



JOINT AFFINITY GROUPS

The Meaning and Impact of Board and Staff Diversity in the Philanthropic Field

Findings from a National Study

Lynn C. Burbridge

William A. Díaz

Teresa Odendahl

Aileen Shaw

Foreword by Emmett D. Carson

Edited by Chris Cardona

© 2002 by the Joint Affinity Groups, Lynn C. Burbridge, William A. Díaz, Teresa Odendahl,
Aileen Shaw, Emmett D. Carson, and the University of Minnesota

All rights reserved

Joint Affinity Groups
c/o Leila Minerva
JAG Coordinating Consultant
(415) 330-0878 (voice)
(415) 330-0870 (fax)
lminerva@earthlink.net

Table of Contents

Preface	vi
Background and Context	vi
About the Joint Affinity Groups	viii
Evolution of the Research Project	ix
Implications of the Research	x
Next Steps	xi
About the Project Report	xi
Acknowledgments	xii
Endnotes	xii
Foreword	xiv
Emmett D. Carson	
Diversity in Foundations: The Numbers and Their Meaning	1
Lynn C. Burbridge	
Introduction	1
What Do We Know? Existing Data on Diversity in Foundation Staff and Board	
Composition by Race and Sex	2
Overall Trends Since the 1980s	3
Comparisons of Paid Staff and Board Members	5
Comparisons by Occupation	12
Occupation by Foundation Type and Assets	17
Comparison to the Public and Third Sectors	21
Summary	23
New Data, New Perspectives: The Joint Affinity Groups Survey	24
Survey Sample	26
Survey Questionnaire	27
Response Rate	28
Comparison to the Council on Foundations Sample	29
Career Patterns	32
Job Characteristics	35
Responsibilities	41
Interaction with Others	46
Grantmaking	50
Summary	60
Perceptions and Comments	62
Previous Experience and Career Plans	62
Foundation Effectiveness	68
<i>Comments</i>	75
Summary	80
Conclusion	81
References	82
Endnotes	83

Independent Foundations in Transition: From Family Vehicles to Major Institutions	85
Teresa Odendahl and William A. Díaz	
Introduction	85
Staffed Family Foundations	86
Introduction to Foundation Type	86
Study Sample	87
Staffing and Diversity	87
Board Diversity	89
Institutional Culture	91
Case Study: The Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation	92
Large Independent Foundations	95
Institutional Culture	96
Case Study: The Rockefeller Foundation	97
Case Study: The California Wellness Foundation	99
Conclusion	101
References	102
Community Foundations and Progressive Grantmaking Public Charities	103
William A. Díaz and Aileen Shaw	
Introduction	103
Community Foundations: The Entrepreneurs	104
Introduction to Foundation Type	104
Study Sample	104
Institutional Culture	104
Best Practices	105
Case Study: The Saint Paul Foundation	106
Conclusion	107
Progressive Grantmaking Public Charities	107
Introduction to Foundation Type	107
Study Sample	108
Diversity Practices	109
<i>Diversifying Donors</i>	111
<i>Diversifying the Board of Directors: Selection, Training, and Structure</i>	112
<i>Institutional Culture: Addressing the Issue of Class</i>	114
<i>From Numbers to Culture</i>	116
Case Study: The Boston Women's Fund	117
Conclusion	119
Conclusion	120
References	120

Corporate Philanthropy: The Business of Diversity	121
Aileen Shaw	
Introduction to Foundation Type	121
Study Sample	122
Institutional Culture	123
Best Practices	125
Creating Diverse Workplaces	125
Recruitment	126
Training	128
Corporate vs. Independent Foundations	129
Case Study: Wells Fargo Foundation	130
Conclusion	132
References	133
Endnotes	134
Conclusion: Findings and Recommendations	135
Findings	135
Recommendations	137
Appendix: Interview and Case Study Methodology	139
References	142
Institutions Interviewed	143

