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# DIVERSITY DERAILED

LIMITED DEMAND, EFFORT AND RESULTS  
IN ENVIRONMENTAL C-SUITE SEARCHES

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**A REPORT BY MAYA A. BEASLEY, Ph.D.**

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

[www.diversegreen.org](http://www.diversegreen.org)

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Many thanks to all of those who participated in surveys and interviews. Your willingness to participate is a positive sign of your interest in diversifying this sector and this report would not have been made possible without you. And special thanks to all of those involved in this work for lending their expertise and drive to see it to fruition.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

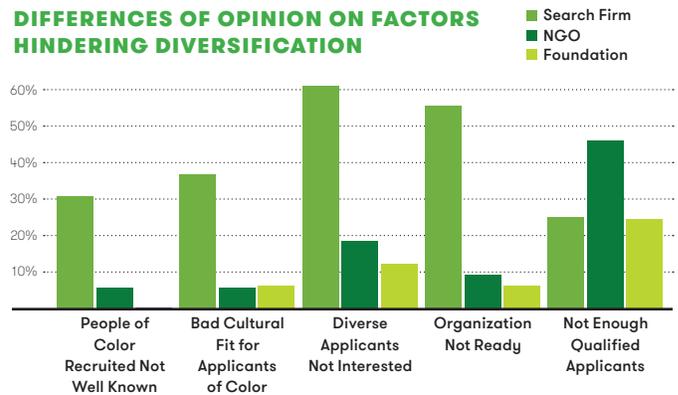
Search firms serve two roles in diversifying senior leadership. The first is to partner with organizations to identify what they are looking for in a new hire. The second is to help organizations move beyond their own networks to find the best candidates.

Despite the relatively high proportion of well-educated people of color in the United States, diversity among management and leadership in a variety of sectors remains limited. In the environmental sector, particularly, people of color comprise only 12 to 16 percent of staff at environmental organizations and agencies (Taylor 2014). Organizations are increasingly turning to executive search firms to assist them in hiring for senior level positions, and often express interest in finding more diverse candidates, thereby, making search firms the gatekeepers of the networks that impact the movement of talent (Falconbridge, Beaverstalk, Hall and Hewitson 2009).

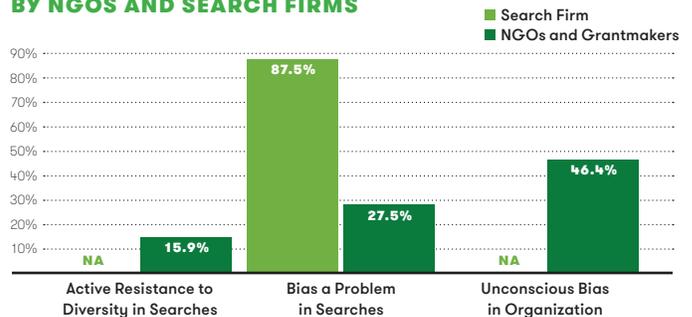
## Study on Diversity in Executive Searches

Research on executive search firms and their practices has been limited, with virtually no assessment of executive search firms' impact on increasing diversity and which specific practices used by these firms and their clients are more or less effective. This study, therefore, examines the executive search process used by mainstream environmental NGOs and foundations, and the search firms they employ to assist them in diversifying their senior staff. We conducted 85 in-depth interviews and surveys from CEOs, COOs and HR Directors of major U.S.-based environmental NGOs and foundations as well as consultants from blue chip and boutique executive search firms identified as having been used frequently by environmental organizations in the recent past.

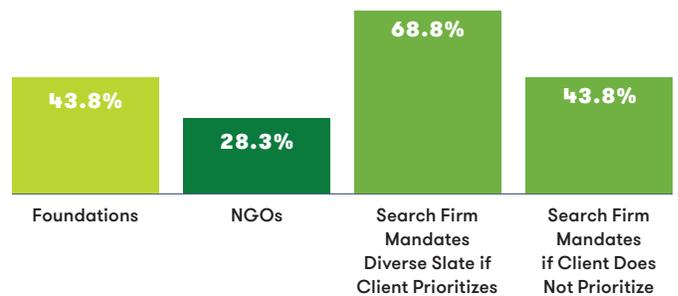
### DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ON FACTORS HINDERING DIVERSIFICATION



### PERCEIVED BIAS/RESISTANCE TO DIVERSITY BY NGOS AND SEARCH FIRMS



### MANDATING DIVERSE SLATE — SEARCH FIRMS, NGOS AND FOUNDATIONS



## What is Hindering Diversity in the Search Process

When asked what hinders their capacity to diversify, NGOs and foundations believe there are not enough qualified and diverse candidates to diversify the senior level. Search firms, on the other hand, cited a lack of organizational readiness, disinterest in environmental advocacy by potential job candidates, and a bad cultural fit as factors impeding diversity. This difference in perspective inhibits organizations' and search firms' ability to achieve their common goal of diversifying organizational leadership.

### Breakdown of diversity as a search priority.

While 81 percent of search firms said they raise the issue of diversity with clients, the practice was inconsistent. Our interviews reveal that blue chip search firms allow the client to take the lead. If a client does not signal that diversity is a priority, only 43 percent of search consultants reported mandating a diverse slate. Furthermore, only 28 to 44 percent of NGOs and foundations, respectively, mandate diversity on their short lists, meaning the majority of these organizations lack the discipline to demand diversity throughout the search process. Both search firms and organizations need to be responsible for ensuring diversity is a top priority and not just one of several criteria.

### Existing biases and compressed search timelines.

According to search consultants, the biggest barrier to bringing a diverse slate of candidates was organizations not allowing the time needed to find strong diverse candidates, and that their ability to ensure a diverse candidate slate depended on the client's sense of urgency. This issue of compressed timeline coupled with existing biases creates the conditions for organizations to maintain a senior leadership that is neither diverse nor inclusive. For example, 46 percent of organizations surveyed agreed that there was unconscious or overt bias to diversity within their organization and 87 percent of search consultants affirmed that bias had been a problem in past searches.

### Overemphasis on cultural fit.

Some organizations hinder their ability to diversify at senior levels by wanting a specific cultural fit within an organization, or in some cases, wanting a specific set of individuals. When participants were given a scenario to choose a candidate based on a short list of two black men, an Ivy League graduate and HBCU graduate, and one White man, there was considerable variance between responses. While few or none of NGOs, foundations, and search firm representatives believed the Ivy League grad could offer a different perspective, roughly one-fourth, one-fifth and one-third believed that candidate would be a better fit for the organization respectively. This suggests a serious conundrum for organizations that believe in the value of diversity but seek a cultural fit.

## Best Practices for Diversity in Searches

In order to conduct searches that are conducive to a high degree of diversity, organizations and search firms should deploy the following best practices:

- **Mandate a diverse candidate slate:** The National Football League's Rooney Rule, which mandates that any team with a head coaching vacancy must interview at least one person of color before making a hire, has increased candidates of color filling head coaching positions. Furthermore, the Harvard Business Review (HBR) found that whatever demographic group comprised the majority of a finalist pool (e.g. men vs. women, Whites vs. people of color) was likely to be chosen as the favored candidate [Johnson, Hekman and Chan 2016]. When at least two candidates were Black or Hispanic, a Black or Hispanic person was more likely to be selected. See HBR video at: <http://bit.ly/28XO4rH>
- **Diversify the search committee:** An interview panel and/or search committee should have "at least one different-race interviewer in a panel [who] may serve as a check and balance on the evaluation process" (Lin, Dobbins and Farh 1992 p. 396). Hiring agents of color are more likely than their white counterparts to recommend applicants of color (Stoll, Raphael and Holzer 2004) which may be the result of in-group preferences that benefit people of color just as they do whites (Giuliano, Levine and Leonard 2009).
- **Structure the interview process to minimize bias:** Structuring the interview process as much as possible minimizes bias in hiring. Organizations should assess candidates with a series of predetermined job-relevant questions in order to focus on candidate responses and not demographic stereotypes (Campion, Palmer and Campion 1997).
- **Track leaks throughout the hiring process:** Applicant tracking systems (ATSs) are now sophisticated enough that they can be used as tools for detecting and monitoring diversity in the applicant and new-hire pipeline.
- **Measure process and outcomes:** Assessing diversity throughout the recruitment, interview, hiring and retention process is critical to achieving change. Search firms should measure the diversity of applicant pools, and of the final slate of candidates, and the retention rates of hires, and share this information regularly with clients and potential clients. NGOs and foundations should demand these statistics along with the search firm's commitment to diversity both internally and in sourcing candidates.

# INTRODUCTION

The United States population is becoming increasingly diverse as has the subpopulation of Americans with at least a college degree. In 2014, approximately 32% of the population 25 years of age and older was non-white. That same year, 24% of those with at least a bachelor's degree were people of color<sup>1</sup> (U.S. Census Bureau 2015). Yet diversity among management and leadership in a variety of sectors remains limited. People of color account for only 10% and 15% of the American civilian labor force employed as chief executives or general and operations managers but comprise 23% and 19% of human resource workers and social and community service managers (American Community Survey 2016).

Only a small percentage of racial disparities in hiring and salaries can be explained by differences in organizational characteristics, job demands, and candidates' human capital, while a considerable amount can be attributed to discrimination (Rivera 2012). Multiple studies<sup>2</sup> on employment discrimination (Pager and Shepherd 2008) found that people of color and whites with similar human capital characteristics (e.g., educational pedigree, work experience, skillsets, etc.) have drastically different employment outcomes.

## Diversity in the Environmental Advocacy Sector

The environmental advocacy sector has been slow to diversify, especially among the upper ranks. The 2014 landmark Green 2.0 study (Taylor 2014) found executive and leadership positions at the majority of environmental NGOs and foundations were by whites, with the only exception being the position of diversity manager. Among the major environmental NGOs and foundations surveyed, 97% and 71% of the top three positions (executive director, president, and vice president) had white incumbents. In contrast, 58 percent of diversity managers were people of color (Taylor 2014).

There is a disjuncture between the existence of highly qualified people of color and the recruitment and retention practices employed by top environmental organizations that has yet to be addressed. An annual average of 1,710<sup>3</sup> and 3,160<sup>4</sup> people of color received J.D.s and M.B.A.s each year from the top 20 ranked business and law schools respectively in 2013 and 2014 (U.S. Department of Education 2016). Moreover, as of 2013, there were an estimated 50,566 people of color employed with graduate degrees in biological or environmental sciences (National Science Foundation 2014). For a thorough review, please see Appendix A.

