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# **From window-dressing to real change: Success stories from Boards on a journey of Diversity & Inclusion**

By L. Robin Cardozo and Matt Fullbrook

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## Executive Summary

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### Why we embarked on this study

Early in 2021 we published a paper called, “Not-for-Profit Board Diversity & Inclusion: Is it essentially window-dressing?” For that study, we interviewed 26 experienced thought-leaders in not-for-profit board governance, asking about their experience with building diverse boards in the sector. We were deliberate in reaching out to a broad cross-section of community leaders, including members of Canada’s Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities.

Sifting through the stories and observations, six noteworthy themes emerged:

- 1. Board diversity is unlikely to be effective - unless there’s a parallel commitment to inclusion**
- 2. Successful inclusion depends on determined leadership of the Chair**
- 3. Board candidates deserve clarity on how they might contribute to the organization**
- 4. On-boarding for new board members needs to be re-imagined**
- 5. Lived experience can contribute hugely to a diversity of perspectives on the board**
- 6. Sound diversity and inclusion principles are aligned with the broad principles of good governance**

We were very gratified by the reactions to the report. Leaders and practitioners in not-for-profit board governance commented that the themes resonated, and that the specific advice offered - for board candidates and new members, board chairs, CEOs and others - was practical and effective.

And while that report resonated with many, we kept getting questions at our webinars and workshops:

- **Could we talk more about the opportunities and challenges of recruitment for diversity?**
- **Can we share more specific examples of success?**
- **Can we share more specific examples of the challenges?**
- **Would successful organizations be willing to share more practical details about the journey to strengthen board equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism?**

### **Leading Organizations on the EDI-R Journey**

Recognizing the validity of these questions, we decided to embark on a second study. This time, we chose to take a different approach - we would talk to several organizations that have had successes in building Board Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism (EDI-R). Each of the not-for-profit organizations we spoke with was intentionally on an EDI-R journey, and while none would claim to have achieved all their goals - indeed it's arguable whether such a claim would be meaningful - each is doing valuable work to advance the agenda.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the Board Chair, CEO/Executive Director, and participating board members at each of the boards we interviewed. The leaders we spoke with were passionate, committed and thoughtful - about the organizations they served, and about the importance of EDI-R. Thank you to the generous participants from:

- Anishnawbe Health Foundation
- Responsible Gambling Council
- Soulpepper Theatre
- Toronto Foundation
- Vancouver Airport Authority
- Women's College Hospital

We also spoke with four executive search consultants who frequently work with corporate and not-for-profit organizations in recruiting executives and board members. Acknowledging that board diversity is a timely topic in their respective practices, they generously shared their time and expertise with us. Thank you to:

- Nick Chambers, Partner, Boyden Executive Search
- Shawn Cooper, Managing Director, Russell Reynolds
- Jason Murray, President, BIPOC Executive Search
- Sharon Rudy, Practice Lead, Executive & Director Search, WATSON Advisors

# What We Learned

We were most fortunate to be able to learn from so many thoughtful leaders. The major learnings are summarized below and are expanded upon in the individual chapters that follow.

## **Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism**

While there are several descriptions and acronyms in common use today, we have chosen, for consistency, to use the acronym EDI-R throughout this report. There are also several definitions for each of these terms. We offer the following:

**Equity:** The outcome of policies and practices where all individuals have fair access, opportunity, resources, and the power to thrive.

**Diversity:** The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes - with which we are born and gain through experience. These include age, race, ethnicity, gender, physical and intellectual ability, sexual orientation, educational background and lived experience. In the context of the role of a Board, we believe that diverse perspectives strengthen Board governance.

**Inclusion:** The actions taken to understand, embrace and leverage the unique strengths and facets of identity for all individuals, so that all feel welcome and valued.

**Anti-Racism:** A range of ideas and actions which are meant to counter racial prejudice, systemic racism, and the oppression of specific racial groups.

### **1. Board recruitment priorities need to be razor-sharp**

Boards seeking to recruit candidates from diverse communities are advised to be razor-sharp in their recruitment priorities. Criteria that are too broad (such as “people of colour” or “representatives of diverse communities”) run the risk of the candidate outreach being too broad. The Toronto Foundation had a clear sense of both skill sets and cultural groups that they were seeking and targeted their outreach accordingly. Soulpepper Theatre was driven by numeric diversity goals embedded in their recently approved EDI-R board policy.

### **2. Expectations of Diversity can vary widely**

Potential board candidates from diverse communities and demographic groups often feel that they are ready for a board role, while board nominating committees frequently claim that it is difficult to find candidates from those very communities. Why is there such a gulf in relative expectations? Often there is a lack of flexibility as to who is deemed to be qualified to serve. At the Anishnawbe Health Foundation meeting, several Indigenous board members observed that mainstream organizations seemed fixed on a view of the required professional skill sets or previous board experiences – overlooking the potential, say, of younger candidates with meaningful lived experience. Search consultant Nick Chambers told us, “There is a thirst for board work, and suitable candidates are out there – they’re not always in places where one traditionally looks.”

### **3. Onboarding for new board members needs to be customized**

This was a feature in our first report, and it has emerged even more strongly in this study. More and more, organizations are finding that the traditional one-size-fits-all onboarding programs are limited in their usefulness. As boards diversify, and recruit new members with different abilities, cultural and age groups, as well as differing previous board experience, they are finding that each member needs different types of mentoring, background information and introductory experiences. At the Vancouver Airport Authority, board members with different abilities are provided personalized experiences of the facilities. At the Anishnawbe Health Foundation, younger board members are provided with a greater level of mentoring, to assist with their understanding of a board member’s role.