List of Charts and Tables

Chart 1. Professional Staff, 1984-1998	3
Chart 2. CEOs, 1982-1998	4
Chart 3. Board Membership, 1982-1998	4
Table 1.1. African Americans, 1992/1998: Percentage of Paid Staff and Board Totals	6
Table 1.2. Asians and Pacific Islanders, 1992/1998: Percentage of Paid Staff and Board Totals	8
Table 1.3. Hispanics or Latinos, 1992/1998: Percentage of Paid Staff and Board Totals	9
Table 1.4. Native Americans, 1992/1998: Percentage of Paid Staff and Board Totals	10
Table 1.5. White Americans, 1992/1998: Percentage of Paid Staff and Board Totals	11
Table 2.1. African Americans, 1992/1998: Occupational Percentage and Distribution	13
Table 2.2. Asians/Pacific Islanders, 1992/1998: Occupational Percentage and Distribution	14
Table 2.3. Hispanics or Latinos, 1992/1998: Occupational Percentage and Distribution	15
Table 2.4. Native Americans, 1992/1998: Occupational Percentage and Distribution	16
Table 2.5. White Americans, 1992/1998: Occupational Percentage and Distribution	17
Table 3.1. Professional Staff by Foundation Type, Sex and Race/Ethnicity, 1998: Percentages	18
Table 3.2. Professional Staff by Assets, Sex and Race/Ethnicity, 1998: Percentages	20
Chart 4. Female Professionals in Foundation, Government and Third Sector Employment	22
Chart 5. Male Professionals in Foundation, Government and Third Sector Employment	22
Chart 6. CoF and JAG Surveys by Foundation Type	29
Chart 7. CoF and JAG Surveys by Asset Size	30
Chart 8. CoF and JAG Surveys by Region	30
Chart 9. CoF and JAG Surveys by Race/Ethnicity	31
Table 4.1. Characteristics of the Sample	33
Table 5.1. Job Characteristics	35
Table 5.2. Job Characteristics by Sex and Race/Ethnicity	37
Table 5.3. Job Characteristics by Sex and Sexual Orientation	39
Table 6.1. Responsibilities	41
Table 6.2. Responsibilities by Sex and Race/Ethnicity	43
Table 6.3. Responsibilities by Sex and Sexual Orientation	44
Table 7.1. Interaction With Others	46
Table 7.2. Interaction With Others by Sex and Race/Ethnicity	48
Table 7.3. Interaction With Others by Sex and Sexual Orientation	49
Table 8.1. Grantmaking	52
Table 8.2. Grantmaking by Sex and Race/Ethnicity	54
Table 8.3. Grantmaking by Sex and Sexual Orientation	57
Table 9.1. Previous Foundation Experience	63

Table 9.2. Previous Foundation Experience by Sex and Race/Ethnicity	64
Table 9.3. Previous Foundation Experience by Sex and Sexual Orientation	65
Table 10.1. Career Plans	66
Table 10.2. Career Plans by Sex and Race	66
Table 10.3. Career Plans by Sex and Sexual Orientation	67
Table 11.1. Feeling about Affinity Group	67
Table 11.2. Feelings about Affinity Group by Sex and Race/Ethnicity	67
Table 11.3. Feelings about Affinity Group by Sex and Sexual Orientation	68
Table 12.1. Perceptions	70
Table 12.2. Perceptions by Sex and Race	72
Table 12.3. Perceptions by Sex and Sexual Orientation	73
Table 13. Diversity Indices	140
Table 14. Study Interviewees	142

Preface

The Joint Affinity Groups

In the midst of an active dialogue within philanthropy on accountability and responsiveness to communities, a prominent fact remains – the staffs and boards of philanthropic institutions have not kept pace with the general population in terms of diversity. If responsiveness and diversity are linked, then foundations must attend to their internal diversity if they wish to offer a more credible outreach to diverse communities. However, diversity means more than numbers; institutional culture and practices must shift as well.

