entry-level hires of recent graduates improve. All of the phase two informants strongly endorsed development as a career for recent college graduates/young alumni of diverse backgrounds, stressing two messages: (a) fundraising offers younger workers the opportunity to make a difference by supporting efforts to achieve social goals through education and research;

and (b) development careers generally pay very well, especially for young people with only a bachelor's degree.

- **Recruiting other university staff such as admissions, career services.** These staff may be more diverse overall than in development, and often possess parallel “soft skills” of value in fundraising.
- **Mid-career certificate programs in fundraising for university staff and external consumers.** With classes taught by current development staff, these certificate programs help to recruit diverse individuals into fundraising careers, prepare them for success, and network them directly into university development.
- **New relationships with universities with greater diversity/diversity advantages.** Some of the eight universities are experimenting with staff exchange programs and other relationship-building activities to create connections with HBCUs, HACUs, and other diversity-serving institutions. These efforts are still in a nascent stage.
- **Referral bonuses.** Some of the eight universities are using referral bonuses to offer modest rewards to current staff for assisting with recruitment of new talent.
- **Sign-on bonuses and relocation assistance.** Universities in locations that do not readily favor diversity recruitment and retention, or with very high housing costs, have experimented with sign-on bonuses, financial assistance specifically for housing/relocation costs, and even relocation “concierge services” to encourage persons of diverse backgrounds to take positions in fundraising.

Consider behavior-based instead of experience-based job qualifications

Common qualification requirements such as “five to seven years of nonprofit fundraising experience” may limit the ability of universities to recruit a more diverse fundraising staff. Several of the key informants advocated behavioral interviewing in which job candidates were put into simulated fundraising situations to assess their skills. This approach increased the overall pool, and diversity within the pool, by highlighting candidates with extensive experience and demonstrable skills related to, but not in, fundraising.

Most of the diverse staff members interviewed stressed that any hire should be based on ability, and that no reduction in ability should be accepted in order to achieve staff diversity. That said, many of them also expressed concern about situations they had encountered in which diverse candidates clearly satisfied or exceeded the stated qualifications (especially for leadership-level positions) but were excluded from consideration. These incidents had fueled the belief in the existence of a “color ceiling” limiting hiring and promotion opportunities for diverse professionals at the leadership level.

Conduct blind applicant review

Several of those interviewed discussed efforts to make initial applicant review blind to gender, race, and other facets of diversity. Their experience is that blind review opens up the search

process to a wider range of applicants and mitigates hidden biases in applicant review. Hiring at the leadership level would be difficult to conduct in this manner but the reasons for such difficulty highlight the ways in which informal career networks can work against diversity in hiring.

Redirect diversity applicants to other positions to improve job match

Some institutions have transferred a diverse applicant from one position search to another in order to optimize the fit between the job and the applicant's qualifications. Advancement leaders and talent managers also keep in regular contact with individuals who were not a good match to current staff openings but might be well-suited to future openings. This is part of a longer-term approach to staff development that recognizes the need to continually grow talent "in house" while bringing into the staff as much diversity as possible.

Improve procedures for onboarding and socializing all staff

Most of those interviewed stated that staff retention is an issue across the board, and expressed concern about the brief time most university advancement staff stay in a given position. Few believed that there were measurable differences in retention between staff based on diversity. That said, institutions are taking steps to ensure that such differences do not develop or, in some cases, to respond to differences as they emerge. Retention practices include:

- **Formal and informal social activities with monitoring for systematic non-participation.** Most of the eight universities have regular staff-managed social activities to encourage cohesion and morale. Many of these same universities explicitly monitor and verify participation for the purpose of detecting any workplace issues that might relate to such factors as diversity.
- **Managing the social divides that impact the workplace.** Several individuals spoke frankly about the need to manage social divides in the workplace that result from staff of different levels of pay and responsibility living in very different neighborhoods and communities from each other. Such stratification may impact staff commuting times and quality of life, ultimately leading to differences in the workplace that correlate with diversity.
- **"Case management" and mentoring for new hires early in their service.** Several senior leaders discussed the need for ongoing "case management" of new hires, including for staff from diverse backgrounds, to respond to inevitable "bumps in the road" at the start of their service. Additionally, institutions typically have formal and informal mentoring programs that pair new hires with existing staff for purposes of office acculturation and professional development. Most of those interviewed also discussed a desire to expand and improve mentoring programs.
- **Recognition programs and related professional rewards.** Many of the eight universities have formal staff recognition programs and related forms of rewards for accomplishment. Those interviewed frequently mentioned how much staff in general,

and particularly those from diverse backgrounds, appreciated being recognized through these programs.