#### **4. Meaningful Inclusion Practices benefit from external expertise - and time**

Helping a board to evolve from a traditional way of doing things, to develop practices that are more inclusive, does not happen organically. Boards that are making the shift have taken advantage of external expertise. Most of the organizations we spoke with - including the Responsible Gambling Council - had drawn upon external experts to help them identify priority areas that would benefit from change. These changes may have included advice on chairing of meetings to be more inclusive or planning agendas that would encourage participation. At Women's College Hospital, the Bylaws and Policies are being reviewed in detail, to identify and change language that is deemed to be racist, biased, or language that could discourage openness and transparency.

#### **5. A tendency to minimize differences can unwittingly disrupt true inclusion**

New members joining a board are often subtly encouraged to subscribe to the dominant culture of the board - to 'fit in' rather than to add their own unique perspectives to the discussion. With one or two new members joining the group each year, this tendency can become inevitable. At the Responsible Gambling Council, leadership is aware of this risk, and new members are proactively encouraged to share their perspectives and their experiences. RGC also recognizes the value of intersectionality - acknowledging that each Board member brings a range of professional, community and personal experiences, and that these experiences are all valuable to the work of the board.

#### **6. Board Accountability Mechanisms Matter**

It would be very easy for EDI-R policies to be treated as low organizational priorities. Boards typically oversee complex organizations that face numerous challenges and opportunities. To ensure that EDI-R work does not get overlooked in the context of other pressures, accountability needs to be clearly defined. At the Toronto Foundation, the Board BIPOC Caucus advises the board of the EDI-R implications of its deliberations. At Soulpepper Theatre, two designated EDI-R Board Champions are charged with identifying related issues for any Board agenda item. At Women's College Hospital, an Anti-Black Racism Task Force advises the Board on developing and updating policies that will address the challenges of anti-Black racism.

**7. The language of race is sensitive - and boards need to become comfortable with it**

Using terms such as “Black”, “White”, “White Privilege” or “White Supremacy” - for example - can cause significant discomfort to many Canadians. This is to be expected. That said, language such as this cannot be avoided as a group of people work together to move forward from inequities of the past, and towards a truly inclusive culture. A good first step is simply to acknowledge that some of the language relating to race and equity can be unfamiliar and sensitive. At the Toronto Foundation, it took a while for the board to deliberately acknowledge and become comfortable with the language of race. At Women’s College Hospital, where health equity is at the core of the mission, the board worked with external consultants to identify the language they needed to learn. Vancouver Airport Authority realized a need to adjust some of the fundamental ways it operated... as they were unintentionally creating and reinforcing barriers to diversity, inclusion and belonging that were not initially visible.

**8. It isn’t only about the culture of board meetings**

Attending and participating in board meetings is an important, but a small component of a board member’s engagement. It’s helpful to be reminded of this, as a packed board agenda typically does not allow for fulsome participation - and newer board members, in particular, often feel left out. This can appear to deter active engagement - unless there are clear alternatives. Participation on special projects or attendance at key events allows all board members to feel more engaged, and to have personalized experiences that build on one’s knowledge and experience. At the Responsible Gambling Council, board committee agendas are more flexible, allowing for greater participation.

**9. We’re in a changing world; ongoing education is essential**

Boards that are on an EDI-R journey typically engage with a consultant to lead them through a learning and planning session. As board members rotate, and as the field of EDI-R evolves, it is important that education opportunities relating to EDI-R, and other board governance issues, are provided on a regular basis. At Soulepper Theatre, an initial board session about its ‘radical inclusion’ agenda is being followed up with a session on ‘white privilege’, to assist the board in overseeing the company’s evolution. The Responsible Gambling Council is planning to follow up their earlier board education session with a diversity audit - that will provide opportunities for further board education.

**10. This work needs an openness to change - and it takes time**

Some of our conversations led to challenges of long-standing norms. One that surprised us - but only at first blush - was the long-standing regulation that board members of charities should not be compensated in any way. It was pointed out that this regulation results in the exclusion of many whom we want to include - such as young people, single mothers, or newcomers. Another common theme, from almost everyone we spoke with, is that the work of Board EDI-R policy and practice takes time. Those who have tried to rush it - for example, by quickly recruiting a few diverse candidates - have found that they missed an opportunity for meaningful change to occur. Organizations seeking to recruit candidates from Indigenous communities, for example, find that the time it takes to build relationships is critical. The Vancouver Airport Authority, observing that the work takes more time than expected, expressed a wish that they had begun their EDI-R work earlier.

In the chapters that follow, we summarize our informative and thoughtful conversations with each of the six organizations we interviewed. We've also provided relevant quotes from the four experienced search consultants with whom we spoke. As we write this report, we feel enormously encouraged that leaders in our not-for-profit sector are making impressive progress in the field of board equity, diversity, inclusiveness and anti-racism. While much remains to be done in Canada's not-for-profit sector, it is clear that there are leaders in the sector who are showing the way.

# Anishnawbe Health Foundation

## FEATURE:

Successfully Recruiting and  
Retaining Indigenous Board  
members

### **Background**

The Anishnawbe Health Foundation provides philanthropic support to Anishnawbe Health Toronto - whose mission is to improve the health and well-being of Indigenous People in spirit, mind, emotion and body through both Traditional and Western healing approaches. The programs and services are based on Indigenous culture and traditions through a multi-disciplinary team of dedicated healthcare professionals and service providers.

Toronto has the largest Indigenous population in Ontario, and the 4th largest in Canada. The population is estimated at 70,000.