What is the empirical reality that grounds these conjectures? Can we quantify the changes in foundation staffing? How well represented are different identity groups within the field, and how do members of these diverse groups fare in their career advancement? How do different types of foundations address inclusiveness, and what are examples of practices that lead to successful implementation of staff and board diversity?

To examine these questions in detail, the Joint Affinity Groups (JAG) developed a multi-stage research project that combined surveys, interviews, and focus groups to reach more than 600 grantmakers nationwide. The primary lesson of this research is the importance of keeping board and staff diversity squarely on the philanthropic agenda. Philanthropy has a chance to build on its existing strength by increasing attention to its own diversity.

The present volume compiles the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the research. It represents the culmination of a multi-year effort among the Principal Investigators, the Study Director, and the Joint Affinity Groups. This Preface seeks to provide context about the environment in which philanthropy confronts the opportunities and challenges of diversity, to offer background information about the Joint Affinity Groups, and to situate the research within a story about JAG’s overall evolution. The Preface concludes with a series of reflections on the meaning and impact of the research itself, suggesting avenues for continued investigation.

Background and Context

Philanthropy is a field in flux. For decades a bastion of elite privilege, the closed world of institutionalized charitable giving has been pried open in recent years by multiple

pressures.¹ New forms of wealth are challenging traditional philanthropic practices. Charitable giving has come under increased public scrutiny. The recent economic slowdown, and the ongoing impact of September 11, will shape philanthropic giving in ways that remain to be seen.

Individually and in combination, these changes have significant effects on the issues discussed in the JAG research, namely, the meaning and impact of board and staff diversity in philanthropy. Despite the recent downturn in the economy, individual wealth has continued to grow in this country, and analysts predict a “trillion-dollar transfer” between baby boomers and their children over the next few decades. These trends will generate significant numbers of new donors, which will primarily fuel the growth of the family foundation sector. As detailed in Lynn Burbridge’s chapter on findings from the JAG survey, family foundations face some of the strongest challenges with respect to staff and board diversity (see p. 17).² While these challenges are primarily a function of the institutions’ minimal staffing and small boards, the family foundation segment has been slow to address the issue of board and staff diversity, and unless this latter reality changes, the continued growth of family foundations has the ironic potential to lessen diversity within philanthropy rather than increase it.

From the private sector, new forms of wealth are creating donors with markedly different attitudes toward risk, control, and investment strategy, but with no clear perspective on the issue of board and staff diversity. Venture philanthropy, as an alternative grantmaking style, has the potential to introduce new approaches; however, greater attention to board and staff diversity has not been one of them. Financial services providers have begun encroaching upon the traditional domain of community foundations by offering charitable donation services to their clients. Partially in reaction to this challenge, community foundations have begun to focus more attention upon cultivation of donors and less on responsiveness to community needs. Furthermore, it is not at all clear that venture philanthropists or financial services providers have any concern with diversity as a grantmaking criterion, let alone with internal diversity. To the extent that they respond to trends in the corporate sector – described in Aileen Shaw’s chapter on corporate giving in this report – toward greater diversification of staff, these organizations may have an interest in diversity, but their levels of awareness and sensitivity are not well understood at present.

The media is casting increasing scrutiny on nonprofits generally, and charitable institutions in particular. Foundations have tended to shy away from the spotlight, for varying reasons. Such anonymity hardly seems possible anymore, especially for the larger independent foundations. This new level of scrutiny may have positive implications for staff and board diversity, in that it offers a potential source of leverage for applying pressure to foundations. However, unless staff and board diversity can be positioned as a relevant issue with regard to philanthropy, such potential may go unfulfilled.

In the short term, the downturn in the economy, combined with the adverse economic effects of September 11, has created a more difficult climate in which to advocate for diversity in philanthropy. Greater diversity can come about either through replacement or expansion of current philanthropic staffs and boards. On the staff level, both outcomes are less likely in uncertain economic times. Institutions are unable to add new staff, and existing staff is more likely to hold on to current jobs.