## Use of Executive Search Firms To Increase Diversity

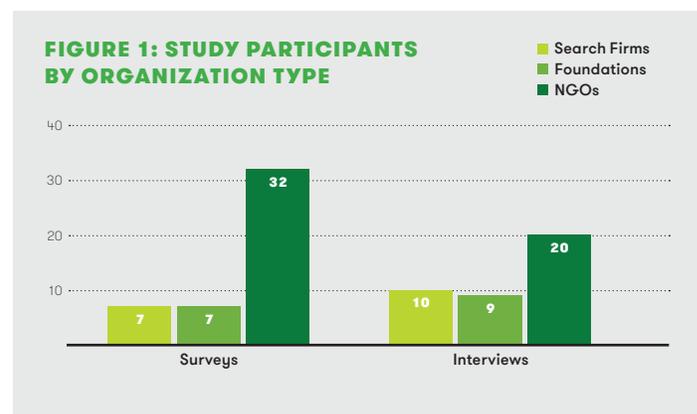
In order to diversify at senior levels, organizations are increasingly turning to executive search firms for assistance in finding heterogeneous candidate pools. Search firms build talent pools from which they select qualified candidates to present to their clients (Finlay and Coverdill 2002) and effectively act as gatekeepers of the networks that impact the movement of talent (Faulconbridge, Beaverstalk, Hall and Hewitson 2009). Job candidates generally do not nominate themselves when executive search firms are involved. Instead, search firms have staff dedicated to maintaining a database(s) of senior personnel who can be contacted in the future (Cappelli and Mamoi 2014) but who are not openly planning to change jobs (Finlay and Coverdill 2002). Search firms are typically retained on an exclusive basis (Dreher, Lee and Clerkin 2011). Consultants approach individuals identified within the database who they perceive may be good matches for a given vacancy and inquire whether they are interested in being considered for a position, thereby beginning the search process (Cappelli and Mamoi 2014).

Research on executive search firms and their practices has been limited, however; the majority of what has been published is in trade journals focused on marketing and advice for practitioners (Hamori 2010; Dreher, Lee and Clerkin 2011). We, therefore, have a minimal understanding of the impact of employing executive search firms to increase diversity and which specific practices used by these firms and their clients are more or less effective.

## This Study

Until recently, little has been done to address why environmental organizations remain so racially homogeneous in the face of an increasingly diverse constituency and pool of qualified candidates. Moreover, the majority of research on employment disparities across sectors tends to be based on analysis of pre- or post-interview aspects of hiring. Yet, workplace inequalities are established and engrained in organizational practices and policies that recruit, rate, hire, retain and promote employees. Investigating inequality by relying solely on employee data rather than incorporating organizational characteristics and behaviors is methodologically and theoretically flawed (Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2010). The study that follows is part of a small but important research agenda to examine how organizations and actors influence the employment of people of color in leadership positions.

85 in-depth interviews and surveys were conducted to identify the ways NGOs, foundations and executive search firms approach and practice diversification at the senior levels. As shown in Figure 1, participants included the CEOs, COOs and HR Directors of major U.S.-based environmental advocacy organizations and foundations as well as consultants from executive search firms<sup>5</sup> used frequently by environmental advocacy organizations in the recent past. For a detailed description of the sample and methods of analysis used, please see Appendix B.



## This Report

This report examines the executive search processes used by environmental NGOs, foundations, and the search firms they employ to assist them in diversifying their senior staff; it is largely exploratory because little prior empirical research has been conducted on how executive search firms participate in these processes.

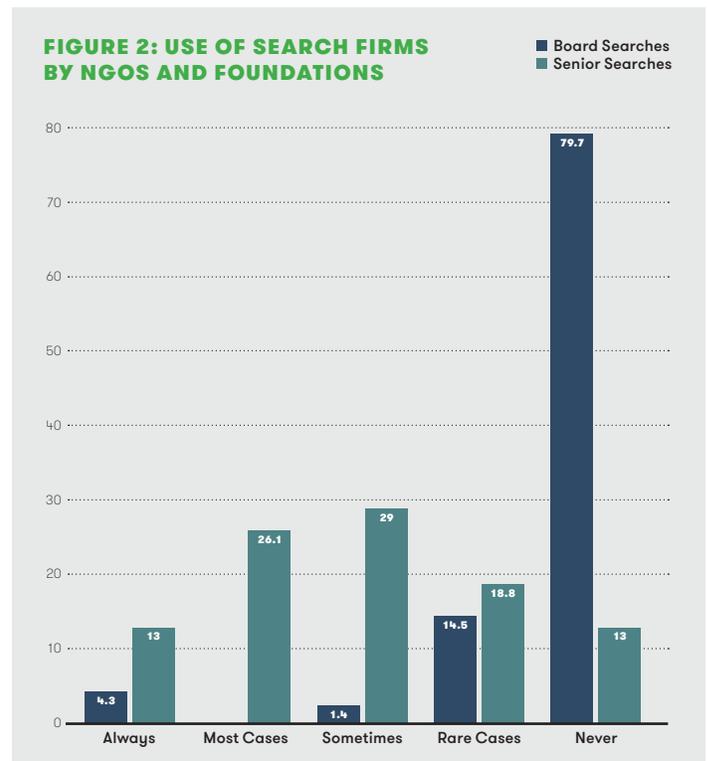
# THE ROLE OF SEARCH FIRMS IN DIVERSIFYING SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Over the past 25 years, organizations across sectors and industries have increasingly used targeted recruiting to increase demographic diversity (Knouse 2009). More and more have turned to executive search firms to recruit women and people of color to positions of senior leadership and boards (McCool 2008). Only a small number of firms are responsible for the majority of searches and most search consultants are white men. An examination of a Business Week list of the 100 most influential headhunters showed that approximately 73% were white men (Dreher, Lee and Clerkin 2011). Likewise, earlier data released by the Association of Executive Search Consultants showed that only 28% of the 3,430 consultants at its 170 member firms were female and no data was provided on race (Sanders 2001). This closely mirrors the composition of the candidate pools sourced by executive search firms (Dreher, Lee and Clerkin 2011). For example, a sample drawn from the database of one of the largest search firms in the United States was 97% white and 93% male (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, and Bretz 1995).

Because search consultants rely heavily on social networks to develop candidate slates (Finlay and Coverdill 2000), it is not surprising that an industry dominated by white men would be more likely to connect with white men than women or people of color (Dreher, Lee and Clerkin 2011). Executive search firms tend to negatively weigh staff roles (relative to line positions) when evaluating people of color, but not white men. Likewise, educational credentials of people of color are more scrutinized than are those of their white counterparts (Dreher, Lee and Clerkin 2011).

Executive search consultants and their clients, when not cognizant of or actively checking their own prejudices, may act on tendencies to associate with others who are similar to themselves (homophily), and have preferences and status expectations (See Appendix A). Prior research shows that recruiters often emphasize issues of “chemistry” and “fit” — ambiguous terms that are largely irrelevant to the skills required for a given position. White male recruiters and search committee members may act upon their homophily preferences under the guise of needing candidates to share the chemistry of the organization (Doldor et al 2012). Under those circumstances, people of color may be appraised less favorably, regardless of their actual qualifications, rendering searches ineffective in recruiting and hiring diverse leaders.

As shown in Figure 2, the majority of organizations represented in this study use search firms. However, it is important to note that while 68% of NGOs and foundations responding in this study used search firms at least “sometimes” in their senior staff searches, 94% reported using search firms “rarely” or “never” for their board searches. Because much of the focus of this research is on the ways in which search firms participate in the search process, and due to the fact that most HR personnel are not involved with board searches, this report focuses only on senior staff searches, not on board searches.



Of the more than two-thirds of organizations that engage search firms at least sometimes, there appears to be a general consensus that the search firm is intended to serve two basic roles: (1) to act as a partner in helping organizations find what they are looking for in a new hire; and (2) to help organizations move beyond their own networks in order to bring in the best candidates. Organizations often described their work with search firms as a team effort. For example, the HR manager of one foundation stated,

*Generally, it's quite collaborative with the search firms. I would say that HR is always really involved in working with the manager and with the search firm. We have regular conversations with the search consultant. We jointly spec the job. The search firm helps us finalize the job description and then they do their sourcing. They bring forward candidates that we evaluate and review for their skill sets, and then we do phone screening. So it's a partnership I would say with our search firm; we also consult with the search firms if there are organizations that we think that they should consult with or if we have candidates that we know should be part of a slate.*

Organizations also expressed an awareness of their own limitations in bringing new blood to an organization. The HR director of an NGO cited using a boutique search firm as part of their strategic redesign. They felt their capacity to find candidates who would offer something different was limited and that in the face of change, including change within their human resources system, they could not rely solely on their normal recruitment and hiring practices. The director referred to the relationship with the search firm as a “partnership” and noted, “It just makes sense to get them involved. But I think that once we've come to a normal hiring process we wouldn't really need to get them involved.”

What going beyond their own organizational networks meant varied widely. However, perhaps most germane to this study, most organizations that prioritized diversity at upper levels intentionally sought out search firms with a reputation for success. Regarding their most recent searches, the executive director of a large NGO stated, “we chose those search firms that have a good track record on finding and building a diverse pool of candidates in their searches.” In this case, it meant hiring a smaller firm that specialized in non-profit organizations. Likewise, the HR director who described their work with search consultants as a partnership went on to explain,

*We emphasize to every search consultant the importance of providing a diverse candidate pool, which sometimes they're able to do and sometimes they're not. But usually when you hire a search consultant that's what you pay them for.*

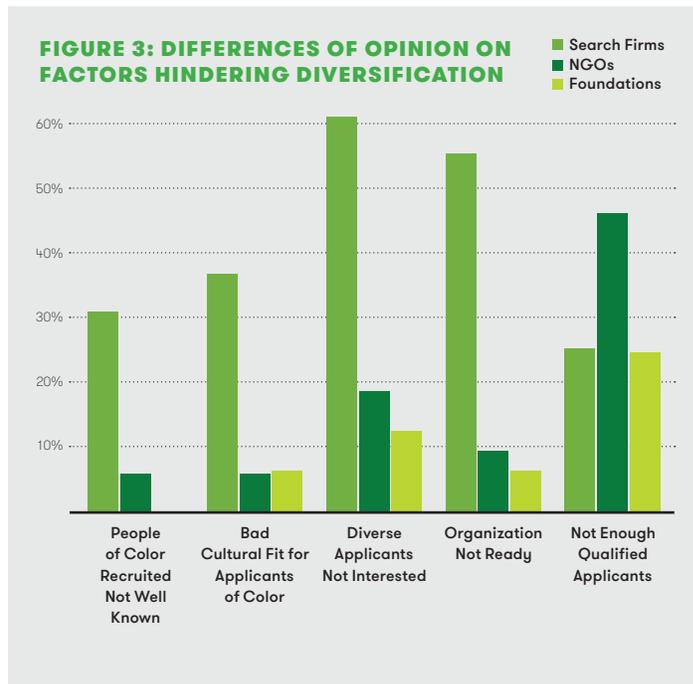
As the HR director noted, sometimes search firms were able to bring in diverse candidates and sometimes they weren't. As we discuss in the section titled “Approaching Diversity in the Search Process,” some of that is a matter of the tools and priorities of the search consultants themselves, and some of it is a matter of an organization's commitment to diversifying their senior leadership.