### **Recent Organizational Initiatives**

Anishnawbe Health Toronto has acquired a block of land from The Province of Ontario which will be the site of the new Indigenous Health Centre. This prominent site was part of the 2015 PanAm/ParaPanAm Games Athletes' Village, and is adjacent to the Distillery District, the new Cherry Streetcar line and near the popular Corktown Common. The new Anishnawbe Health Toronto building will be the first project on the site of a new Indigenous Community Hub for the city at this location. The new purpose-built facility will incorporate a sweat lodge, ceremonial grounds, group meeting spaces, a teaching kitchen, and a range of spaces for health promotion and therapies.

Anishnawbe Health Foundation is completing a \$10 million fundraising campaign. In addition to being a platform for establishing and growing this Indigenous-led foundation, the campaign will fund the new facility and support the expansion of programs to reclaim and restore Traditional healing practices. The fundraising effort is particularly notable given that less than 1% of philanthropic donations in Canada are contributed to Indigenous-led causes.

### **Board Activities relating to EDI-R**

The organization has worked to diversify the board by seeking representation of the Indigenous communities in Toronto, building gender balance, a mix of skills and experience, and a priority for recruiting qualified young Indigenous men and women to join the board.

**SEARCH CONSULTANT  
PERSPECTIVES:**

**Getting Beyond Box-Ticking**

“The talent pool is there. People are hungry for Board experience. To succeed, a Board needs to be willing to broaden or redefine their culture.”

**Nick Chambers**

“Candidates from all backgrounds may feel, from time to time, that they are overlooked for Board appointments. You need to activate how you can add value, be clear about what you’re looking for, and build a network of support”.

**Shawn Cooper**

“Boards should ask ‘what are we willing to invest to make racialized people successful in our boardroom?’ This is especially true for recruits with less board experience. What will you do to empower them and ensure they are embraced, not just at the beginning but on an ongoing basis?”

**Sharon Rudy**

**Feature:**

**Successfully Recruiting and Retaining Indigenous Board members**

It can be disproportionately difficult for Indigenous men and women to be appointed to board positions. Anishnawbe Health Foundation provided the following insights and advice:

- Organizations seeking Indigenous Board candidates are advised to think carefully about why they need Indigenous Board members. Is it simply to ‘tick a diversity box’? Or are they genuinely open to new perspectives and new conversations?
- Joining a board for the first time can be intimidating for anyone. Many boards need to put a greater emphasis on Inclusion - including meaningful and personalized onboarding.
- The inability of registered charities to legally compensate board members for their time is an impediment. Corporations, and even many government agencies, are allowed to compensate board members. For registered charities, this limitation makes it difficult to recruit young people, women (including single mothers), those with lived experience or limited financial resources.
- Apart from direct compensation, offering adjacent benefits such as child care during meetings, meal vouchers, or a transportation allowance, can make board participation more accessible to those on a limited budget.
- Ageism is a common phenomenon. Young people are often overlooked because they are considered too young and inexperienced - even when they might have valuable perspectives to share, based on their skills and lived experience.
- Board recruiters - the chair of the nominations committee or a search consultant - often have no experience with or knowledge of Indigenous communities. Seeking ways to bridge that gap, using different forms of outreach, would be productive.
- Organizations are inclined to go after the “big names” in the Indigenous community, not appreciating that there are many others who can also contribute.
- Looking at an organization’s membership, and the people they serve, (including ‘graduates’ of services) can lead to the identification of potential board members who are skilled and experienced.
- The board is advised to engage with the organization’s staff in conversations about diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism. It is important that the board and staff are on the same page on these issues.

- Education and professional development related to board governance is a valuable service for most board members. One Foundation was commended for providing a \$10,000 professional development allowance for members of the board.
- Create space for new board members to be heard and to make contributions to the work of the board.
- Don't rush through the onboarding process. Excellent onboarding can take time. Mentorship for all new board members - regardless of how experienced they are - is a constructive practice and leads to a more effective board.

### **Challenges**

Systemic racism in our society is a problem that is frequently encountered by Indigenous people in Canada. Regular Board education on anti-racism, including the implications of unconscious bias, and the difference between equality and equity, will lead to more meaningful inclusion - and by extension, to more effective board governance.

The concept of "diversity" is essentially a Western construct. "Inclusion" is a more powerful and meaningful principle to focus on. Diversity addresses recognition of differences - inclusion means actually doing something about it.

### **Advice to others who are also on the journey**

The conversations with the Anishnawbe Health Foundation board, summarized on the preceding page, was rich with constructive advice. Three highlights are:

- The inability of registered charities to legally compensate board members for their time is an impediment. This will be a useful area for charities to advocate for regulatory change.
- Young people are often overlooked for board positions because they are considered too inexperienced - even when they might have valuable perspectives to share, based on their skills and lived experience.
- Looking at an organization's membership, and the people they serve (including 'graduates' of services) can lead to the identification of potential board members who are skilled and experienced.

# Responsible Gambling Council

## FEATURE:

Acknowledging that  
“Intersectionality” is a  
key factor in meaningful  
Inclusion

## Background

The Responsible Gambling Council (RGC) is an independent not-for-profit organization, and a leader in the prevention of problem gambling in Canada and globally for more than 35 years. RGC works with partners in the gambling industry to minimize risks to their customers, and provides educational programs for members of the public, aimed at addressing all aspects of problem gambling.