Furthermore, concerns about diversity are still viewed as “secondary” to service provision and donor cultivation. From this perspective, the concern in the field about staff and board diversity in the late 1990s – as manifested in the Council on Foundations publication *Cultures of Caring* and associated discussions at professional conferences – may be perceived as an artifact of a strong economy which allowed attention to such “secondary” issues which are “over and above” philanthropy’s normal concerns. In the current climate, this story goes, such concerns must be held off until later.

Another national trend worth noting in this context is the overall retrenchment against the civil rights gains made during the 1960s and after. The rollback of affirmative action, the reconfiguration of welfare provision, threats to a woman’s right to choose, continuing discrimination against gays and lesbians, and backlash against the Americans with Disabilities Act all represent challenges to gains made by diverse communities over the past 40 years. It is ironic but perhaps unsurprising that foundations are more reluctant than ever to support a broad social change agenda precisely at a time when so many issues important to diverse communities are facing common threats. The increasing diversity of the U.S. population, in a more conservative political climate, may result, at least in the short term, in the restriction rather than the expansion of civil rights.

All of these trends impact philanthropy’s understanding of the importance of board and staff diversity. They form an important part of the overall context within which the Joint Affinity Groups operate, and in which the research took place.

About the Joint Affinity Groups

JAG is a nationwide coalition of grantmaker associations that engages the field of philanthropy to reach its full potential through practices that support diversity, inclusiveness, and accountability to communities. While each partner organization’s mission and focus is unique, they share a common commitment to increasing the responsiveness of philanthropy to diverse communities. Both the collaborative nature of the research and the broad reach of its analysis reflect JAG’s values and vision.

The nine JAG partners that sponsored this study are:

Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy

Association of Black Foundation Executives³
Disability Funders Network
Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues
Hispanics in Philanthropy
Native Americans in Philanthropy
National Network of Grantmakers
Women & Philanthropy
Women's Funding Network

JAG first came together in 1993. The primary venue for JAG's joint work has been the Council on Foundations (CoF) Annual Conference. Since 1995, JAG has co-sponsored a session at each of these conferences, drawing increasing numbers of participants and generating greater levels of awareness of the partnership and its agenda. Topics covered in panel discussions and site visits over the years include affirmative action, the meaning of community, self-determination for native peoples, and venture philanthropy.

A central aim of the joint work has been to model the type of collaborative spirit and inclusive practices that JAG itself wishes philanthropy to adopt. The development of the research project, beginning in 1997, represented JAG's most significant and far-reaching collective undertaking. The project was an ambitious attempt to gather data that would provide further empirical substance to one of the key claims made by each of the groups individually and by JAG as a whole: that greater attention to board and staff diversity will improve the responsiveness of grantmaking and increase philanthropy's accountability to the communities it serves.

In 2001, JAG obtained a planning grant that led to the hiring of the first paid staff member, a Coordinating Consultant. With the publication of the research in 2002, JAG has reached a new milestone in its collaborative work. The following section describes how the research project came about and how the finished product relates to the original conception.

Evolution of the Research Project

The original proposal planned by JAG and submitted for funding in 1997 by the University of Minnesota outlined four objectives: 1) to examine how racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, and disability differences are represented among foundation staff and trustees; 2) to explore differences in tenure and earning patterns among foundations' staffs according to these different backgrounds; 3) to examine the level of foundation funding to populations of interest to each of the co-sponsoring groups; and 4) to determine the impact of foundation board and staff diversity on grantmaking outcomes. The project was designed to include an extensive survey of foundation staff on employment issues, and a series of qualitative interviews with foundation staff and trustees on institutional practices.