# WHAT IS HINDERING DIVERSITY IN THE SEARCH PROCESS

Although 72% of NGOs and foundations could identify at least five (out of seven) benefits associated with diversity in an organization, most admitted to having trouble diversifying, especially at senior levels. What participants believed was hindering their capacity to diversify, however, varied considerably by the type of organization responding. Specifically, for NGOs and foundations, it came down to one primary factor: not enough qualified and diverse applicants (non-white). Search consultants, however saw more and different obstacles.

As shown in Figure 3, less than 10% of foundations and NGO participants agreed that, “this organization is not ready” (i.e., we do not have a culture of inclusivity or a mandate for diversity); “there is often a bad cultural fit for applicants of color unrelated to their qualifications”; or that “the people of color we do recruit to apply are not well-known, so members of the search committee may be reluctant to support their candidacy.” A slightly larger proportion affirmed, “Diverse applicants are not interested in this organization.” However, far more (25% and 47% of representatives from foundations or NGOs) agreed “there are not enough qualified applicants.”

In stark contrast, lack of qualified applicants was the factor search firms were the least likely to identify as being a hindrance to diversity. Instead, a lack of organizational readiness, disinterest in environmental advocacy by potential job candidates, and a bad cultural fit were the three most commonly selected factors by search consultants. This considerable disparity in outlook between environmental non-profits and the search firms they use is indicative of a clear disjuncture between search firms, particularly boutique firms, and the organizations that hire them regarding what it takes to increase and maintain diversity at the senior level.



## Not Enough Qualified Applicants

The most common problem identified by NGOs and foundations was lack of qualified applicants of color to diversify. However, few NGOs and foundations were able to elaborate on this issue. Indeed, the few that did comment on it gave vague responses that neither specified to what extent there was a dearth of qualified candidates nor what evidence they had that such an issue existed. This CEO of an NGO attempted to point out a pipeline problem using his/her personal conclusions as proof:

*There have not been the mechanisms that have built as many [non-white] candidates that could do this. I think it's most recently happening, but my own experience was the pipeline was relatively weak and it's getting stronger in the last decade, or the last five years.*

A small number of search firm consultants also made vague reference to a pipeline problem in their interviews. Most of these statements came from consultants at blue chip firms who suggested that people of color were not educationally qualified for senior leadership positions. For example, one consultant from a blue chip firm offered,

*I don't think that there's enough effort at the schooling levels to be attracting people. We're seeing limited qualifications across a number of different demographic categories. But with that said, I don't think that they're not existent either. In terms of bringing people into the social sector, I think environmental [sector] is struggling, one of the vulnerable ones. Master's level education institutions are just not doing a good job of positioning the career trajectory in compelling ways and in meaningful ways to be pulling in people from different demographics.*

Similarly, another consultant noted,

*I think part of it is the pipeline. My sense from the experience I have had is there is not, there are not as many candidates, diversity candidates in the pipeline in this particular field. Environmental justice in urban areas maybe, but in general if you're talking about every kind of environmental organization including sustainability and everything else, there is just not as much of a pipeline.*

Senior leadership in environmental NGOs and foundations can come from a broad array of educational backgrounds. When asked for clarification about which educational qualifications were most commonly absent among people of color, the only field search consultants identified was “development” which is not an educational field. As a part of their job, search consultants should be aware of and recruiting a significant number of people of color with relevant advanced degrees from elite institutions who are already in the workforce. As one consultant from a boutique firm pointed out, “If you can't find a diverse pool of candidates, something is desperately wrong with your search practice.”

## Diverse Applicants Not Interested in Environmental Organizations

Search firms also noted that the environmental sector's reputation for homogeneity and exclusion was problematic. One consultant at a boutique firm focused on diversity explained that this reputation was something environmental organizations had done little to overcome:

*People of color don't know about [environmental NGOs and foundations] or they have a bad association with them. I tell clients that; I tell them, “you have a terrible reputation in communities of color as a place to work.” And I think organizations do very little to offset that.*

## Organizational Readiness for Diversity

Although no interviewees from NGOs or foundations discussed organizational readiness in terms of their perceptions of what was hindering diversity, it was clear that a number of them believed the cultures of their organizations were problematic. One NGO executive director pointed to the amount of pressure placed upon people of color once they enter the organization and their likelihood of leaving:

*We have found the transition from going from a largely white population to more racially diverse and eventually multicultural is hard because you have — as you bring in a few people of color, they're not surrounded by folks that they feel comfortable with. They're encountering racism in the organization, staff, board, volunteers, members, which is further alienating. They're often relied on to explain issues or to recruit other people from their own background and so there's an extra burden placed on them, series of extra burdens placed on them, and that's hard. So, we found that to be a significant challenge.*

Search firms, on the other hand, were far more likely to discuss a lack of organizational readiness as a major obstacle to diversity. Rather than shrug their shoulders and move forward with organizations they saw as unready, several search firm representatives took responsibility for creating organizational readiness for real diversity. One search consultant noted,

*I will say it's my experience that it can be really difficult to be the first person [of color] and also there are many people who don't want to be the first person of color at a senior leadership level, and that impacts the search. We've had a lot of frank conversations about that. I've recommended executive coaching. I've recommended diversity consultants. I've sort of run the gambit to keep options open.*

Similarly, another consultant noted,

*If we found that the organization didn't have — their diversity readiness quotient was low — then we would pay particular attention to coaching that individual if they were selected and supporting that person.*

While many search consultants believed organizations were not prepared to have diverse leadership, not all search consultants felt it their job to change or support organizational readiness.

## Bad Cultural Fit and People Of Color as Unknown Entities

Almost 40% of search consultants identified “bad cultural fit” as a hindrance to organizational diversity while only 5.7% and 6.3% of participants from NGOs and foundations did so. In addition, 31% of search consultants agreed that a lack of network ties to people of color was an obstacle, yet only 6% of NGO personnel and no foundation representatives concurred. Two basic obstacles were noted: (1) the desire or proclivity of individuals within organizations to replicate the status quo; and (2) a lack of awareness about where to find people of color they believed would fit those characteristics.

A search consultant noted the tendency of organizations and individuals to be attracted to what is familiar:

*It's so easy to gravitate towards what looks familiar, what's already within their network, their own networks, whatever it might be. It's just so easy to gravitate towards that. Deviating from that becomes a challenge both for the search firm and the HR department even, and the hiring team.*

A CEO confirmed that a lot of their senior hiring had been done through personal referrals that had inhibited diversifying:

*In terms of recruitment, a lot of hiring was done through the circles that you know, personal referrals, etcetera. So being a largely white or largely middle or upper-middle class organization, largely based on coasts, it's difficult to break out of that cycle. Most people's contexts are largely homogenous and so it's hard to get out of that.*

Similarly, another CEO pointed to how narrowly they had been looking for leadership in the past:

*The organization operated for many, many years with a pretty narrow view of what it was looking for. And we've been trying to change that, but anybody on the search committee brings biases to their work. I guess it goes back to trying to be clear about the criteria for the job and for those criteria, what are the skills, as opposed to what school did you go to. And breaking down our traditional bias for the people who had already been in the environmental community, and bringing in more people who had not. That was a bias we worked hard to reduce and eliminate.*

Once the organization did open itself up to using criteria they had not previously considered, the CEO explained that diversifying the leadership had been rather easy:

*It's opened lots of great doors for us to expand who we're talking to and to bring in lots of great people who would not have otherwise considered coming here.*

# APPROACHING DIVERSITY IN THE SEARCH PROCESS

In order to diversify at the senior level, environmental NGOs and foundations are increasingly turning to executive search firms. The results of these searches have been mixed. Searches without a diverse slate of candidates are often the result of: (1) a lack of commitment on the part of search consultants to ensure diversity; (2) a lack of willingness of organizational leaders to provide the time necessary to find a qualified, diverse slate of candidates; (3) a tendency for organizations to feel most comfortable with the cultural known vs. the unknown; and (4) the resulting disconnect between search firms and organizations about the priority for a diversified candidate search.

## Search Firm Commitment to Diversity

One key roadblock to a diverse slate of candidates is the commitment level of the search consultant. While 81% of search consultants said they raise the issue of diversity with all clients, their commitment to doing so was nuanced. For example, some search consultants do not raise the issue of diversity because it is a mandate within in their practice to bring diversity, regardless of client priorities. One particularly successful boutique search firm consultant pointed out that,

*I don't [bring it up]; I only raise it if they raise it. I don't bring it up because I know there's going to be some diversity in the pool anyway because that's what we're going to do.*

Another boutique consultant explained that they do bring it up, but like the consultant quoted above, they present a diverse slate regardless of what the client requests:

*So in both our proposals and in our meetings with clients we ask the clients about their diversity mandates and their diversity objectives and whether or not finding diverse candidates is a priority. We certainly have a strong statement about our diversity practices and our proposals and as part of our contracts. So we, even if the client does not expressly indicate that they are looking for diversity in candidates, as part of our approach to searches, will attempt to present the diversity of candidates. Say we present a slate of five candidates. Of those five, we try to make sure at least one is a person of color, one is a female, and at least there are some other demographics than white male.*

In other cases, usually with consultants from blue chip firms, the client takes the lead. As one consultant explained, they discuss diversity as one among several criteria a hiring organization may or may not bring up:

*I would say that much of the criteria around diversity in that discussion probably comes first in what we call a 'pickup meeting,' sort of understanding what the needs of the organization are. The focus tends to be more the criteria of what will make somebody successful in the role as opposed to does this person need to be diverse in order to be successful in the role. So I think the diversity conversation in most of these conversations tends to be more 'it would be great if' as opposed to 'we really want it.' And I leave that up to the client.*

Similarly, another blue chip firm consultant noted that while diversity is "a core value and core metric that we track and publicize," it does not come up in every search. "Our clients focus on diversity with varying degrees of intensity so we're delivering what they want." Although all the search firms interviewed and surveyed identified a variety of benefits associated with diversity, and while all of those who participated in interviews expressed a commitment to diversity, what that meant in practice varied significantly. Often cursory diversity commitments came at the expense of an unsuccessful search and amounted to trial and error.