Its vision is a world free of problem gambling. The organization is driven by the values of Humanity, Courage, Integrity, and Ingenuity. An excerpt from RGC’s definition of Humanity, states “*We believe in human dignity and respect. We embrace individual and community differences and are committed to being inclusive, equitable, and respectful in all of our work.*”

## Excerpts from Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy

*“We view diversity as a contributor to organizational culture and as a way to address systemic inequities as a core organizational strength.”*

*“RGC fosters a culture which supports and respects the differences, values and needs of all individuals, regardless of the factors found in the Board Mandate and Workplace Harassment Policy... We share the growing recognition that diversity also refers to cognitive diversity such as differences in mental models, problem solving frameworks and perceptions in how to see the world. Hence, all Board members and employees should consider ability and not disability when working with employees and patrons; aiming to create a physical and cultural environment which supports inclusion. This helps individual’s feel welcome to bring their entire selves to our work and contribute their ideas, experiences and talents to the fullest.”*

## Recent Organizational Initiatives

The organization’s work in Canada recognizes that problem gambling can exist in any cultural or age demographic. Its work internationally is designed to recognize the cultural realities of the countries they work in. With an appreciation that problem gambling is a community challenge that cuts across all demographic groups, the RGC Strategic Plan states:

*“RGC works to reduce gambling risks by creating and delivering innovative awareness and information programs for specific age groups and communities including adults, parents, youth and young adults, older adults, new Canadians and Indigenous communities.”*

RGC is in a strategic partnership with the All-In Diversity Project (AIDP). This project, in support of diversity and inclusion in the gambling industry, aims to move the gambling industry forward - globally - when it comes to ‘Diversity, Inclusion and Workplace Equality’.

**SEARCH CONSULTANT  
PERSPECTIVES:**

**Preparing For Effective  
Recruitment**

It's most helpful when the instructions to the search consultant are as specific as possible, eg, 'We need someone with IT leadership skills - our preference, given the current composition of the board, is for a racialized female.'

Less specific would be: "We would like your list of candidates to be as diverse as possible."

**Nick Chambers**

"Nominating Committees need to be creative and open-minded, and not rigid about all the requirements. I always encourage them to look at a candidate's capacity to contribute in the long term. Trying to get too much out of one Board appointment would be a mistake."

**Shawn Cooper**

"As traditional hiring processes often preclude individuals from Indigenous and racialized communities from serious board director contention, education around inclusive and equitable hiring needs to happen throughout the entire recruitment journey to ensure outcomes aren't always the same."

**Jason Murray**

**Board Activities relating to EDI-R**

- The board has identified EDI-R as a strategic area of focus for the organization and has worked with independent consultants to assist in identifying related organizational priorities.
- The board Chair intentionally leads with a philosophy that individual board members bring their own backgrounds, skills and lived experience to the role, and accordingly will think and contribute differently; this diversity is welcomed and encouraged.
- The organization's leadership is aware of the risk of 'minimization' in diverse groups - the tendency to minimize one's differences in group settings to "fit in", this can be a barrier to meaningful inclusion.
- The board and management work to ensure alignment on their EDI-R work, on subjects including HR policies, program development and research.
- The board seeks to apply an EDI-R lens to all subjects on their agenda.
- The board is undertaking an independent EDI-R audit of its work in the Fall of 2021.

**Feature: Intersectionality**

From the RGC Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy:

An intersectional approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion begins from the understanding that the different vectors of social diversity, (race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, religion, language, etc.) do not exist separately or in isolation from each other. Instead, the various vectors of social diversity are interwoven and affect each other. Intersectionality focuses on how multiple, interwoven vectors shape social belonging, cultural representations, social and political institutions, as well as the material conditions of our lives in ways that are not reducible to any singular vector or social category.

The RGC Board recognizes that intercultural competence is an essential aspect of a meaningful EDI-R practice - that each member of the board brings a distinct contribution to diverse thinking, often representing a cross-section of culture, background and lived experience. Intercultural competence is the capacity to shift perspective and change behaviours appropriately when encountering cultural differences. The board and CEO encourage all board members to recognize that each colleague represents an intersectional range of diverse perspectives.

### **Challenges**

- The board acknowledges the risk that culture can unknowingly encourage 'diverse' members to minimize their differences, in an effort to fit in.
- Board meeting agendas often present a challenge: There is never enough time at board meetings to fully explore different perspectives.
- The organization acknowledges how important it is to understand the implications of problem gambling that exists in different communities, that cultural differences need to be acknowledged, and the board needs to be sensitive to these realities.

### **Advice to others who are also on the journey**

- Create the space for board members from different backgrounds to acknowledge their differences, and contribute based on their specific areas of knowledge and lived experience.
- Use standing committee meetings as opportunities to fully explore different perspectives, acknowledging that time at full board meetings may often be limited.
- Facilitate conversation at board meetings by identifying questions for discussion in the board meeting materials. This practice contributes to the enhanced inclusion of all members of the board.
- Seek opportunities for the Chair and the CEO to have one-on-one conversations with Board members, to seek their advice, and encourage their input.
- Board education on EDI-R and related topics needs to be a regular feature, and not just a one-off training session.

## Soulpepper

### FEATURE:

Introducing the concept of  
Radical Inclusion

### Background

Founded by 12 artists, Soulpepper was launched in 1998 with a two-production summer season at Harbourfront Centre. The Company's ensemble approach to artistic rigor garnered enthusiastic responses from audiences, artists, and critics alike. With a focus on youth outreach and artist training, Soulpepper's activities grew year-over-year to fill a vital need in Canada's largest theatre market. Today, Soulpepper is Canada's largest artist-driven theatre company.

The goal of the company is to expand its artistic program, remaining a home for new interpretations of classics and a company rooted in text work and musicality, but growing to include new Canadian voices, work by artists of varying life experience and lesser-known works drawn from a more global canon.