The final scope of the JAG study was determined by its funding. In 1998, the Ford Foundation awarded a grant of \$243,000 to support the development of the survey and to conduct interviews with foundation CEOs to highlight “best practices” in the field. The Ford grant – Phase 1 – of the project began in August 1998. In Phase 2, beginning in mid-1999, the Rockefeller Foundation provided additional funding of \$150,000 and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund also gave \$50,000 to expand the interviews to board members and staff other than CEOs; to conduct focus groups; and to begin plans for dissemination of the results. Overall, the project received approximately two-thirds of the funding requested. The plans to study the impact of diverse decision-makers as well as levels of grantmaking to populations of interest were never funded and were dropped. In addition, the work on trustee diversity was not sufficiently covered by the grants provided and could not encompass the full range of investigation initially planned.

Principal Investigators Dr. Lynn Burbridge of Rutgers University, Dr. William Díaz of the University of Minnesota’s Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, Dr. Teresa Odendahl and Study Director Aileen Shaw, at the time staff members of the National Network of Grantmakers (NNG), collaborated on the implementation of this research. Díaz, Odendahl and Shaw undertook the qualitative, institutional components of the study, while Burbridge carried out the survey analysis.

Implications of the Research

This research is important for JAG on several different levels. First and foremost, it substantiates one of the key points the group has been making for several years, that significant barriers persist to the advancement of diverse populations within philanthropy. Furthermore, the research itself embodies the JAG model of strength in collaboration. A jointly sponsored and implemented effort, this project has brought the nine groups together around a common theme and undertaking. The findings point to specific issues for each group but also indicate a common challenge: changing foundation culture. The research makes clear that numbers are not enough; institutional culture and practices must change for diversity to make a lasting impact.

The different organizations that make up JAG will employ the research in different ways. Some have already used preliminary findings in their own work, as in the case of the Disability Funders Network’s survey of California grantmakers. Others will use it to supplement existing materials on the importance of expanding definitions of diversity. Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues will use the findings on the status of gays and lesbians in the field, and in particular the absence of sexual orientation from diversity definitions, to continue to advocate for a consideration of this issue within diversity concerns. Other groups will participate in the joint dissemination, without necessarily generating new

activities or materials of their own from the research. Whatever the level of follow-up, the nine groups remain committed to the joint mission of the research.

Although survey respondents primarily viewed diversity in terms of race, it is clear that issues of gender, sexual orientation and disability are an important element of the diversity that underlies foundation accountability. In this respect, foundations lag behind the evolution of diversity as a social phenomenon. This lag, considered alongside the gains that undeniably have been made, make it crucially important to keep diversity on the agenda of philanthropy. While recent trends may lead some to move away from diversity issues, JAG's research demonstrates the central role that considerations of staff and board diversity have for philanthropic practice in the 21st century. In their effort to keep pace with a rapidly changing context, foundations are paying more attention to issues of accountability and responsiveness. As part of this process of self-examination, philanthropy must include the issue of staff and board diversity.

Next Steps

In presenting the findings of this research, JAG is conscious of the need to formulate next steps and follow-up activities. Given the funding situation of the research and the substance of the findings, it seems clear that the next step from the perspective of future research involves an examination of the impact of staff and board diversity on grantmaking decisions. Does greater diversity on the staff and board levels lead to greater diversity among grantees, or in the target populations of foundation programs? Does diversity always follow programming, or can the dynamic work in the other direction?

Further research must also be done on the role of trustees with respect to internal efforts to diversify philanthropy, as well as the specific issues that arise around bringing greater diversity to boards. Aileen Shaw and William Díaz's chapter on progressive public charities contains interesting examples of foundations that have made conscious efforts to diversify their boards, suggesting a potential new avenue of investigation. Trustee issues cannot be included more fully in this report because the mail survey reached only a limited number of trustees. If a survey-based approach was not successful, perhaps more one-on-one interviews, and potentially focus groups, might prove useful.

