

UNIT II GAINING SUPPORT FROM THE GOVERNING BOARD

Gaining Support from the Board of Directors/ or Advisory Board of your Agency

The Board's support for diversity is critical to all CASA programs as well as all programs run by a multi purpose agency of which CASA is but one program or service. Board support is needed for a variety of purposes: as the leaders of an organization, Boards send a important message to executive and direct service staff about what is valued by the organization. Board "buy in" is important because achieving diversity often comes with some financial costs - staff training, recruitment costs, development of new positions and the like. Finally, taking up diversity in an effective way is a challenging proposition for many agencies. Board support is needed to support the Executive Director and other management staff in their implementation of a plan to become diverse and culturally competent. To ensure that this effort does not falter, the Board must hold the Executive Director accountable for making progress and continuous improvement in this area.

In some instances, it may in fact be the Board that takes leadership on this issue. At other times, it is the Executive Director who is bringing the question to the table. Once diversity issues become a central focus of an organization, the Executive Director will most likely have certain responsibilities to communicate with the Board about progress and work to be undertaken.

A critical first step is an agency assessment that begins with the composition of the Board itself. It is very difficult for a Board to provide leadership on the issue of diversity if it does not itself reflect diversity in its own makeup. As is discussed later in this manual, the ability to attract volunteers from diverse communities, requires that the organization as a whole demonstrates commitment to inclusion in its Board, executive and line staff. Prospective volunteers will inquire what the organization as a whole "looks like". Depending on the organizational structure, the first step in gaining support from the Board may be an effort to recruit Board members from the communities from which it is important to attract volunteers.

Written Communication to the Board

Written information provided to the Board helps prepare for the discussion of efforts at taking up diversity work throughout the organization and its programs. The Executive Director, in conjunction with a Board subcommittee, can provide the Board with a memorandum about why diversity is important (some materials and information can be drawn from this manual). The written information should also include an analysis of the program and organizational shortcomings, i.e., the demographics of the population

served by the agency/CASA program, current Board, staff and volunteer make up. Finally the written communication should also include recommendations to the Board as to how to proceed in achieving diversity. Examples of recommendations include:

- Bringing in a trainer with expertise in training on diversity for Board and staff
- Recruiting members of diverse communities to the Board
- Organizational restructuring to ensure that diversity is routinely and effectively attended to as part of staffing and staff development
- Resource development to support new positions, program modifications and new initiatives that promote and sustain diversity.

Presentation to the Board

Sufficient time should be set aside at a Board meeting to review the written material and recommendations. A Board member and the Executive Director should share in the presentation responsibilities. There should be ample time for discussion that should conclude in action steps. These steps will vary according to each agency's situation. For example, some agencies who have not addressed this issue previously might want to set up a special meeting to more fully discuss the information and recommendations. Other Boards may chose to move directly to training and still other organizations may be ready to take steps, such as creation of a new staff position or program modification, to implement an action plan for diversity.