

VOLUNTARY SECTOR LEADERS

The voluntary sector in Canada employs approximately 1.3 million people along with 6.5 million volunteers (Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2009). Studies suggest that volunteerism results in strong and democratic communities. Evidence also suggests that civic engagement may reduce social and economic inequality in general (Andersen & Milligan, 2010). It is imperative that the leaders of voluntary organizations understand the diverse needs of their volunteers and stakeholders (Guo & Musso, 2007). Non-profit boards develop the strategic direction of voluntary organizations and establish their credibility and longevity (LeRoux, 2009). Diversity among non-profit board members can contribute to the organization's effectiveness and ability to serve the community (Gazley et al., 2010).

Methodology

The study focuses on the twenty largest charities and foundations registered in the GTA, based on revenue, as identified in the first year of the study (see appendix 4). As in previous years, ethnocultural foundations and charities are not included as they are often led by the specific ethnic and cultural groups they serve.

Findings

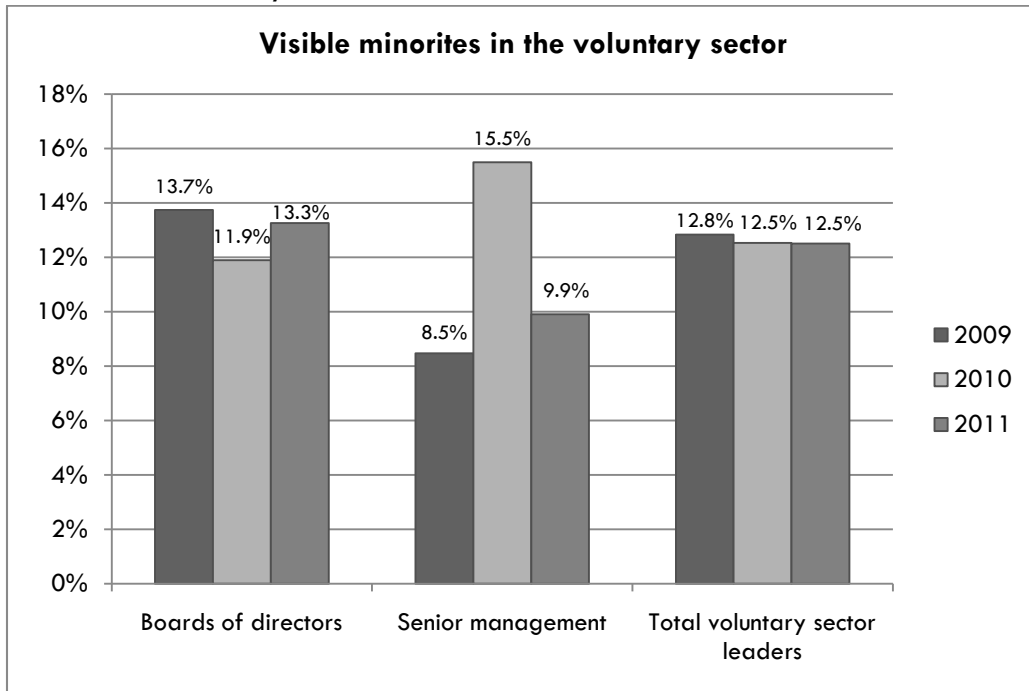
The proportion of visible minorities in positions of leadership in the voluntary sector remains at the same level as in 2010: 12.5%. This was a slight decrease since 2009, when the percentage was 12.8%. (This small decrease may reflect an increase in the total number of board members and executives analysed, from 343 in 2009, to 448 in 2010).

At the board level, visible minorities make up 13.3% of members, a slight increase from 11.9% in 2010 but a decline from 13.7% in 2009.

Visible minorities make up 9.9% of senior executives in the voluntary sector. This represents a decrease from the 2010 rate of 15.5% but a slight increase from the 2009 rate of 8.5% (see Figure 5).

There are significant variations within the sector. Among foundation executives in the last three years, for example, there have been no visible minority leaders, while representation among boards of directors has risen by 13%. Among charity executives, 35.7% of organizations have 20% or more visible minorities.

Figure 5: Visible minorities in the voluntary sector



Practices that Work in the Voluntary Sector

Specific strategies can improve the diversity of the voluntary sector’s leadership so that it can better reflect the needs of the community.

Count: What gets measured gets done

United Way Toronto (2011) has committed to tracking and evaluating diversity within the organization by undertaking audits to periodically measure rates of visible minority representation in leadership roles.

Set targets

To increase the number of visible minority leaders, organizations must set targets, such as those set by United Way Toronto (2011), which used the results from its diversity audit to inform its goal-setting.

Lead: Make diversity a strategic priority

In some cases, senior management in organizations in the voluntary sector have aligned their diversity goals with their organizational strategy. For example, United Way Toronto’s (2011) board of trustees has implemented strategies to ensure that the board and any sub-committees reflect the demographic makeup of the GTA. Similarly, the Sick Kids Foundation (2011) ensures that its board appointments reflect its “Diversity & Balance” policy.

Develop the pipeline

Voluntary sector organizations can develop the pipeline by creating strong relationships with ethnic voluntary sector organizations as these organizations can provide leadership experience to new immigrants and visible minorities (Meinhard & Faridi, 2009).

Similarly, research (Andersen & Milligan, 2010) suggests that participation in voluntary associations by immigrants is associated with their greater economic and political participation. The pipeline can also be cultivated by stressing the importance of participating in them to youth.

Develop and sustain excellent human resource practices

To increase the number of visible minority leaders, an organization must implement progressive human resource practices. These include, for example, encouraging the development and advancement of visible minorities within the organization through the use of job shadowing and mentoring.

Communicate to influence: Mainstream diversity

Diverse appointments and opportunities can be communicated to the broader public, which will increase awareness about an organization's commitment to diversity. United Way Toronto (2011) commits to ongoing research and training to enhance diversity knowledge and skills; requires that public consultations consider diversity; and promises that equity and access are ensured in all stakeholder relationships. In addition, United Way Toronto has mandated that all information materials reflect diversity and inclusivity and present positive images (United Way, 2011).