### Recent Organizational Initiatives

Although interrupted by the pandemic, Soulpepper is introducing a significant shift in the diversity of its artistic programs, with new leadership committing the company to better representing the city it serves, and the world at large.

During the COVID-related lockdown, Soulpepper introduced a range of virtual programs - most notably, a series of highly regarded and internationally-recognized radio plays, under the umbrella "Around the World in 80 Plays".

Soulpepper is striving to be an environmentally sustainable performing arts facility.

Management and staff have implemented a series of initiatives to enhance diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism practices at Soulpepper. An experienced facilitator was retained to advise the board and the staff, and a staff committee is undertaking a review of all policies and practices, with an EDI-R lens.

### Board Activities relating to EDI-R

In April 2021, the board adopted a formal policy on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism, committing the board to "recognize the benefits and importance of equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism... and affirming that diversity of thought and experience will contribute to Board effectiveness, and enable us to advance the company's vision and mission."

The Board policy sets a goal of 50/50 gender balance on the Board, and 40% representation from BIPOC communities within three years. In addition, the representation of other equity-seeking groups will be measured and reported. The Board reports that progress is already being made toward these goals.

As part of the new policy, Onboarding processes for new Board members will be reviewed, to ensure that they address the needs of a diverse Board, and the terms of reference of all Board Committees will be reviewed to ensure that the work of every committee will include an EDI-R lens.

Board and Management have worked to remain aligned on EDI-R related issues, so that there is a common understanding of language and of priorities.

In 2021, Soulpepper launched a new “Chair’s Advisory Council” – a body of former Board members who will provide advice to management and the board on organizational strategy and fundraising plans, and advice to the Governance & Nominating Committee on Board member recruitment. Part of the objective is to keep in contact with retired Board members and long-time supporters, and seek their advice, as the Board of Directors becomes more diverse.

The Board has appointed two EDI-R ‘Champions’ – Board members who will encourage the ongoing development of EDI-R plans for the board and will be recognized by their peers as champions on all related issues that come to the board.

**SEARCH CONSULTANT  
PERSPECTIVES:**

**Emphasizing Inclusion**

**“Board chairs should structure meetings in a manner that encourages dialogue and energizes each member to contribute meaningfully to discussions. Not all new board members feel comfortable readily speaking up, so using facilitation frameworks that encourage each member to let their voice be heard is critically important.”**

**Jason Murray**

**“Having a member on the search committee act as an inclusivity monitor can be helpful.”**

**Shawn Cooper**

**“You are not automatically increasing Board performance by diversifying - it takes work to build an inclusive and high-performing Board... many Boards have only started diversifying quite recently. It is too early to describe the difference it’s making.”**

**Sharon Rudy**

**Feature: Introducing the concept of Radical Inclusion**

Soulpepper’s current Strategic Plan calls for the company to be radically inclusive.

*“We want to be radically inclusive, which means we are dedicated to investigating and shifting systemic barriers. We strive to be an organization where everyone’s experience is both valued and reflected.”*

As a theatre company with a history of performing classics of the Western canon, and with management, artists, administrators, and board members who traditionally were largely white, this has been a significant shift. It has been important for Soulpepper to express that it values its long-term friends and supporters, and also to demonstrate that all aspects of its art, governance and administration are boldly changing to become more diverse and inclusive.

**Challenges**

- As with all performing arts companies in the country, the COVID pandemic created a significant setback in programming and revenue generation in 2020/21. While there were several virtual offerings during the lockdown, the company is planning to re-launch its theatrical presentations in 2021.
- The board and management have been aware of the risk of losing long-time supporters who may not understand the shift to radical inclusion. They have worked to communicate that the goal is to be more broadly inclusive, and not to turn its back on its long-time friends and supporters.

**Advice to others who are also on the journey**

- Be prepared to invest time and money; introducing a comprehensive EDI-R program cannot happen without dedicated human and financial resources. *“It is actual work”.*
- Education is critical, for Board members and for staff.
- Developing a shared language on EDI-R is essential to developing a common understanding of the issues.
- Senior management needs to be seen to be actively engaged in the EDI-R agenda.
- Community conversations with external stakeholder groups have been valuable.

Disclosure: Robin Cardozo is a member of Soulpepper Theatre's Board of Directors, and he chairs the Governance & Nominating Committee.

## Toronto Foundation

FEATURE:  
Creating a BIPOC Board  
Caucus

### Background

Toronto Foundation pools donations of local philanthropists to create permanent endowment funds for the community. The net investment return on the value of the original donation is then available to provide grants to charitable organizations every year in perpetuity. Donors partner with the Toronto Foundation for their donor education programs, strategic investment, and administrative services, as well as for community insights.

At December 31, 2020, Toronto Foundation held more than \$700M in assets, and in the nine months ended December 31st, distributed more than \$47M in grants to charities and not-for-profit organizations in Toronto and across Canada.