About the Project Report

The project report is organized as follows. Emmett Carson's thoughtful and provocative Foreword places the findings in the context of larger trends within philanthropy. Lynn Burbridge's chapter reports the results of an original survey that collects the experiences and perspectives of 500 grantmakers with respect to employment status and

career advancement within philanthropy. Following this quantitative analysis, which covers the field in general, the remaining three chapters focus on qualitative findings for specific foundation types. Teresa Odendahl and William Díaz look at independent foundations; William Díaz and Aileen Shaw examine community foundations and grantmaking public charities; and Aileen Shaw studies corporate foundations. Finally, the Conclusion collects overall findings and recommendations from all four chapters.

Acknowledgments

The study was funded by grants from The Ford Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund. Publication of the project report was supported by a grant from the Edwin Gould Foundation for Children.

The authors want especially to acknowledge Michael Seltzer who, as a Ford Foundation program officer, provided the original support for our work. Christopher Harris, at Ford, provided supplemental support. Aida Rodriguez, formerly deputy director of the Equal Opportunity Program at the Rockefeller Foundation, stepped in with timely support when the study required it. Carol Mollner provided thorough background research on corporate diversity practices. Adam Rubel of the National Network of Grantmakers provided invaluable research, coordination and writing assistance, and Erin Randolph conducted some of the independent foundation interviews in the South.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Council on Foundations for sharing its statistical data on diversity within foundations. This study would not have been possible without the research the Council has conducted in this area. Of course, the interpretations, conclusions and recommendations are solely those of the authors and we assume responsibility for any factual errors.

The editor wishes to thank Jeanne Argoff and Nancy Cunningham of JAG for their tireless editorial consultation, and JAG Coordinating Consultant Leila Minerva for her able coordination and logistical assistance.

Endnotes

¹This analysis of trends is based on discussions among the Joint Affinity Groups and consultation of secondary sources, such as *Foundation News & Commentary*, *Philanthropy News Digest*, and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, and online resources, such as the websites of the Council on Foundations, Independent Sector, Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers, and Blueprint Research and Design. Blueprint's document "Scanning Philanthropy: 2001 and Beyond," a June 2001 presentation to the Board of the Council on Foundations, was particularly useful: <http://www.blueprintrd.com/text/COFscans.pdf>

² It is worth noting that white women have made significant gains in this sector, particularly with regard to obtaining executive positions.

³ The Association of Black Foundation Executives will change its name to Philanthropic Partners for Black Communities in May 2002.

Foreword

Emmett D. Carson*

There is a mythology that surrounds foundations. Charged with the grand goal of improving society, foundations are often believed to be better than other types of institutions. Better in what they do – represent our best nature by providing grants to improve society. And, better in whom they recruit as board trustees and hire as staff to do this difficult work – the best and the brightest without regard to their outward packaging. With endowments that insulate them from the economic marketplace and popular opinion, foundations are better positioned than other institutions to recruit trustees and hire staff based on fairness and equality.

If, however, foundations are no better in handling diversity issues than other institutions, they may prove to be more resistant to change than other institutions. Because of the myth, foundations may find it more difficult to accept and therefore act on a different picture of themselves. Their endowments may allow them to continue practices that other institutions have had to abandon because of vulnerability to the economic marketplace or concerns about public opinion. Moreover, acknowledging that foundations are not immune to the different “isms” and phobias (racism, sexism, homophobia and ableism) that exist within the larger fabric of American society might call into question the efficacy of their grantmaking.

This report, *The Meaning and Impact of Staff and Board Diversity in the Philanthropic Field*, opens an important new chapter in the study of foundation diversity practices. It was commissioned by the Joint Affinity Groups (JAG). JAG represents the collective efforts of Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, Association of Black Foundation Executives, Disability Funders Network, Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues, Hispanics in Philanthropy, Native Americans in Philanthropy, National Network of Grantmakers, Women & Philanthropy, and Women’s Funding Network. The shared interest of these groups in foundation diversity practices raises the profile of this subject above what would have been possible by any one of the organizations acting alone.