- **Routine measurement and assessment of the internal climate for diversity.** Some of the universities use occasional or regular surveys and other methods to assess the internal climate for diversity, often as part of a broader assessment of the workplace. Several individuals noted that they wanted to expand, routinize, and improve these assessments.
- **Work/life flex policies.** Several individuals reported that work/life flex policies were proving effective in recruiting and retaining talented staff of all backgrounds, and felt that such policies would become increasingly important as recruitment and retention tools.

Enhance and formalize professional development and “career ladders”

Leaders of nearly all institutions discussed the importance of offering professional development and transparent “career ladders” to staff from diverse backgrounds, expressing dissatisfaction with their current activities in both regards and planning to improve on them in the near future. They believe that staff from diverse backgrounds very much want a road map to career success at their universities, and were more likely to remain if they had a clear understanding of that road map.

These views were strongly supported during the phase two interviews with diverse advancement staff. As noted above, one of the concerns among this group was that hiring and promotion at the leadership level often were not occurring according to the stated road map but rather through more informal social networks. That deviation, favoring non-diverse candidates, contributed to ongoing concerns about a “color ceiling” in university advancement careers.

Caveats and Further Concerns about Diversity in Hiring

The research identified several concerns about practices designed to increase staff diversity.

Defining diversity in terms of current students and future alumni

Many of those interviewed suggested that the definition of diversity needed to be adjusted to match current realities on campus, especially when using student demographics as a benchmark. Diversity was typically defined by:

- Race and ethnicity
- Sexual orientation/gender identification (LGBT)
- Socioeconomic background (including first-generation college attendees)
- Veteran status (given the influx of veterans back into higher education)
- Disability (spanning physical and psychological)

- Geography (some leaders mentioned the preference for hiring persons from outside the local region, including those with international connections/experience).

Many diversity initiatives focus predominately on race and ethnicity with some attention to sexual orientation and gender identity, leaving staff to feel that they were operating “in the dark” regarding how to proceed with other aspects of diversity.

The diverse staff interviewed mostly represented diversity in terms of race but were supportive of including other aspects of diversity as hiring and retention priorities.

The “tip of the spear”: Next steps when a search comes up empty for diversity

One leader offered a cogent and sobering assessment of where many recruitment efforts “hit the wall” regarding diversity: A hiring manager with limited resources receives numerous, highly qualified applications for a position but there is little or no diversity in the pool. To pursue diversity at that juncture may require a substantial investment of effort and a delay in hiring for a critical position when there are no guarantees of an extended search yielding a different result. In such a case, leaders need to send consistent messages emphasizing the importance of practices intended to foster diversity.

Improving training programs for diversity and cultural competency

Many of those interviewed expressed outright disappointment with the results of programs training staff in diversity and cultural competence. There seems to be a need for more collective investment in designing and implementing such programs to produce tangible results.

Diversity in the context of the overall pipeline for university advancement

All of those interviewed underscored the need for efforts to more effectively market fundraising careers to college students and young workers. The common refrain was that young people do not consciously choose fundraising as a career or understand the professional benefits of the career. Some noted that this is especially the case for younger workers from diverse backgrounds.

Very few of the 16 phase-two informants had much knowledge of or contact with advancement as a career while in college. As with most of their non-diverse peers, their move into advancement usually occurred through serendipity and participation in various career networks, not through planning and conscious preparation.

Location, location, location

Leaders of universities located in urban areas with considerable demographic diversity recognized that they had an advantage in recruiting diverse staff. Recruitment practices must be assessed in locational context. Leaders of some institutions located in areas without diversity

discussed the advantages of opening regional advancement offices in major urban centers, which allowed them to attract a more diverse staff to those satellite locations.

