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Cal-in-Sac Undergraduate Research on Diversity and Entrepreneurship

Title

How Diversity Affects California Nonprofit Organizations

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In the spring of 2021, IGS launched a two-year Diversity and Entrepreneurship Fellowship Program. Cal-in-Sac Fellows conducted original research focused on the challenges and opportunities facing women- and POC-owned small businesses and diverse entrepreneurs in California. This series includes Op-Eds, blogs, policy briefs and other research products that capture key findings of the students' research. Learn more at <https://igs.berkeley.edu/matsui-center/fellowships/cal-in-sacramento>.

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How Diversity Affects California Nonprofit Organizations

by Leslie Vasquez

California is one of the most diverse states in the nation. According to the Public Policy Institute of California, no race or ethnic group constitutes a majority of California's population, and almost 30% of the population is made up of immigrants. With an increasingly diverse state, there is pressure to diversify the workplace particularly in the nonprofit sector. Many advocates of educational equity believe that nonprofit organizations are stronger when they promote policies regarding diversity and inclusion. This is due to the idea that diversity increases productivity, innovation, and brings in new perspectives to the workplace. To explore the links between diversity and efficiency in the educational nonprofit sector, this study focuses on the diversity of nonprofit directors to investigate the underlying issues regarding diversity problems.

In my research, I study the relationship between diversity of directors in educational nonprofit organizations across California and the overall effectiveness of the organizations. For the purpose of this research, I define diversity in nonprofit organizations to be companies that intentionally employ people who reflect a variety of characteristics including race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. When studying the nonprofits, I conventionally measured diversity using simple number counts, taking the overall percentage of people who meet various ethnic, racial, and gender categories. Effectiveness, for the purposes of this research, is defined as how well organizations account for program monitoring, diversity, and policy formation. Because educational nonprofits vary across sub sectors (e.g. high school education, K-12, alternative

education) I relied heavily on each nonprofit organization's mission statements. Then I compared the mission statements of each organization to the interviews I conducted with program directors as well as secondary research involving existing information on these organizations available online. I focused on three educational nonprofits: Project Invent, Encourage Tomorrow, and Central Valley Scholars. In my research, there were several key takeaways including how diversity can help foster new programs and ideas.

The first nonprofit organization is Project Invent, whose mission is to “create a generation of fearless, compassionate problem solvers.” Project Invent primarily focuses on investing in high school students by helping them invent technology to solve real world problems. Their main method for pursuing this goal is through developing physical technology products, conducted by students, to be presented on “Demo Day.” The second organization is Encourage Tomorrow whose mission is to “provide quality educational programs that empower students and families to become resilient and maintain healthy lifestyles.” Encourage Tomorrow provides a vast array of tutoring programs ranging from pre-kindergarten education to college preparation. They also provide several niche programs such as family and financial literacy programs for parents. The final organization is Central Valley Scholars, whose mission is to empower students across the Central Valley to realize their potential and “make their educational dreams a reality.” Central Valley Scholars also offers a variety of programs such as workshops, mentorships, and scholarships available to high school students. Like Encourage Tomorrow, Central Valley Scholars provides several niche programs such as their Community Health Scholars program which grants research opportunities to high school students.

I would like to preface my findings by stating that due to the small sample size of the companies, I cannot make concrete conclusions about how diversity affects an organization. The purpose of this research is to open a dialogue regarding why nonprofits should aspire to be more diverse and what that can mean for an organization.

While studying the differences and similarities between the organizations with relation to diversity there are two main takeaways. More diverse organizations tend to have 1) niche programs specific to their communities, and 2) a larger emphasis on stories about students. From my research I concluded that Encourage Tomorrow and Central Valley Scholars are more diverse than Project Invent. Encourage Tomorrow has both ethnic and racial diversity - all four directors are women of color. Ten of the 12 Central Valley Scholars' directors either identifying as an ethnic minority and/or female. Project Invent has only one person who identifies as a minority out of its seven members. In addition, the two more diverse organizations demonstrated strong links to the communities they are serving with their programs. Encourage Tomorrow currently has a total of nine programs to assist students, including camps focusing on inventions, the environment, and the arts. Central Valley Scholars also exemplifies significant attentiveness to the communities they serve and offers five different programs, including the Black Youth Empowerment Program which creates a network of Black leadership across the Central Valley. According to their website, the Black Youth Empowerment Program helps advance Black wellness, education, and creativity.

These two diverse organizations not only invest heavily into their programs, but they also place a larger emphasis on the student participation. Student success stories are highlighted by both of these organizations. Encourage Tomorrow has a section on their website dedicated to the “Success Stories” of their students, while Central Valley Scholars highlights their students in their “News” portion of their website. Project Invent currently does not mention student stories on their website.

While studying all three organizations, I found that although they all do incredible work in their communities, having a diverse set of directors can help foster greater innovation in the form of new projects. By bringing in a multitude of different backgrounds, organizations have the advantage of having a range of views ultimately fostering creativity to generate new programs that help the communities they hope to serve. Moreso, I learned that diversity shouldn't be something companies strive for simply because our changing communities demand it, but organizations should begin diversifying themselves because of the benefit it brings to communities to have an array of talent.

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