The composition of the research team that conducted this research is also unique and warrants special mention. Lynn Burbridge, William Díaz, Teresa Odendahl and Aileen Shaw each have significant research experience in examining foundation diversity practices and bring an interdisciplinary approach to this work. Moreover, the research team reflects many aspects of the diversity that were under study and their involvement surely helped to ensure candor and integrity for the different groups involved.

The Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation and Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund are to be commended for taking a leadership role in supporting this research and have provided an invaluable service to the field of philanthropy. It is always a difficult task for institutions in any field to ask themselves hard questions, and, as stated earlier, organized philanthropy may be more resistant to change than other fields. Notwithstanding this observation, it is unfortunate that so few foundations were willing to provide financial support for this research.

There are many reasons why foundations would be well served to take a greater interest in their diversity practices. As employers, foundations have a legal and/or ethical obligation to hire staff without regard to disability, sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity or race. Foundations occupy a special position of public trust that requires them to go beyond the letter of the law and embrace the spirit of the law in their recruiting of trustees and hiring of staff. They also have the enormous responsibility to collectively award billions in grants to nonprofit organizations on an annual basis. If foundations are unable to equitably recruit trustees and hire staff, this may suggest that they have similar biases in reviewing and awarding grants. Lastly, there is anecdotal evidence that foundations that have a diverse board and staff may be more likely to receive proposals as well as be responsive to grant requests from diverse organizations than foundations that are not diverse.

In many ways, this study is more comprehensive than previous studies of diversity in foundations. The research methodology includes: surveys of foundation trustees and staff, focus groups of foundation staff and in-depth case studies of 29 foundations. The research confirms the findings of earlier studies about the disparities in pay, titles, and upward mobility that exist between white males and both people of color and women. Indeed, the myth that foundations have somehow escaped the diversity challenges that have confronted and confounded other institutions in American society should finally be put to rest.

This study also breaks new ground with regard to its findings on the ongoing employment challenges faced by women of color as well as gays and lesbians. Moreover, the study raises significant questions about the institutional culture of foundations, the role of foundation leadership in promoting a culture of diversity and how diversity issues are handled within different foundation settings, e.g., private, corporate and community foundations.

Perhaps the most provocative part of this study is the suggestion that diversity is often viewed within a regional context that recognizes that the nature of the diversity challenge in the South may not involve the same groups as in the West. This approach may prove troubling if it is misinterpreted by some foundations that it is permissible to focus their diversity effort on one group to the exclusion of others based on geographical representation.

With this study, JAG has elevated the diversity discussion from its traditional lens of focusing on a single disparity, e.g., whites relative to people of color, men relative to women, heterosexuals relative to gays and lesbians, and non-disabled relative to people with disabilities, to examining diversity as it relates to the full range of affected groups. By viewing all of these diversity issues as being equal, the JAG members are asserting their belief that they have reached a shared understanding that diversity cannot be achieved without the full inclusion of all groups. In effect, the JAG members are declaring that their approach to diversity is, “All for one and one for all.”

Only time will tell if the membership organizations that comprise JAG are prepared to forgo gains for their specific group to adhere to this philosophy. And, perhaps more importantly, whether the affinity groups are willing to hold their individual members who occupy decision-making positions (trustees and senior management) equally accountable for improving diversity outcomes. Ultimately, the success of JAG’s strategy will be measured by the extent to which foundations improve on their dismal performance in recruiting diverse trustees and hiring staff that reflect the larger society. This study is an important next step in making the myth that surrounds foundation diversity practices a reality.

*Emmett D. Carson is president and CEO of The Minneapolis Foundation.



Joint Affinity Groups
c/o Leila Minerva
JAG Coordinating Consultant
(415) 330-0878 (voice)
(415) 330-0870 (fax)
lminerva@earthlink.net