### Recent Organizational Initiatives

Noteworthy recent initiatives of the Toronto Foundation included the creation of the Black and Indigenous Futures Fund. From the organization's website:

*"The Black and Indigenous Futures Fund is designed to support Black and Indigenous leaders, organizations, and grassroots groups who are best equipped to identify and advance solutions for their communities and push for an equitable and just recovery from the challenges of COVID-19. These communities have historically not had a say when it comes to shaping and accessing philanthropy's funding opportunities. The creation of this new program is an important step in our commitment to addressing systemic and institutional challenges as we build for an equitable recovery in our city."*

### Board Activities relating to EDI-R

Toronto Foundation had historically had a predominantly White board; they had had EDI-R goals for the last three years, but came to realize that they did not have a concrete action plan to achieve those goals. In the wake of the murder of George Floyd, Toronto Foundation donors raised an important conversation about the whiteness of the philanthropic sector and challenged Toronto Foundation to look inward at how traditional philanthropic practices can exclude and oppress BIPOC donors and partners. The work at the Foundation has become more intentional; this has included actions that:

- Build comfort talking about 'Whiteness' at the Boardroom table;
- Decide whether the Board needs to reflect the demographics of Toronto, fund-holders, or donor organizations - the Foundation concluded that the Board needed to reflect Toronto because they serve all communities;
- Engage community stakeholders in the search for Board candidates where there would be a fitting match - both for the Foundation and for the candidate;
- Re-design the onboarding program for new Board members, making it more personalized;
- Form a BIPOC Caucus of the Board (see below)

**SEARCH CONSULTANT  
PERSPECTIVES:**

**Building A Common Vision**

“A board needs to be clear about why they are seeking to diversify, and what they are ready for. Some Boards may not be ready for a Board member who may challenge the prevailing norms. Some Boards wish to change the demographics, but are not open to changing the culture of the Board.”

“Sometimes a search committee is looking for candidate diversity, and they also have a very specific list of ‘must have’ skills and experiences. I work with them to identify those that are truly ‘must haves’ and those areas where there may be some flexibility. This can significantly open up the range of potential candidates with diverse backgrounds.”

**Nick Chambers**

**Feature: The Board BIPOC Caucus**

The Board BIPOC Caucus was created to engage all BIPOC-identifying board members as proactive strategic advisors in the EDI-R work of Toronto Foundation. Membership also includes the Board Chair, Chair of the Governance Committee and the CEO. The caucus meets quarterly, providing advice to the Governance Committee, Board Chair and CEO, acting as a sounding board and idea generator on all issues relating to the Foundation’s EDI-R strategy.

Board members credit the caucus with raising the profile of EDI-R issues for the full board and providing an opportunity for the full board to engage in uncomfortable language and topics. Asked about the risk that such a caucus may create a silo, Board members noted that the impact so far has been the opposite – caucus members have been constructive in aligning the Foundation’s overall strategy with its EDI-R values and policies. Intentional participation of the Chair and the CEO help to ensure that ongoing alignment is facilitated and that there is active communication between the BIPOC Caucus, the full Board and staff.

**Challenges**

- Developing a critical mass of board members from key demographic groups;
- Clarifying mutual expectations in discussions with Board candidates and new members;
- Structuring board meetings to be inclusive of board members’ personal and cultural needs;
- Ensuring that onboarding activities are personalized to individual directors;
- Creating a welcoming environment for younger board members, or those with less board experience, who can find the board experience intimidating

**Advice to others who are also on the journey**

- Be prepared to go beyond your comfort level. Language can often seem sensitive. For example, be prepared to talk about ‘whiteness’, or identifying, for example, a specific ‘need for a Black woman on the board’;
- Allow recruitment interviews to be an iterative process – instead of the starting point being a discussion about joining the board, the starting point might be a request for advice;
- Allow for the time it may take to build relationships with Indigenous communities before expecting to recruit candidates from these communities;
- An organization needs to bring all its stakeholders along on the EDI-R journey. One should not assume, for example, that the board, staff, donors, and community partners have the same knowledge or experience with EDI-R issues.

# Vancouver Airport Authority

FEATURE:  
Deep Engagement with  
Stakeholders is Critical to  
EDI-R Success

## **Background**

Vancouver Airport Authority (VAA) is a community-based, not-for-profit organization that manages Vancouver International Airport (YVR). Canada's second busiest airport, YVR served 26.4 million passengers in 2019. Fifty-two airlines served YVR, connecting people and businesses to more than 122 non-stop destinations worldwide. In 2021 YVR was voted Best Airport in North America for the twelfth consecutive year in the Skytrax World Airport Awards.

## **Recent Organizational Initiatives**

VAA has a dedicated Employment Equity and Diversity committee that is responsible for monitoring and supporting all of the organization's diversity programs. VAA's organizational commitment to EDI-R is rooted in the diversity of the communities it serves. Building on successful initiatives to increase recruitment of women in management, VAA is now focusing on additional communities, including Indigenous communities and persons with disabilities. In 2017, VAA entered into a 30-year Sustainability & Friendship Agreement with Musqueam, on whose land YVR operates, providing scholarships and employment opportunities to Musqueam members. In addition, VAA has committed to creating barrier-free employment practices for persons with disabilities, and in 2019 became the first airport in North America to receive the Accessibility Certified Gold Rating under the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification program. As the travel industry recovers from the covid-19 pandemic, VAA has continued to work with its communities and labour union to ensure ongoing representation, inclusion, and equity, including creating new positions that will only be filled with Musqueam individuals.

## **Board Activities relating to EDI-R**

The board's work on EDI-R focuses on close interaction with key stakeholders. At an organizational level, VAA interacts with external groups that have some 20,000 staff on site at YVR. At the board level, eight organizations including local & federal governments and professional associations nominate nine out of the board's fourteen directors, and are collectively referred to as Nominating Entities. Much of VAA's EDI-R efforts are designed to ensure communication, representation, and collaboration with these stakeholder groups.