The CEO of one of the larger NGOs expressed his/her disappointment with their investment in certain search firms:

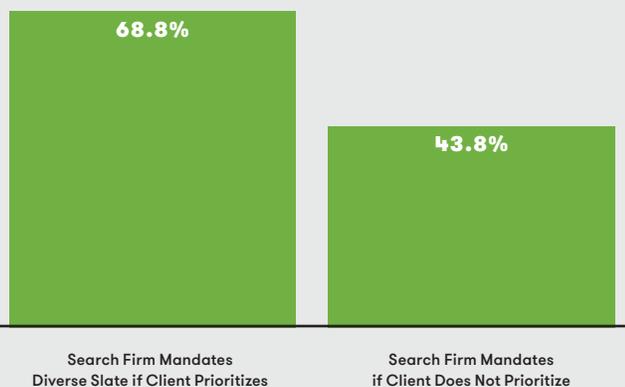
*Some have made [diversity] part of the core mission, others haven't. Some had great experience with doing this, others haven't. Some are more diligent about finding a diverse candidate pool, others aren't. There's a pretty wide disparity we found amongst search firms that are doing this. So, it's getting to a point now where everybody knows they need to say they're going to produce a diverse candidate. Well, some were better than others.*

The HR manager of another NGO who works closely with the search firms contracted noted,

*Our experience with them has not been great in terms of diversity. My experience, I have to speak about them globally, is that even though we say that's a priority, that somehow doesn't show up as a priority. It ends up at some point where all the people of color are on the C lists, of the ABC lists with [search firms] saying that "we try." I'm not a big fan of them.*

One factor that contributes to the dearth of diversity produced in searches described by the executives above is the search firm's own lack of commitment to mandating diversity in the search. Figure 4 shows that despite a professed commitment to diversity by all search consultants that participated, only 69% mandated that the slate of candidates they returned to a client was a diverse slate, and only if that client had stated diversity was a priority in the search. Thus, in at least 30% of cases, clients who expressed an interest in diversity would deal with consultants who did not have a commitment to ensuring a diverse slate. Moreover, as noted earlier in this report, some search firms approach the search process with the assumption that they are there to service their client, not follow their own organizational or personal commitment to diversity. Thus, only 43% of search consultants reported mandating a diverse slate in cases in which a client had not signaled that diversity was a priority.

**FIGURE 4: PERCENT OF SEARCH FIRMS MANDATING DIVERSITY FOR CANDIDATE SLATE**

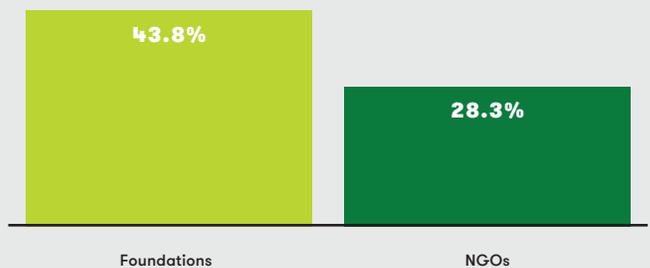


## Client Willingness to Ensure a Diverse Slate

Clients and search firms do not always align in priorities, and perhaps this is where having a search firm that mandates a diverse slate rather than organizations relying on their own resolve for making a diverse hire becomes most clear. This may be especially important since only 28% and 44% of NGOs and foundations mandate that there must be some sort of diversity represented on their short lists.

In some cases, individuals in leadership positions recognize that searches can take time and that finding the right candidate is more important than filling the position. The executive director of one foundation took this very seriously. "We don't make mistakes. We do it until we've got the right candidate and if the right candidate doesn't come along for quite a while it stays open."

**FIGURE 5: PERCENT OF NON-PROFITS MANDATING DIVERSITY ON SHORT LIST**



In other cases, however, there is a sense of expediency. "We go with the most qualified person or someone that gets the job qualifications," explained one HR manager. Despite having emphasized the importance of diversity to their organization, when asked if they would keep a job open in order to find more diverse candidates than what was initially presented, the manager responded: "You mean strictly to find a more diverse candidate? I'm not aware of doing that."

The CEO of an NGO helped elucidate the internal debates some organizations may be having between prioritizing diversity and filling a position.

*I think what you're probably getting at is 'what's the relative weight you're going to give as an organization and a board,' right? Everyone will say it's important, but what's the relative weight that you're going to give them. And I think that as a field, there's a big disparity. On one side there's a set of players who say it's a good idea but they're sort of positively opting in: 'we can even choose a diverse candidate if they're as good in every way as anyone else. Don't bother us otherwise.'*

The other side of the field places a far greater priority on diversity because equity is important, but the long-term survival of the organization is even more important. The CEO continued,

*This is rare in an environmental community, and I can't even point to an example. But just for the purposes of this comparison, we'd say we're going to really actively — some foundations might do this — we're going to actively to push toward diversity even though it may not be at quite the same skill level and so on, because we just believe strongly that that's the right longer-term solution.*

The conundrum for some organizations with this line of reasoning, however, is that funding and internal metrics directing these organizations are short-term:

*A lot of funding is driven by what can you win in the next year, two years, three years, what can you deliver. In that context, it's hard to pause and put the time and energy into diversity programs that would deliver the quality that many of us understand is important for the longer-term win. And it's the ecosystem in which we live in, I mean, an Executive Director challenge. Any of the green NGOs that you might have talked to love the idea of diversity. But that costs time, and it takes a smart senior staff to do it well. And that runs up my overhead and I can't make an argument to the foundations that I should have a higher overhead for that. So they get caught in the ecosystem that's not supportive of it as a whole. And that's a tough choice as an executive director to try to do that well, you know? I think that's where we find ourselves as a community in this.*

Still other organizational representatives asserted that the short-sightedness was something that could be corrected with basic training rather than continuing with the status quo and remaining locked in the dysfunctional ecosystem described above. One executive director of an NGO became very animated when confronted with this issue and suggested that organizations are failing without diversity. Continuing to hire for expediency and a specific career pedigree, he explained, was causing organizations to fail.

*We're not getting the job done. But I want to hire somebody that looks just like the last guy who wasn't getting the job done. Well, how dumb is that? I learned a long time ago, one of my mentors told me — you hire for attitude and you train for skill. Every time I violated that, I've hired for skill, outside of a skill position, every time I've hired for skill, I've had to fire for attitude.*

*What arrogance to say they have to know how to do this as if we're building nuclear power plants. This isn't rocket science. This [environmental advocacy] is cultural and social awareness and creativity. If they're willing to work hard and learn and they're open to new ideas, they're good with people and they can communicate, what more do you want? This isn't rocket science. Teach them those other skills. People have it absolutely backwards."*

The HR director of one foundation did, in fact, articulate this exact concern the CEO above referenced regarding finding people who had what he/she referred to as "capabilities" that were extremely rare.

*We're looking for a fairly specific set of experiences or qualifications. But while we make efforts to reach diverse candidate pools, sometimes, we're looking for a set of capabilities — there may only be handful of people in the world with them. None of us are likely to take people who are inexperienced, with less depth and less connected, and that may exclude people who are diverse.*

Yet several other interview participants agreed with the CEO that there were plenty of capable people of color with strong career backgrounds that could be brought up to speed in the environmental sector rather quickly. One executive director explained,

*There are qualified people out there who are not working directly in our movement but are working in related movements, have comparable skillsets, and can learn the issues around [the environment]. Hopefully, they're passionate about these things or they wouldn't be applying for job at [an organization] like ours.*

Similarly, the COO of one NGO whose mid to senior leadership was diversifying quickly clarified that part of their ability to successfully transition in a shorter period of time was owed to their belief in training talented people.

*It goes back to our organizational commitment to making sure that if we can at least find someone with those core elements of the job, we can hire because it is that important — we're willing to actually train this person for three months on the job for some of the specifics that they probably don't have but they have a lot of the core abilities. A lot of candidates have worked in other industries or the same industry but a different type of job. We can transfer a lot of skills that are really applicable for the job.*

Search consultants also saw the value in transferring skills from other sectors to environmental advocacy but recognized the reluctance among some of their clients to take this approach. One consultant from a blue chip firm explained,

*If someone has been the vice president of finance at a major non-profit, many of those skills are transferable to a VP of finance role in an environmental organization. Most organizations prefer to make hires that walk in the door with knowledge of their sector and a history of working in likeminded organizations, but I think being conscious about and more accepting of transferrable skills is one way that you can talk about re-prioritizing qualifications safely.*

The consultant noted that while this approach was often well-received in theory by environmental organizations, in practice, it was much more difficult to implement.

*They scare at such high stakes hires, it feels risky to them and they're not always willing to do it. But the organizations that are really committed, I think, can see beyond that sort of fear factor.*

Another consultant explained that applying transferrable skills from other sectors was not only a practice for finding diverse hires, but for finding the best hires. In reference to whether tradeoffs needed to be made in searches to find candidates, he/she responded emphatically,

*Yes. I would say that's true for every single search, because nobody is perfect. And if you looked at some of the criteria that's out there, it's like these are walk on water kind of criteria. There are always tradeoffs in searches*

Some consultants, in fact, noted a tendency to increase the desired qualifications in which diversity was prioritized, effectively making it into a search for a unicorn that did not exist regardless of demographic background:

*They always think they're going to get the superstar who's also diverse, who's also going to result in like — them achieving their biggest ambition ever. Diversity is wrapped up for sure in that unicorn.*

Indeed, as the COO of a large NGO pointed out, many of the senior leaders that currently exist in organizations do not have the skillsets or proven abilities that many NGOs insist upon for non-white new hires.

*There are people who were either brought in or promoted up that may not have all of the knowledge and expertise but because they have a certain personality and maybe they have a certain air about them, then that person maybe given some level deference [i.e., they may receive more favorable reviews than their objective qualifications warrant]. Sometimes, even if you have 10 years of experience within an environmental organization, what have you done with it? It's going to be difficult to shift that mindset for leaders because they've done that for so long. Getting them to take someone who may never have run an actual [specific environmental] campaign but has run some sort of grassroots campaign, and has done everything in terms of "soup to nuts." It's the willingness on the part of our leaders to try something new, rather than going with what we already have, which in some cases, isn't working.*

Contrary to what foundation and NGO leaders may assert is their general hiring pattern – bringing on people for senior leadership positions with direct experience within their own or similar organizations — prior research suggests that in practice, regardless of race, this is not the case. A study of foundations found that 67% of new CEOs appointed had not worked for a foundation in their prior job, and of that 67%, only about 25% came from positions in non-profit organizations.