Several of the diverse staff interviewed were highly conscious of the disparity between community diversity around a university (very diverse) and diversity on the university's fundraising staff (in such cases, not very diverse). These disparities reinforced concerns about how informal career networks were shaping hiring in ways that suppressed diversity.

Two sides of the gender imbalance of current staff: Entry-level vs. leadership

Many of those interviewed brought up the gender imbalance (70 percent female or greater) among entry-level through mid-level advancement staff. Several advancement leaders are taking explicit steps to recruit more men at those levels and view men as representing contextual diversity in that regard. They also discussed the gender imbalance in leadership positions in advancement generally, although the eight universities in this research do have gender balance in their current leadership.

Power of the tipping point: Diversity builds diversity

At least two of the eight universities appear to have reached a tipping point with diversity on their advancement staff. Consequently, when recruiting staff, they have found it much easier to attract a diverse applicant pool and to make diverse hires. Having applicants personally encounter substantial diversity among the existing staff is more powerful than most other practices related to diversity. Conversely, those universities that have structural factors (such as geography) limiting their ability to reach a tipping point may find that various diversity practices continue to underperform.

Staff diversity is *not* about matching with individual donor characteristics

While most individuals interviewed discussed the need for diversity among “front line” fundraisers in the context of changing donor demographics, the senior leaders rejected the idea of pairing development officers with donors based on shared demographic characteristics. The leaders did not link diversity to effectiveness in such terms, but some mentioned occasions on which difficulties had arisen because of a lack of cultural sensitivity among existing gift officers.

Risks of the current employment “revolving door” in university advancement

One senior leader among those interviewed offered a thoughtful assessment of how the “revolving door” among fundraising staff may be harming the longer-term career success of those from diverse backgrounds. The core concern is that fundraisers of all backgrounds are getting promoted too rapidly through their frequent changing of employers, quickly attaining positions of responsibility for which they are not prepared to perform at a high level. An unfortunate consequence is poor performance outcomes resulting in a career “stall” and low morale. This can lead to an exit from fundraising that could have been prevented by a more calibrated path upward within the profession.

Not surprisingly, the diverse staff interviewed did not share this perspective, suggesting instead that talented development staff of diverse backgrounds lose morale when passed over for promotions. As noted above, their primary concern was that informal career networks favor non-diverse candidates for leadership-level positions.

Legal and practical barriers

Several leaders cited legal and practical barriers their universities face in seeking more staff diversity. These include:

- **Local restrictions on special interventions for diversity.** Several states have laws that limit the use of public resources in the pursuit of diversity.
- **Limits of candidate self-identification.** Job applicants may choose not to disclose aspects of their diversity, and they cannot be asked to disclose. This is affecting the measurement of diversity within the applicant pool and even within the staff.
- **Practical concerns about staff climate from both sides of diversity.** Staff of diverse backgrounds resist being recipients of special benefits or subject to additional scrutiny in ways that make them feel set apart from all other staff. Non-diverse staff also are sensitive to these issues, and managing issues of climate and morale is an ongoing challenge.

None of these concerns are insurmountable, and some of those interviewed suggested that they may be poorly understood and exaggerated.

Conclusion

This research has addressed a range of programmatic initiatives and human resources practices that may help advancement leaders increase staff diversity. The 2015 survey and subsequent interviews suggest, however, that achieving staff diversity requires a significant allocation of resources and changes in hiring and retention practices as well as changes in institutional culture. This represents a significant challenge, but the growing diversity of student and alumni populations renders increasing staff diversity an ever-more important objective for advancement leaders. The same demographic changes may also expand the pipeline of diverse candidates for development positions.

While this research did not demonstrate a link between staff diversity and fundraising performance, it seems likely that staff diversity will become a growing factor in achieving fundraising success. Institutions whose staff composition fails to reflect changing demographics may be perceived by alumni and other prospects as lacking a commitment to diversity and therefore find it harder than ever to recruit diverse candidates.

New research conducted by Gallup and the Knight Foundation found that a majority of college students say protecting free speech rights (56 percent) and promoting a diverse and inclusive society (52 percent) are both extremely important to democracy, but chose diversity and inclusion (53 percent) over free speech (46 percent) as the more important goal. At such a moment, advancement leaders must make a commitment to diversity a central principle of their talent management and a core part of their organizational cultures.