

Equity Leaders Fellowship (ELF) Board Exposure Experience

Are you looking to improve your board's diversity?
Are you willing to inspire new board leaders?

Are you ready?

Congratulations on recognizing the importance of having a diverse board!

We all increasingly know the importance of diversifying the workforce including organization leadership and boards. "There is a causal relationship between diversity and groups that are more innovative, creative, problem-solving, and better performing overall".¹

The **Equity Leaders Fellowship Board Exposure Experience** is an opportunity for you to engage an ELF Fellow for a 6 month board shadowing experience. Shadowing with your board is a wonderful way for a fellow to learn about board service. And, when it is a mutually beneficial match, it has proven an excellent way to bring on new board members from historically excluded communities/identities. Many NH Boards have gained new board members from the prior cohorts of ELF Fellows, since the program began in 2014.

You may be wondering, "How do we know if we're ready?"

The fact that you're exploring this and asking the question is already an important indicator. Bringing in people with different lived experience requires that the board be willing to be more intentionally attentive to group process and culture. We are all at different stages of the continuum of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) learning journeys. However, we do expect that the board be willing to learn about and seek to improve its capacity for inclusion:

"Inclusion in the workplace is all about understanding and respect - making sure everybody's voices and opinions are heard and carefully considered. Inclusion is the practice of ensuring that people feel a sense of belonging and support from the organization. While diversity refers to the traits and characteristics that make people unique, inclusion refers to the behaviors and social norms that ensure people feel welcome, and is crucial for diversity efforts to succeed."²

Consider asking yourselves these questions:

- What does it mean to be ready?
- Has the board ever talked about Equity, Diversity and Inclusion?
- What has the board done to assure the organization is more Equity-promoting?
- Are you looking to move beyond a performative, check the box, compliance approach towards Diversity?
- How is the board welcoming to new members?

Additionally, before even wanting to take on a fellow, consider whether the Board is a healthy, functioning entity:

- When your board meets, do you usually have a quorum?
- Does your board have clear roles and responsibilities?
- Is the board open to hearing the perspective of other guests or board members?
- Does your board have clarity of purpose and a vision for its work?

Engaging an ELF Fellow is one strategy for moving towards equity - Please recognize that there's learning on both sides. This is likely the Fellow's first board experience and taking on a Fellow means the board will be embarking on a learning process as well. It is very important to remember that the ELF Fellow's primary objective is to have a fruitful board exposure experience as a non-voting member to learn about the mechanics of board service, and not to serve as an equity consultant. Having an ELF Fellow on your board will likely bring a valuable new perspective and lived experience to the board conversations and decisions. Please remember we look to the individual identified to serve as the Board Champion to be an important resource to the Fellow. All Board Champions are expected to participate in an Orientation by members of the ELF Leadership Team.

"We're interested to learn more about DEI - How do we further advance our capacity?"

Because Boards have been requesting more coaching and technical assistance, the ELF Leadership Team members have started offering board consultation services. Please reach out to learn more about how to operationalize equity, diversity, and inclusion. Contact equityleadersfellowshipnh@gmail.com or psmith@snhahec.org for more information about Board Consultation Services.

¹ Hayes, K. (2017). A Roadmap to Better Boards. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/a_roadmap_to_better_boards

² Adapted from "What Is The Meaning Of Diversity & Inclusion in the Workplace in 2021?", accessed 8/10/21, <https://builtin.com/diversity-inclusion>