Thus, the majority of newly appointed executives are outsiders who come from an entirely different field (Branch et al 2010). Likewise, a study of non-profit leaders found that 41% had spent most of their careers in the business or government sector (Suarez 2010).

Fortunately, for organizations trying to find senior leaders who are not only capable of doing the work but who will offer valuable new insights, skills are transferable across jobs and industries. Some jobs do require a knowledge base of the environmental sector, and this is where advocates of moving beyond the status quo assert training is most valuable. Jobs should not be revised to reduce skills in order to find diverse or any type of hires. Instead, candidates with the proven ability to do similar work can be educated about specific environmental campaigns. According to this line of reasoning, three months of training and perhaps some time lost is worth the long-term benefits of diversity and improved leadership.

## Comfort With The Known vs. The Unknown

This issue of expediency in hiring is closely related to organizational or leadership preferences to find people who fit a particular mold. Just as some organizations are reluctant to take the time to search for diverse hires that fit all their criteria or to find diverse candidates with transferrable skillsets who would require some onboarding, other organizations hinder their ability to diversify at senior levels by wanting a specific cultural fit within an organization, or in some cases, wanting a specific set of individuals.

According to some consultants, organizations were often mired in their own networks and used consultants primarily to reel in candidates they already had in mind from their networks. As one consultant asserted,

*The higher a position is the more the hiring process is wholly reliant on networking and not on kind of candidate marketing — going out to the market and really finding who's out there. It's really about, "Who you know, Joe. Find me so and so, and hook me up," and it's a phone call and a handshake, and the person's hired.*

Other consultants commented on current leadership's desire to find a good "cultural fit." The perception that others share aspects of our social identities like culture is frequently a strong mechanism for interpersonal attraction (Tajfel and Turner 1986), so the desire of organizational leaders to hire people whom they presume will share their culture is not surprising. One consultant explained that NGO leaders gravitated to what was culturally familiar.

*I do think there are unrealistic expectations that challenge the search firm and challenge the discipline of the organization to really be committed to a diverse hire along the way. It's so easy to gravitate towards what looks familiar, what's already within their network, their organization.*

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Another consultant stated, “I think this is one of the biggest challenges, I mean we’re all human beings. As those of us who’ve gone to the training now, we all have our biases.” And while demographic characteristics like race, class and gender can affect what is accessible in individuals’ cultural toolkits (Swidler 1986), intra-group differences are frequently larger than inter-group differences (Lamont and Small 2008). Moreover, empirical research shows that perceived similarity and interpersonal attraction have more significant effects than objective similarity (Graves and Powell 1995). In effect, assumptions about cultural similarities based on race or other demographic differences may be inaccurate both in terms of who is considered different and who is considered similar. The way this particular firm tried to deal with organizations that were looking for what they presumed was a good cultural fit was to:

*Try to really bring back all of the decision-making to the core competencies that we had to identify at the beginning of the search and continually focus on those and really gear the discussion away from less useful and more subjective perceptions and observations and takeaways. But again, we don’t entirely control that part of the process.*

This insistence upon maintaining a cultural fit or utilizing internal networks while trying to diversify an organization is somewhat antithetical. Prior research on organizational behavior does suggest that because organizational leaders facilitate and shape organizational cultures, new leaders may create new sets of shared values. As an organization grows and develops, employees draw from their new experiences, resulting in a culture that reflects the group experience and leaderships’ beliefs (Jaskyte 2004). As one consultant pointed out, “I think more about how candidates are going to contribute to the culture and help it evolve. How will their being there make it slightly different if not slightly better?”

## Assumptions About Credentials and People of Color

While some organizations were concerned about the ability of people of color to fit the current cultures of their organizations, others expressed concern that they bring in leaders they believed would offer a diverse perspective. That is, they wanted to ensure that the senior personnel of color whom were brought on would come to the table with thought processes, experiences and beliefs distinct from those of their white counterparts. An abundance of research has shown that (a) there is no single perspective or approach for any racial group (Celious and Oyserman 2001; Harper and Nichols); and (b) it also shows that increasing demographic diversity does, in fact, increase variance in beliefs, experiences and problem solving (Loes, Pascarella and Umbach 2011; Antonio et al 2004; Hurtado 2001). However, most people outside social science, believe that certain people of color are more authentic than others and in some cases, this “authenticity” was sought after by nonprofits and search consultants alike in their approach to recruiting people of color.

Participants in both the interviews and surveys were given the following scenario:

Imagine you had a short list of three candidates: two black men and one white man, all of who had virtually identical work experience (exactly what you were looking for on your list of qualifications) and equally strong references. Diversity is a top priority in this search.

They were then asked three questions<sup>6</sup>:

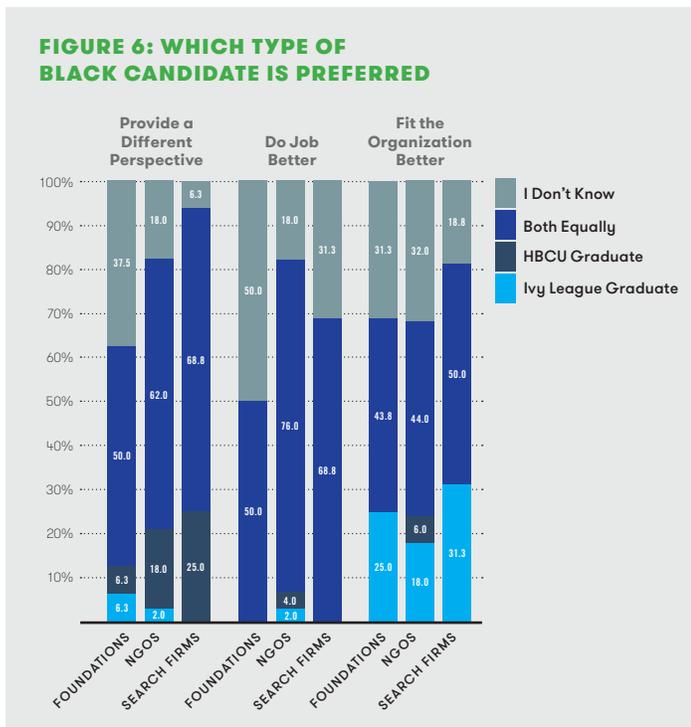
1. Which of the two black candidates do you think would ensure a different perspective for your organization (presuming your organization is primarily white male)?
2. Which candidate do you think could do the job better?
3. Which candidate do you think would be most likely to fit in at your organization?

In each case, their options were: (a) An Ivy League Graduate, (b) A Historically Black College or University Graduate, (c) Both Candidates Equally, or (d) I Don’t Know. Prior research and interviews for this study both indicate that people often view Ivy League graduates (or those from highly selective Predominately White Institutions) as being not truly black and having had the same experience as their white peers (Harris-Perry 2011).

In contrast, HBCU graduates are typically regarded as being more authentically black but have negative job outcomes including lower average earnings than their peers from predominantly white institutions (Strayhorn 2008). In reality, black students at HBCUs and Ivy Leagues are extremely heterogeneous relative to their white counterparts in terms of socioeconomic status, community background, and nativity (Torres 2006).

Figure 6 displays the results. Although the most common response to each question was both candidates equally, there was considerable variance otherwise which provides some insight into the issue of authenticity. In particular, while few or none of NGOs, foundations, and search firm representatives believed the Ivy League grad could offer a different perspective, roughly one-fourth, one-fifth and one-third believed that candidate would be a better fit for the organization respectively.

The readiness to assume an HBCU graduate would be more likely to offer a different perspective than a black graduate of an Ivy League institution and that an Ivy League graduate would be a better fit than an HBCU alum confirms that representatives of these organizations are making fallacious assumptions about the overlap between race and culture and what being black means. It also suggests a serious conundrum for organizations that believe in the value of diversity but which seek a cultural fit. That is, if organizations wish to reap the rewards diverse leadership can bring to their organizations because of differences in perspectives, experiences and beliefs, but think that those differences are contrary to the organizational culture they wish to maintain, the ability to recruit and retain a more heterogeneous leadership will be difficult.



## Maintaining Client Resolve to Prioritize Diversity

For search consultants, one of the biggest barriers they found in bringing in a diverse slate of candidates and/or eventually a non-white hire was the unwillingness of organizations to allow the needed time to find strong diverse candidates. One search consultant explained that the primary reason diversity broke down in searches was, in fact, due to time.

*The only thing that I can do along the way is to coach the organization to basically brace themselves at the beginning of this and ensure they're really going to be committed to making sure that they've got the right hire which hopefully includes diversity as one of the key actors in that. As a result, it's just going to take more time. And if they're not ready to put that time, it might mean that they're going to lose opportunity to hire the more diverse, more senior candidate.*

Similarly, another consultant asserted,

*A lot of it depends on our clients and their sense of urgency. If they have a particular need, if it's a CFO role or a CEO role, there's a sense that the show must go on, right? And so I think if the client has a sense of urgency, that's when those kinds of tradeoffs get made.*

Some consultants were comfortable with these tradeoffs, for example, in reference to finding a diverse slate, one noted, "We try to keep looking, but because of search timelines there's a point at which you have to say, 'Okay, I've got to go ahead; here's the strongest among those who we've identified.'" Other consultants, however, were less sympathetic to the non-profits they worked with about the sense of urgency they felt and believed the problem was a lack of discipline. As one consultant at a boutique search firm contended,

*The single biggest barrier, I think the word I can use, is discipline. It's really easy at the beginning of the hiring process for an organization to say it wants diversity. And what we often find is that they give up on that very early once they see a candidate with the skills that they want and it happens to not be a diverse candidate. They don't have the discipline to remain very committed to this ideal and so they give up on it pretty early on. But if there is a commitment being made to diversity, there has to be a discipline on a hiring process that evolves from that.*

How search firms handled this lack of discipline or sense of urgency on the part of organizations varied by their own commitment to diversity and the role they saw themselves playing. In some cases, consultants left it up to the organizations that retained them. For example, one pointed out,

*A lot if it depends on the client's comfort level with the pool. If they feel like they have exceptional candidates but not candidates of color, sometimes they want to move forward and sometimes they don't. That's really client-driven.*

Others saw it as their job to keep diversity at the forefront and to steer the search. One blue chip consultant was openly confrontational with clients:

*We generally try to say 'you guys need to be broad-minded; you've got your profile of the ideal candidate but no one is going to fit the ideal. And everyone is going to fall short.' And sometimes we say again, depending on the nature of the committee, 'I want you to let me send somebody in who I think you guys should see.' And sometimes that's around diversity and sometimes it's around other things. Whether or not candidates exactly fit in the specs we're saying it's our judgment that this person is worth an interview.*

