



## MODULE 7B: DIVERSITY, AS IT RELATES TO COMMUNITY LEAGUE BOARDS

-Ella Washington and Camille Patrick

Last week we explored the concept of diversity and reflected on who the underrepresented groups were in your community. This week we delve into three common challenges highlighted in the Governance Gap related to diversity that are of relevance to League boards. Next week we'll hone in on Community League programming.



"Simply put, Canada's charitable and non-profit sector is behind the times when it comes to diversity. This prevents Canada's sector from identifying top talent, limits the ability of boards and senior staff to govern and innovate, and ultimately could jeopardize the capacity of an organization to resonate with a diversifying Canadian population. Charities and non-profits must take the initiative."

-Senator Ratna Omidvar

**What actions is your League currently engaging in to demonstrate that you are welcome of diverse experiences, voices and opinions?**

## CHALLENGE ONE: KNOWING THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD(S).

If you don't know your neighbourhood's demographics, then it's hard to know if your board is reflective of the voices and experiences found in your community. In last week's module, we reflected on the diverse populations within your neighbourhood. Think about how you know this information. Are you basing your knowledge of your community's demographics on your interactions with neighbours or factual data? If we go on our interactions we often don't have the full picture. This is because as Community Board Members we have limited time and energy to invest in meeting all our neighbours. Without actual data, it's hard to know what kinds of identities are present in your neighbourhood or the needs of your community.

A good place to gain more information on the makeup of your community is the [City of Edmonton's 2016 Census](#). Another option that's always worked well in the Community League Movement is door-to-door flyering or holding an open house (which can always be virtual) to get neighbours to come to you. Community Leagues that make an effort to know their neighbours are better able to build relationships and rapport with community members, which helps strengthen their League's outreach and can result in more underrepresented groups applying to be on the board.



It is a Westernized perspective to expect community members to contact services to ask for help or engage when they are struggling. For example, in many Eastern cultures asking for help can be seen as a sign of weakness. This can be a barrier, especially for newcomers in your community, to accessing support or services here in Edmonton. As such, **consider how your League can go to community members while also creating opportunities for community members to come to you**. It might be through partnering with other non-profits who already have relationships established with underrepresented groups in the community or connecting with programs like Abundant Communities which does outreach at the street level. If you're looking for ideas you can always email us at [leaguesupport@efcl.org](mailto:leaguesupport@efcl.org) and we can brainstorm with you or put you in touch with organizations to partner with.

## CHALLENGE TWO: WHAT ASSUMPTIONS ARE YOU MAKING ABOUT UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS?

There are many reasons why someone may decide to not engage or participate. It's easy to assume that the underrepresented voices on your board are due to folks not wanting to participate, but that's simply not always the case. In the era of COVID-19 we've seen people turn to the community for comfort and support, from inhabiting online spaces to organize activities to volunteering their time to do grocery runs for their neighbours and more. Establishing community is to be human, and it's important to our overall health and wellbeing.

Exploring "why people aren't engaging" is important to ensure you're not unintentionally excluding folks from your Community League. Let's watch "The Danger of a Single Story" (18:34) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and then consider the following questions related to League Member outreach. When answering try not to attribute blame, instead reflect on how your League Movement can be more accommodating.

- Are there people or groups of people that you have given up on trying to engage in your neighbourhood(s)?
  - How do you know that they don't want to get involved?
- If all they had for reference is an events calendar and a few newsletters, what would someone likely conclude to be your primary area(s) of focus as a League?
  - Based on this answer, who might feel well served and who might feel that their interests are left out?

The Community League moment is unique to Edmonton, which means that newcomers to your community who are also new to Edmonton may not have ever heard of Community Leagues, and this may be a barrier to engaging with your League. For example, in China a neighbourhood is defined as a district of the government which has neighbourhood leaders that can enforce rules and support the maintenance of the neighbourhood. This is a much different model to how Community Leagues run. Hence, think about how you're communicating the value of joining the League Movement to newcomers in your community. If you need some help contact us as [leaguesupport@efcl.org](mailto:leaguesupport@efcl.org).