Every new board member presents an opportunity for VAA to learn and evolve its board EDI-R activities. For example, one of their board members lives with a disability, and attends board meetings with an attendant. This raised new questions for the VAA board about how to accommodate an extra person in board meetings who is neither a board member nor an executive. The board also created an entirely new onboarding experience for this board member to ensure his full understanding of YVR's operations, including ensuring that he was able to participate in tours of the airport's facilities. This example illustrates a broader point that onboarding of new directors is always a two-stage process for VAA - first, the conventional experience of ensuring a new director has the material, access, and relationships they need to succeed, and second, a careful process of mutual cultural alignment.

**SEARCH CONSULTANT  
PERSPECTIVES:**

**Building A Common Vision**

“Potential candidates are not always where you would expect them to be. While Board searches typically look in the C-Suites of large corporations, searches for candidates from diverse communities need to broaden out to look for entrepreneurs or executives in smaller companies. They often have had a range of related experiences, but their career may have taken them in different directions.”

**Nick Chambers**

“The search consultant must build up her or his connections in the different communities, this takes years of work in the field.”

**Sharon Rudy**

“The worst thing to say is ‘We tried, but we couldn’t find anyone’. This is a race without a finish line. It takes time to build relationships, and finding the right candidate and setting them up for success should be allowed the time that is needed.”

**Shawn Cooper**

**Feature: Deep Engagement with Stakeholders is Critical to EDI-R Success**

VAA’s Board Diversity & Inclusion Policy includes a mandate that spells out the board’s EDI-R principles, as well as principles for communication, education, and partnership between the board and the Nominating Entities. This ensures that the Nominating Entities are active participants in VAA’s board diversity journey.

VAA’s Corporate Secretary has one-on-one conversations with the Executive Directors of the Nominating Entities to ensure that their mutual focus on EDI-R focuses on ongoing success, rather than just on numbers. In addition to using a skills/competencies matrix to identify nomination priorities, the board looks for nominees that will further the board’s diversity goals as outlined in the Policy.

In cases where the board’s composition does not represent an important constituency, VAA works to build relationships in those communities that ensure their perspectives are brought to the board table. For example, although the board does not currently include an Indigenous member, VAA’s ongoing partnership with Musqueam has brought critical topics to the board such as climate change and residential schools.

**Challenges**

- With operations hit very hard by covid-19, VAA has not had the opportunity to see the full impact of its recent EDI-R activities on the airport and its people
- In hindsight, the board and management feel they could have moved faster – they believe there is no reason they could not have begun its diversity efforts earlier. VAA’s first EDI-R policy only applied to 400 out of the 26,000 people who work at the airport.
- Governance is much more than just the board – EDI-R must extend beyond the boardroom and into operations (supply chain, procurement, etc.)
- VAA cannot control who its Nominating Entities put forward for board seats, which sometimes creates difficult constraints when it comes to diversity, representation, and skills.

### **Advice to others who are also on the journey**

- It can be difficult to create space for everyone to have a voice in the boardroom - having a policy is important, but the “human” element is critical.
- Lived experience on the board can help to guide future-oriented business decisions, and to ensure that those decisions have a positive long-term impact on the customers and communities you serve
- When building partnerships with external stakeholders and communities, make sure that the agreements go beyond consultation, and include commitments to actually “do something”
- Take your time when orienting new directors, especially ones from under-represented groups. They will need to learn about the organization, but the board will also need to work together to ensure new directors are empowered to bring their perspectives to the table
- EDI-R policies need to be extremely clear - through the creation of specific objectives and ongoing communication - or else even well-intentioned people will ignore them
- EDI-R is a journey without an end, and so the board, management, and partners must all have the willingness and discipline to adjust and change constantly.
- Inclusion sometimes requires fundamental changes to the way an organization operates. If your EDI-R efforts are not having the desired impact, the issue may be that you are unintentionally creating or reinforcing systemic barriers.

# Women's College Hospital

FEATURE:  
Reviewing Policies and  
ByLaws through an Equity  
lens

## Background

Women's College Hospital (WCH) is a world leader in health for women, health equity and health system solutions - a hospital designed to keep people out of hospital. WCH advocates for health equity, based on a belief that a healthy society requires a level playing field where everyone has access to timely, high quality, efficient and compassionate care.

The Board of Directors has been demonstrating leadership in the field of EDI-R for several years and has recently strengthened this priority in all areas of board governance. The Board's goal is to be an acknowledged leader in EDI-R.

## Recent Organizational Initiatives

A recently updated Board Commitment to Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppressive Practice highlights the board's commitment to implementing anti-racism and anti-oppression practices with an intersectional lens in all aspects of its policies, processes, and practices. This includes modeling diverse representation, using disaggregated data to identify systemic barriers to inclusion, and engaging in ongoing evidence-based education. With this commitment, the board will facilitate new governance structures to foster the desired culture and will oversee the transparent measurement and monitoring of relevant Hospital equity indicators.

The Hospital's traditional Quality and Academic Committee has an expanded mandate to incorporate Equity and Community Engagement - overseeing the integration of an equity perspective into the work of the Hospital, and community engagement opportunities that are aligned with hospital strategy.

## Board Activities relating to EDI-R

- WCH retained the services of an "embedded expert", who has been involved in every step of the EDI-R journey - acting as a sounding board, assisting with board and staff education, and providing an impartial perspective to the board and to management.
- The criteria for recruitment of new board members have been sharpened, to be specific on cultural demographics (for example 'a BIPOC woman') and on desired professional skills.
- The CEO and board have worked to expand the traditional hospital scorecard, to incorporate several equity indicators. The scorecard is updated for the board on a quarterly basis. In addition, the CEO's goals include specific equity initiatives.
- A Chair's Anti-Black Racism Task Force was created in 2020, to serve as an advisory body to support the advancement of the Hospital's anti-Black racism priorities. The board task force includes a member from each of the board Committees, and the board Chair and CEO (or their delegates). The work of the Task Force is coordinated with the Hospital Corporate Equity Committee to ensure alignment and impact.
- The WCH Equity Plan, posted on the website, embraces the concept of healthcare as a human right and recognizes that advancing health equity and addressing the underlying social determinants of health requires action both inside and outside of the health sector.