Similarly, another consultant declared,

*We tell them. We challenge the status quo, particularly if they say they want a different type of leader but they're asking for the same competence and requirements and skills as the person who's leaving. That tells us that they just want to replicate the same type of person. So, yes, we do tell them. Sometimes clients are looking for certain experience that just doesn't seem to correlate with what they say they're looking for today, and we question that.*

Others insisted on changing qualifications they believed would stunt diversity in their candidate pool. For example, a boutique consultant explained that when he/she did not believe a qualification was necessary or realistic,

*I'll either try to take it out or if they insist, then I list it sort of as nice to have. Or I will sometimes say okay if you want to keep this, I want to put something else in.*

Still, for some search consultants, a client's disinterest in diversity could equate to them refusing to work with that client or ending the relationship. One consultant from a particularly diverse search firm asserted that,

*If we run into a client that said, "We're not interested in diversity" that would give us pause. It would, because it would then question whether or not they would be able to work effectively with us given our own representation. That would give me pause, significant pause.*

Likewise, another consultant pointed out that their success has made it possible for them to turn down searches when clients were not interested in diversifying:

*I think it's fair to say that and we also are very, very selective about who we work with. We've turned down more searches than we take on. If I met with a potential client and felt that that their values and the kind of organization they run and the kind of things they support would run contrary to our values, I wouldn't work with them. I think we're a little bit of a biased example in that sense; we're very selective about who we take on. Diversity is the core value of our practice. If I've thought an organization wouldn't be a hospitable place for a person of color, I wouldn't continue. I had one [search] last year and it was just horrid and I did phrase it as diplomatically as I could. And it's the god's honest truth; I was not the best person then and I've returned every dime and I just felt better about it.*

## Resistance to Diversity

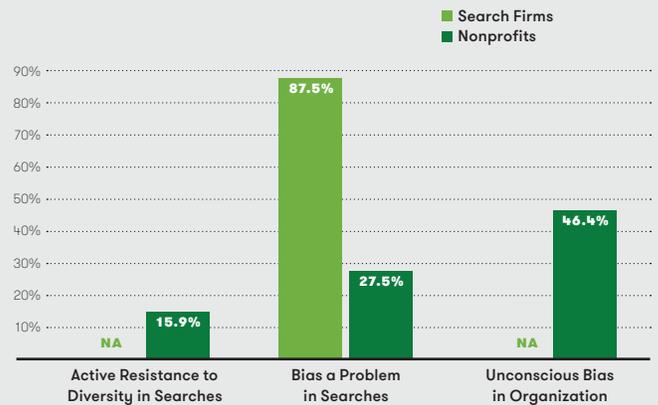
Having executive leadership, human resources, and search firm commitment to diversity are all essential to increasing diversity in the search process. However, a myth has arisen across sectors that if the leadership of an organization openly advocates for diversity then it will be realized in the search process. The assumption is that hiring managers, search committee members and other stakeholders in the search process also agree on the importance of increasing diversity. Instead, if there is any resistance to diversity, it may generate hostility that “plays out behind the closed doors of search committee deliberations” (Kayes 2006, p. 65).

The HR director of one NGO described the resistance to diversity by staff as being responsible for an increase in turnover when their leadership first embarked on a push to diversify several years prior:

*At that phase of our journey it was painful. When we said we want to be very deliberate and conscious about hiring and then having a work environment that is — makes room for diversity and equity discussions — some people said I don’t want to be a part of it and left. And other people who participated in that initial diversity training were just like this is crazy and I’m out of here. We did have some attrition. I don’t think it was big numbers but there were people who transitioned. But since then [within the past five years] we’ve been able to retain our staff based upon what we have to offer them.*

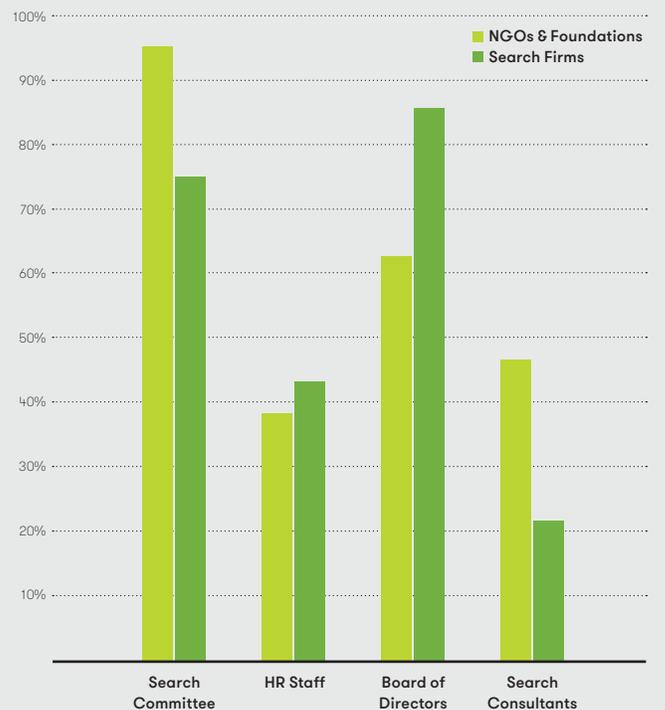
Although most organizations did not identify the same degree of backlash described above, a large proportion of participants from NGOs and foundations in this study identified some sort of bias or resistance to diversity in their organizations. As Figure 7 reveals, 46% of organizations agreed that there was bias (unconscious<sup>7</sup> or overt) within their organizations, though only 56% of those who perceived a bias had any measures in place to mitigate it (not shown), and 16% of organizational representatives could recall active resistance to diversity being a problem in previous searches. Oddly, despite the fact that almost half of participants believed there was bias in their organization, only 28% believed that this bias had affected their searches. In contrast, 87% of search consultants affirmed that bias had been a problem in their searches in the past.

**FIGURE 7: PERCENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS AND SEARCH FIRMS THAT PERCEIVED BIAS OR RESISTANCE TO DIVERSITY**



As shown in Figure 8, search consultants and non-profit leaders agreed that search committees were largely to blame for bias in searches. Approximately 95% and 79% of non-profit leaders and search consultants placed blame on search committees while an additional 63% and 86% asserted the board was partially responsible. In contrast, only 36% and 43% laid blame on HR and 47% and 21% held search consultants responsible.

**FIGURE 8: ACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR BIAS IN SEARCHES**



## Dealing With Bias or Resistance to Diversity

Given that nearly one-third of all NGO and foundations representatives believed that bias was a direct problem in their searches, and almost all search consultants agreed, how do these organizations and individuals handle bias or resistance in the search process?

On the non-profit side, this is often endeavored through some sort of diversity training. For example, the executive director of an NGO pointed out that making their staff aware of their own biases through training was the primary mechanism for staving off discriminatory behavior:

*We try to prevent it continuously through the training that we mentioned before, right? Our general view is that there's bias in all of us and that inhibits our ability to work well with each other and create the organization that we want to create. Whether it's recruiting or whether it's building outside alliances, these biases are part of who we are and can be really problematic, particularly when one is unaware of them. So, we're trying to make these biases more visible to ourselves internally through training and then we call it out when we can see it.*

Search firms, on the other hand, tended to deal with bias and resistance in two ways: (a) by directly confronting organizations and individuals they believed were hindering the process or (b) by not pressing diversity or diverse candidates any further in the process. Most consultants' first step was to diplomatically approach hiring managers or other executives to alert them to the problem and compel them to identify their bias. As one consultant explained,

*We'll acknowledge them and call them out. I mean not call them out negatively but sort of inquire. For example, someone will say why they don't really like this person and I will say "I don't see it." So it's less a matter of defend it, and more kind of explain to me because I don't see it.*

Similarly, another consultant spoke of trying to get the individual to articulate their concerns:

*We usually try to understand their opposition to a particular candidate and to get them to really articulate. So if they say, "Oh, the person that just doesn't fit." "Well, can you give me a sense for why they don't fit?" and try to draw down to that. And then the client will usually tell on themselves and help us understand that they in fact have a bias against a certain type of person or certain schools or education levels, whatever. It starts to come out, and then we just usually respond accordingly.*

While these discussions were a starting point for most search consultants, some backed off when they ascertained that the bias they had sensed was strong. A consultant from a blue chip firm described how,

*We try to call them out directly. Try to have an honest conversation about that as much as we possibly can in that client-consultant relationship. I've had some instances where I've been able to have a meaningful conversation and others where I haven't at all.*

However, when confronted with a situation in which someone became defensive or unresponsive, the consultant stated,

*I mean, I don't go anywhere. I have to stop. We are a vendor essentially. We're a consultant and we're not being hired to focus on diversity in that way. I think we're working within some parameters.*

Similarly, another consultant asserted,

*In the end, the hiring manager has to be the one to make the decision and to be comfortable with the person; otherwise, they are not going to be successful. If an unconscious bias becomes obvious and will impact the way the hiring manager is going to deal with this person in the future, I don't want that person to take the job either.*

The priority level a search consultant places on diversity and how they view their role in pushing that forward can have a significant effect. Consultants who saw themselves as equal partners in the hiring process and believed diversity was an implicit part of their mission as search consultants, regardless of client preferences, worked to bring a client around or find a way around individual biases. On the other hand, consultants who saw themselves as vendors, regardless of their own beliefs about diversity, adopted the client's preferences and shifted the importance of diversity as low as the client wished it to go.