## CHALLENGE THREE: INCREASING DIVERSITY ON COMMUNITY LEAGUE BOARDS

It's no secret that many not-for-profit boards lack diversity. As mentioned last week diversity is important for creativity, innovation and more. Having a League board that is diverse and reflects the current needs and demographics of the community is vital to improving your League's reach and relevance in your community. It's important to reflect on the barriers (cost, timing, time commitment, location, negative experiences, hesitation, etc) that underrepresented groups face to being on Community League boards? Below are some common challenges that boards face when increasing their diversity and ideas to overcome these challenges.

### **Issue: No one from an underrepresented group is applying to be on the board.**

*How are you advertising your AGM and board openings?*

Ideas: Get creative when sharing opportunities available at your League. Outside of posting on Facebook or emailing members consider areas in your neighbourhood that people frequent and try to post there. Local restaurants might be a good place to start. In addition, if your League has an outdoor sign try advertising there. Letting other non-profits or agencies that are supporting residents in your community about board openings is another option as well.

*How are you communicating the commitment?*

Ideas: To be able to volunteer requires a big commitment. Being able to make these commitments requires advantages (as mentioned in module two). For example, consider a family who has access to childcare and stable monthly income versus a family without. The former family will probably have an easier time volunteering in the Community League movement than the latter. Those from underrepresented groups may be trying to overcome other challenges, like getting situated to a new neighbourhood or overcoming financial burdens, which means they don't have a ton of time to volunteer. Consider creating opportunities that allow folks to be flexible with the time they spend volunteering. One option might be creating board subcommittees. Another option might be creating one-off volunteer opportunities like supporting Community League Day events where through volunteering people can learn more about your Community League. When advertising about your board positions try to be as accurate as possible about the time commitment so that folks who apply know what to expect.

## **Issue: Not gaining enough appropriate applications from underrepresented groups.**

Many of those who identify in underrepresented communities also face disadvantages as mentioned in module two. Challenges to gaining meaningful employment, relevant volunteer experience or even education might mean that the applicant hasn't had the chance to develop skills in areas like board governance, advocacy or finances. So what do you do? It can be tempting to select candidates of different identities to increase your board's diversity; however, if they don't have the skills to be successful on your board this can do more harm than good. Cherry-picking applicants invalidates the hard work that people go through to build their experience and skills.

Ideas: If someone from an underrepresented group applies to your board but they aren't the best fit for the position, consider the areas the person needs to develop their skills into be an effective board member and how your board can help foster that. Having the applicant volunteer on a board subcommittee or at the Community League is one option. Another might be having current board members mentor the applicant so they can develop the right skills. EFCL is launching a new board training program this year that can support skill development too. Actions such as these show the community that your board values diversity and is committed to creating opportunities for everyone. This can be a huge step forward to growing your League Movement and building relationships with underrepresented groups.

"Mentorship is a vital component of successful inclusion programs because it creates an opportunity to engage."  
-Noah Rue



## MODULE WRAP UP AND REFLECTION

Food for thought: For some folks a Community League board might be their first time hearing about boards or learning about board structure. That can be overwhelming and a barrier to applying. Communicating the types of support available to train new board members in your outreach is a great way to show new applicants that if they get the position, they won't be expected to know everything off the bat. Stay tuned as EFCL has some opportunities to support board mentorship launching in the near future.



We hope this gives you a place to start when recruiting underrepresented groups to your Community League Board. If you have any other ideas on how to increase diversity on Community League Boards get in touch with us at [leaguesupport@efcl.org](mailto:leaguesupport@efcl.org) so we can share your ideas with everyone.



### Reflection for this week:

- What is one action your board can take today to have better outreach with an underrepresented group in your community?
  - It could be an idea from this module or something completely different.