

Creating Pathways for Diverse Philanthropy Professionals

In October 2009, the Council on Foundations held a convening to discuss how the demographics of philanthropy executives could better reflect that of the country's population as a whole. To do this, they invited what had been an untapped group: search firm representatives and human relations officers, the people directly involved in hiring and retaining leaders.

"To the best of our knowledge, this was the first time in recent memory where decision makers—what we refer to as the 'demand side' of the hiring and appointment process—were pulled together for this kind of discussion," says Renée Byng Branch, COF's Assistant Vice President of Diversity and Inclusive Practices.

More than 60 participants in the convening identified two key steps: (1) connect search firms that know diverse candidates with foundations seeking executives from diverse backgrounds; (2) introduce the "Next Gen" to careers in philanthropy and mentor them early in those careers.

These steps formed the basis for COF's [Career Pathways Pipeline Expansion Program](#). Launched in July 2010, Career Pathways is a leadership preparation program for mid-career philanthropy professionals of diverse backgrounds interested in higher-level positions. Over the course of one year, participants attend small-group learning sessions facilitated by both philanthropic leaders and executive search consultants and receive one-on-one coaching and career planning. The second Career Pathways cohort is currently in formation.

Career Pathways does not come with a guarantee of an executive position, but the program takes rigorous steps to help participants improve their likelihood of success. The inaugural class of 15 has reported promotions, incentive bonuses, increased recognition and visibility, and new jobs. As of this writing, the Council on Foundations is recruiting applicants to form the second Career Pathways cohort. Branch reports that the Council is also developing a formal long-term evaluation to measure the program's effectiveness.

While the Career Pathways continues on its trajectory, COF is also exploring producing a toolkit of case studies and best practices for hiring and retaining leaders from diverse backgrounds.

Ultimately, says Branch, "we hope that talent pools become more inclusive and more senior leaders from diverse backgrounds are prepared and considered for executive positions."