## Employing A Diverse Interview Panel To Limit Bias

One way organizations have attempted to mitigate bias in the hiring process is through the use of diverse interview panels. Figure 9 shows that 56%, 69% and 63% of search firms, NGOs and foundations mandated that panels interviewing and/or meeting with applicants be either or both racially or gender diverse. Including people of color on panels could prove challenging since many of the organizations participating did not have a critical mass of people of color in managerial or executive positions. Participants identified two key rationales for diversifying interview panels, particularly along racial lines. As the CEO of one NGO asserted,

*Partly it's to help the candidate to see that we have people of color in our organization. It's also to make sure that there are a variety of perspectives or backgrounds in the hiring process — you know voices in the room where the decisions are being made.*

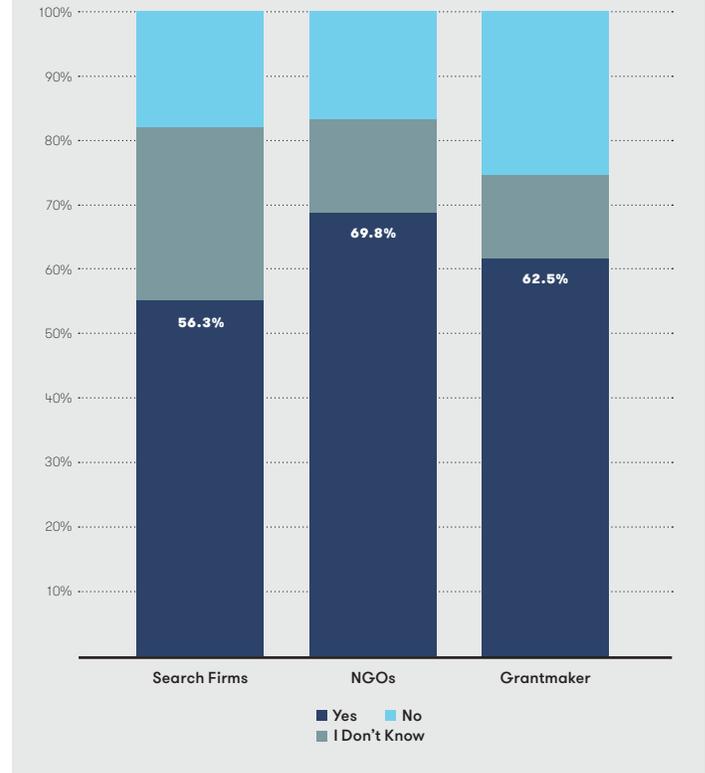
Similarly, another CEO explained,

*We do it as a natural part of creating a cross-sectional team that's looking at this. But also, if we are trying to attract the diverse candidate, trying to show them that we have an inclusive culture, that we're a place that they would be interested to work, we think that's a good idea. It's not something we only do for a diversity hire. If someone's from the Midwest, we would consider putting someone from the Midwest on the panel. If someone went to Princeton, we might find someone from Princeton. We're trying to recruit somebody.*

Both rationales are supported by empirical research indicating significant benefits of diverse interview panels. Prior studies show that same-race bias is decreased by interview panels composed of interviewers of more than one race (Lin, Dobbins and Farh 1992). This is due in part to diminishing the biased effects of individual interviewers' ratings through averages, and in part to intergroup dynamics of post-interview conversations held by diverse interview panels that decrease average rater bias relative to panels comprised of only one racial group (Buckley et al 2007).

Previous research also confirms that applicants of color are more attracted to organizations when members of their own racial group are used as recruiter (Avery and McKay 2006; Goldberg, 2003; Young et al 1997) and that they place more emphasis on recruiter characteristics than their white counterparts (Thomas and Wise, 1999)

**FIGURE 9: PERCENT AND TYPE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT MANDATE A DIVERSE INTERVIEW PANEL**





# BEST PRACTICES FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN SEARCHES

- \* Mandate A Diverse Candidate Slate
- \* Minimize Bias in the Hiring Process
  - Structure the Interview Process As Much As Possible
  - Diversify the Search Committee
- \* Tracks Leaks and Blockages in the Hiring Process

## Mandate A Diverse Candidate Slate

Mandating a diverse candidate slate is not a common practice among environmental non-profits and is frequently practiced by search firms only when a client directly requests it. Yet these mandates, not to be confused with hiring quotas, are gaining increasing recognition across industries and sectors as effective methods to increase diversity at senior levels.

The National Football League's Rooney Rule, which mandates that any team with a head coaching vacancy must interview at least one person of color before making a hire, has been in effect since 2003 and was expanded in 2009 to include general managers and equivalent front office positions. And despite the criticism it has received, the Rooney Rule appears to be working. An analysis of data from 1992 to 2014 found that candidates of color were 19% to 21% more likely to fill a head coaching vacancy in the post-Rooney era than the pre-Rooney era [DuBois 2016].

Why these mandates are effective, is currently being examined by organizational researchers. However, one theory is that repeated contact [via interviews or resumes] with candidates of only one demographic can lead decision makers to associate specific groups, like men or whites, with a particular job. Hence, the composition of the candidate pool not only affects who is available to fill a position, but how a hiring manager or search committee evaluates applicants. If there is only one person of color on the short list, he/she may be evaluated differently than if they are part of a diverse slate [Perry, Davis-Blake and Kulik 1994].

A series of recent experimental studies [Johnson, Hekman and Chan 2016] published by the Harvard Business Review found that whatever demographic group comprised the majority of a finalist pool (e.g. men vs. women, whites vs. people of color) was likely to be chosen as the favored candidate. Thus when two out of three candidates were white, a white candidate was significantly more likely to be chosen, but when two out of three candidates were black or hispanic, a black or hispanic person was more likely to be selected.

Likewise, a study of university hiring decisions for academic positions revealed that the odds of hiring a woman were 79 times greater if there were at least two women in the finalist pool and the odds of hiring someone black or hispanic were 194 times greater if there were at least two black or hispanic candidates in the pool [controlling for the relative number of men vs. women or black and hispanic vs. white finalists]. In contrast, when only one out of four finalists was black, hispanic or female, their odds of being hired was zero [Johnson, Hekman and Chan 2016]. Because of the effects of biases, whether conscious or unconscious, hidden or overt, any organization that prioritizes diversity must therefore take heed not only to bring in one candidate of color, but to ensure the slate of candidates is truly racially diverse.

## Minimize Bias In The Hiring Processes

Bias plays a role in most aspects of our lives, so and unquestionably, within the recruitment and hiring process. Minimizing the impact of individual and institutional biases, however, can seem challenging. The following are recommended practices to mitigate bias in searches.

### Structure the Interview Process as Much as Possible

Job interviews are one of the most common selection mechanisms used in hiring, yet they are also prone to interviewer prejudice [McCarthy, Van Iddekinge and Campion 2010]. In particular, demographic differences can result in interviewers use of biased scoring systems and may negatively impact applicant interview responses or their subsequent motivations to accept job offers [Ryan 2001; Saks and McCarty 2006; McCarthy, Van Iddekinge and Campion 2010]. Interviewers often form their opinions well before the interview stage based on race, regardless of objective qualifications [King, Mendoza, Madera, Hebi and Knight 2006].

The degree of structure in interviews is significantly related to the degree of bias in outcomes. Unstructured interviews provide interviewers with wide discretion in terms of which questions are asked and how their responses are evaluated and as such can result in biased evaluations of candidates. In contrast, structured interviews limit the discretion of interviewers and thereby the degree of bias they can exert in the process [Hufcutt and Roth 1998].

Three features of structured interviews increase the motivation of interviewers to form less biased impressions of candidates. First, when individuals believe their assessments will be shared with or compared to others' their motivation to form an accurate assessment increases [Castilla 2008]. Thus, the use of interview panels increases interviewer motivation to make more objective judgments since they will be responsible for explaining their ratings to others [Tetlock and Boettger 1989; McCarthy, Van Iddekinge and Campion 2010].

Second, by requiring all knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics [KSAOs] to be assessed in structured interviews through a series of predetermined, job-relevant questions, interviewers are less likely to form their opinions about individual interviewees until the interview is concluded [Campion, Palmer and Campion 1997]. And finally, highly structured interviews comprised of job-relevant content shift the interviewers' focus to candidate responses and decrease their attention to demographic stereotypes [Campion, Palmer and Campion 1997].

We therefore recommend the use of the following elements to structure interviews in order to reduce bias (Campion, Palmer and Campion 1997):

1. Base questions on a job analysis such as critical incidents in order to limit the domain of the interview to knowledge, skills and abilities.
2. Ask the same questions of each candidate.
3. Limit prompting, follow-up questioning, and elaborations as this is a primary mechanism for interviewers biasing information gathering.
4. Use structured, job oriented questions (i.e., hypothetical job situations, past behavior, work-related background, and job knowledge).
5. Employ longer interviews and/or a larger number of questions to obtain a greater amount of standardized information from each candidate.
6. Control the use of supplementary information by (a) withholding it until after the interview or (b) ensuring it is presented and evaluated for all candidates in a standardized manner.
7. Do not allow candidates to ask questions until after the interview to minimize changes in interview content.
8. Rate every question to ensure judgments are linked to specific responses or use multiple scales such that candidates are evaluated on multiple dimensions.
9. Take detailed notes during interviews to enhance recall and help justify ratings.
10. Use multiple interviewers to (a) decrease weight of individual biases (b) motivate interviewers to avoid the use of subjective judgment criteria and (c) increase recall of information.
11. Do not discuss candidates between interviews in order to reduce contamination of the evaluation process.
12. Provide extensive interview training to ensure other components of structured interviews are applied correctly.

## Diversify The Search Committee

The search committee can be an important vehicle for increasing diversity among senior leadership. Prior research indicates that diversity on search committees increases the likelihood of making a diverse hire (Smith et al 2004; Glass and Minnotte 2010; Fries-Britt 2011). This is partially attributable to the increased likelihood hiring agents of color have to receive applications from candidates of color (Stoll, Raphael and Holzer 2004). It is also due to the fact that hiring agents of color are more likely than their white counterparts to recommend applicants of color (Stoll, Raphael and Holzer 2004) which may be the result of in-group preferences that benefit people of color just as they do whites (Giuliano, Levine and Leonard 2009).

When assessing the effects of committees or panels as a group, researchers have theorized that “including at least one different-race interviewer in a panel may serve as a check and balance on the evaluation process” (Lin, Dobbins and Farh 1992 p. 396). That is, individual racial biases are balanced out when there are people of multiple races evaluating a candidate and the actual conversations held about candidates held in interracial contexts may decrease individual committee member biases (Buckley et al 2007). Regardless of the exact mechanism, it is essential that organizations with the capacity to maintain racially diverse search committees do so.

# Checklist

## Included are two checklists.

From the start of the process when interviewing executive search firms to the hiring and retention of your final candidate, keep these things in mind:

- Begin with clear language and processes about diversity at your organization
- Ask specific questions of the search firm
- Demand diversity throughout the entire process

(1) a series of questions and processes for organizations to use through the search process

(2) a series of questions to ask executive search firms

## PROCESS & SERIES OF QUESTIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Clearly articulate and define what diversity means for your organization and/or foundation to the search firm.
- What does diversity mean in this specific job search? People of color, LGBTQ, Women, all of the above, etc.
  - Clearly communicate to the search firm what a diverse candidate pool and a diverse final set of candidates would look like for your organization.
  - Mandate a diverse slate of candidates.
- Identify the decision making process and the level of diversity at all stages in the process:
  - Who makes the final hiring decision — an individual, a team, a team that makes recommendations to an individual, etc.?
  - Who is on the interview panel and how diverse is it?
  - Who provides input on the job description and how diverse are their perspectives?
  - Have you identified the standard qualifications and separate them from content expertise? What skills are must-haves vs. content that can be learned?
  - How can members of the interview panel raise issues and have them addressed?
  - What employee networks do you tap into in identifying candidates aside from using the search firm?
- Craft the interview questions and rubrics for assessing candidates to eliminate and/or minimize unconscious bias.
- Do not discuss candidates between the interview process, thereby eliminating contamination of the evaluation process.
- Set timeline in collaboration with the search firm.
- What happens if the candidate pool and/or final candidates does not match the diversity vision that the organization defined at the outset?
  - Empower all people in the process (interview panel, people who provided input in the job description, etc.) to elevate the issue of diversity.
  - Determine a clear process for communicating the lack of diversity of the pool and/or final candidates to the search firm and revise the timeline to remedy the lack of diversity.
- Revise timeline based on necessary changes.
- Conduct debrief with internal team and share lessons learned with Human Resources, hiring managers and all employees.