**SEARCH CONSULTANT  
PERSPECTIVES:**

**Building A Common Vision**

“There are many different objectives that one sees in relation to Boards that are seeking to diversify their membership. Sometimes, they come to a position that it is simply the right thing to do. Sometimes, the impetus is that a competitor has made an announcement, or that key stakeholders might agitate for a more diverse Board.”

**Shawn Cooper**

“You should expect your search consultant to play a meaningful role in board EDI-R. We can have tough conversations with boards and candidates to build objectives around skills, experience, and fit, and make sure that we’re not just talking about diversity as a number.”

**Sharon Rudy**

**Feature: Reviewing Policies and ByLaws through an Equity lens**

The Hospital Board and Management are reviewing their ByLaws and key policies, with a view to eliminating language that can be considered racist. This review is underway at the time of this writing. Samples of anticipated changes include the following:

- Board Principles of Governance and Code of Behavior: include the statement ‘Maintaining a culture founded on principles of equity, anti-oppression, anti-colonialism and anti-racism’
- Recruitment of Board Members: include the statement ‘Board members are representative of the intersection of race, class and gender’
- Include education on anti-racism and anti-oppression in Board orientation

While this policy review is underway at the time of this writing, the authors consider it noteworthy, given its comprehensive nature.

**Challenges**

- Having conversations about race and oppression can be very uncomfortable for some. The conversations need to be thoughtfully facilitated, allowing for differences of opinion and for ongoing education.
- Board members noted that it can be a challenge to acquire the data needed to adequately monitor progress on diversity and inclusion.
- There is a desire to build out the scorecard measures, and an understanding that this will take time.
- Onboarding new Board members to a complex hospital with an ambitious set of EDI-R goals requires a deliberate approach that takes time.

**Advice to others who are also on the journey**

- “Just start”... sometimes, organizations can feel overwhelmed by the complexity of EDI-R work, and may be hesitant about starting. It is valuable to get started, even if the first steps on the journey are small ones.
- Be prepared to feel uncomfortable at times - this work is not always easy, and one should expect that there will be uncomfortable conversations. At WCH, the Chair sometimes goes around the table, inviting every member to speak if they wish to on a ‘heavy’ issue.
- One should not assume that racialized board members have more expertise in the equity space. They can express a valid personal perspective but may not be in a position to speak for a community, or with expertise in equity issues.
- Bring in external expertise, or draw upon the experience of individual members, to help in complex areas where the board will benefit from greater expertise.

## About the Authors



**L. Robin Cardozo**

L. Robin Cardozo, FCPA, ICD.D, retired after 30 years in executive positions with leading not-for-profit and charitable organizations in Ontario. He is currently engaged as a consultant in the not-for-profit sector, as an executive mentor, and as a training consultant at the Institute of Corporate Directors. Mr. Cardozo currently serves on the Boards of Soulpepper Theatre and the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund. In the recent past, he served on the Boards of the Ontario Nonprofit Network (past Chair), Centennial College and Bridgepoint Active Health.

Prior to his retirement, Mr. Cardozo served as Chief Operating Officer at SickKids Foundation. In this position, Robin's responsibilities included Finance, Legal, Human Resources, and support to the Board on governance and strategic issues.

Prior to joining the Foundation, Robin served for twelve years as Chief Executive Officer of the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), one of Canada's largest grant-making foundations with a mission to help build healthy and vibrant communities in Ontario. OTF is an agency of the Government of Ontario, and during Robin's tenure more than \$1 billion in grants were made to deserving not-for-profit organizations across the province.

For a decade prior, Mr. Cardozo served as Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of United Way Greater Toronto. During those years, Mr. Cardozo's leadership earned him the United Way movement's highest national honour, the André Mailhot Award.

Mr. Cardozo was born in Pakistan, and was educated in Pakistan and in Britain. He was trained as a Chartered Accountant in the 1970's, and was elected a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario (FCPA) in 2000. He is also a member of the Institute of Corporate Directors (ICD.D).

In 2013, he was awarded the Ontario Lieutenant Governor's Medal of Distinction in Public Administration.

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## From window-dressing to real change: Success stories from Boards on a journey of Diversity & Inclusion

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**Matt Fullbrook**

Matt Fullbrook is a board effectiveness researcher and consultant based in Toronto. For twenty years, Matt worked at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, most recently as the Manager of the David & Sharon Johnston Centre for Corporate Governance Innovation. Under his direction, the Rotman School evolved into the central hub of governance research in Canada. Matt oversaw the development and execution of all of the Centre's projects, including the Globe & Mail's Board Games governance ratings, various Pay/Performance studies, credit union board research, and an ongoing study of the governance of family firms. As an independent consultant, Matt has advised dozens of boards of directors as an educator, facilitator and researcher, helping them to maximize their effectiveness through the development and implementation of valuable governance processes, policies and structures.

In 2020, Matt launched his podcast One Minute Governance, where he explores complex governance issues one minute at a time.

Matt is the Co-Academic Director of the Board Dynamics for Executives Program offered by Rotman and the Institute of Corporate Directors.

Matt is also a professional musician and is the bass player for KC Roberts & the Live Revolution, an original touring 7-piece funk band based in Toronto. The band's 7th studio LP, Grit, will be available in 2022.

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