## A SERIES OF QUESTIONS FOR EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRMS

### Search Firm Internal Infrastructure

- What is your search firm's demographic composition?
- What is the demographic composition of your database of candidates?
  - And specifically, the demographics of the non-profit and/or environmental candidates?
- How does your firm define diversity?
- Does your firm have a diversity practice? Who leads the diversity practice and what is his/her experience in diversity recruiting? How many people in the firm are dedicated to the diversity practice?

### Search Recruiting and Hiring Process

- What is your method of sourcing diverse candidates?
- Do you track demographic information regarding your applicant pools for each search?
  - What are your last year's statistics for applicant pools?
- Do you track candidates throughout the interview process, including the demographics and rationale for their removal and/or withdrawal?
- Do you provide and/or assist in the development of interview questions and rubrics to reduce unconscious bias and assess candidates more objectively?

### Search Results

- What percentage of C-Suite executives placed in the last two to five years have been people of color?
- In the last year, what percentage of your searches had a diverse slate? What about the last three to five years?
- In the last year, what percentage of your searches had a diverse final placement, e.g., people of color?
- What is your retention rate for placements? After one year?

## Track Leaks And Blockages In The Hiring Process

When it comes to tracking diversity, organizational transparency serves at least two functions. First, it provides a clear picture of the situation. Second, it provides the context for next steps. A key step for organizations that wish to diminish the effects of biases, explicit or implicit, is to identify where leaks and blockages occur in the application and onboarding processes.

Some applicant tracking systems (ATSs) are now sophisticated enough that they can be used as tools for monitoring diversity in the applicant and new-hire pipeline as well as detecting obstacles to diversifying. Systems that allow for multiple types of users (i.e., HR personnel, search consultants, search committee members/interviewers) can be used to:

- \* Identify how applicants from different demographic groups enter the application system (e.g. through organizational referrals, search consultants, affinity groups, specific advertisements, etc.).
- \* This can aid in understanding whether underrepresented groups enter the system differently and what mechanisms are most useful for attracting people of color to apply).
- \* Track job candidates as they flow through the application process in order to understand which points in the application process are most likely to serve as blocks for diverse hires.
- \* Detect whether specific units or individuals within an organization have higher than average biases against specific types of candidates by requiring candidate evaluations to be entered into the system.

# CONCLUSION

In tandem with their clients, search firms act as gatekeepers to senior and executive positions in all sectors of the workforce. Yet to date, few studies have addressed the practices of executive search firms and virtually no research exists on how search firms impact diversity in candidate recruitment and hiring. The study undertaken here presents one of the first attempts to explore the executive search process and how specific practices used by these firms and their clients are more or less effective.

Although this study is about the environmental advocacy sector and the practices and searches employed therein, the findings are generalizable to many other sectors including the broader non-profit sector, as well as a variety of for-profit industries that are actively trying to diversify. All of the search firms participating in this study have practices that include other non-environmentally focused non-profits and the blue-chip firms have a wide range of practice areas ranging from banking, to legal, to hi tech.

By examining environmental advocacy, a field that is externally perceived as socially progressive, and internally expected to “do good,” we have an opportunity to explore what has been done in a context in which diversity is ideologically consistent with organizational norms yet is underperforming in practice. Additional barriers may well exist in the executive search processes within fields that have not, at least outwardly expressed diversity as a priority.

This report highlights several obstacles facing search firms and environmental non-profits in their efforts to diversify at senior levels. It also details the measures some of these same actors have taken to overcome those impediments. First, there is a distinct difference in the key factors non-profits and search firms believe is hindering their ability to diversify, and as such, there is a marked disconnect in the approaches these types of organizations take or are willing to take in order to diversify.

Almost 50% of NGOs and 25% of foundations were under the misconception that a lack of qualified candidates of color existed to fill vacancies, yet search consultants and HR directors cited a tendency on the part of organizational leadership to create an exaggerated set of requirements when diversity was prioritized in a job opening that no one could meet, regardless of race, thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. In contrast, almost 65% of search firm consultants identified a lack of interest in environmental advocacy among people of color as a primary impediment to diversification and nearly 60% asserted the non-profits they worked with were not prepared to provide environments inclusive of diversity at the senior level.

Second, some NGOs and foundations did not prioritize diversity in their searches and did not require diverse candidate slates. This may be, in part, a result of their disbelief in the existence of qualified candidates, or it may be an exaggerated sense of expediency for searches. Yet some non-profit leaders overcame reluctance, sometimes with the help of search consultants, and recognized that by focusing too much on the short-term, organizations would end up with the status-quo, rendering them less productive and less capable of evolving in the long-term (Jaskyte 2004).

For some, this meant a careful reexamination of the job requirements. This sometimes equated to deprioritizing “cultural fit”, a label inherently tied to racial stereotypes and expectations (Lamont and Small 2008; Graves and Powell 1995). In other cases it required opening the search to individuals with the right skillsets from outside the environmental sector, a practice often used by non-profits regardless of race.

Third, although the diversity of the candidate slate is perhaps the most significant predictor of whether a person of color will be hired for a position (Johnson, Hekman and Chan 2016), some search firms and search consultants (31%) did not require a diverse candidate slate, even in cases in which a client had voiced an interest in finding a diverse hire. Indeed, less than half (44%) mandated a diverse slate if the client did not instruct them to prioritize diversity.

Finally, resistance to diversity within searches can hamper the outcome of a search if biases from search committee members or others involved in the search process are left unchecked (Kayes 2006). While 46% of non-profits identified bias as an ongoing problem within their organizations, and 16% had experienced active resistance to diversity in past senior searches, just over half of those organizations had any mechanisms in place to mitigate these problems. Among organizations that were taking action, diversity trainings were a common practice.

Unfortunately, as this report has noted, statistical evidence shows that diversity trainings alone do not impact hiring senior staff of color (Dobbin, Kim and Kaley 2011; Dobbin and Kaley (2016). Another, more promising practice endorsed by non-profits and search consultants alike was to make interview

panels diverse. Although this could be challenging for some organizations at the start of their journey to racially diversify, prior research demonstrates it is effective at minimizing biases and increasing the likelihood of diverse hiring (Lin, Dobbins and Farh 1992; Buckley et al 2007).

## The Bottom Line

There must be a genuine commitment from search consultants and the organizations that hire them to increase diversity at the senior level. For organizations seeking to diversify, this requires a willingness to take the time to find a diverse candidate slate and to stick to their goal to diversify rather than falling back on what is familiar or candidates they believe they can relate to. It also means letting go of biases in the search process. This is not an endorsement of hosting additional diversity trainings to eliminate individual biases among staff. Instead, it is a call to put measures in place, many of which are detailed in the best practices section here, to limit the ability of individuals from acting on those biases.

Search firms committed to helping their clients diversify must take a resolute stance on the priority of diversity and assist their clients to maintain their resolve. Search firms that mandate diverse slates (regardless of client priorities) and those that go the extra mile to recruit qualified candidates of color should be applauded. However, these should be regular practices of all search firms since every one of the firms that participated in this study, and most high profile search firms, expressly claim to value and strive for diversity.

The return on concretely prioritizing diversity vs. paying lip service is well worth it. One search consultant who boasted a placement rate for people of color of 85% pointed out that potential candidates of color sought out his/her firm explicitly because it had a strong reputation for recruiting and placing high quality, diverse candidates. Not only did this firm get additional business because of its reputation for being able to find and recruit excellent candidates of color, but the consultant’s job was ultimately made easier because of their reputation.

Despite the obstacles enumerated in this study to successfully increasing senior leaders of color through the executive search process, there is a significant upside. There is a genuine interest among many non-profits and the executive search firms they hire to diversify their organizations. Equally important, there is a keen interest in learning how to hire for greater diversity. The participant response rate for this study was significantly higher than most. This research was met with sincere appreciation and cooperation by all involved. Although most organizations were in the early stages of diversification, we endeavored to provide several well-documented best practices that organizations can use to make their searches more successful in the future.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 People of color refer to persons identified as Black/African-American, Hispanic/Latino/Latina, Asian/Asian-American, Native American, Pacific Islander, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, and Multi-racial/Multi-ethnic.
- 2 This type of analysis is commonly referred to as a meta-analysis.
- 3 Minorities represented an average of 28.0% of graduates.
- 4 Minorities represented an average of 24.4% of graduates.
- 5 Participants came from both blue chip and boutique firms. For the purposes of this study, blue chip firms are defined as nationally recognized, well-established generalist search firms that, in the case of this study, had a practice area devoted to non-profits or environmental advocacy. In contrast, boutique firms are small to mid-sized firms that focus on a limited number of sectors (e.g., non-profit or environmental) and often have a relatively local client base.
- 6 Wording varied slightly for search consultants to reflect the fact that the search was not for their own organization.
- 7 Unconscious or implicit bias is defined here as attitudes outside of an individual's consciousness or control.
- 8 The percent of underrepresented minorities increased from 11 to 21 over this period of time.
- 9 The percent of underrepresented minorities increased from 8 to 19 over this period of time.
- 10 These leaks do not occur in the ways to which opponents of affirmative action (Herrnstein and Murray 1994; Thernstrom and Thernstrom, 1999) erroneously point. That is, the leaks do not occur because there are not qualified people of color or because people of color drop out of selective institutions at a high rate due to educational mismatch (Fischer and Massey 2007). Instead, research shows quite the opposite. Specifically, the graduation rate of people of color at more selective institutions is significantly higher than that of their peers at less selective institutions and on par with that of their White counterparts at the same institutions (Arum and Roska 2011; Bowen, Chingos and McPherson 2009). Indeed, one study of 27 highly selective institutions found that students of color who were presumably the beneficiaries of affirmative action (those whose SAT scores fell below the institutional average), actually had a modest but positive and significant effect on their cumulative GPA over the first three semesters of attendance at college (Fischer and Massey 2007).
- 11 National Science Foundation. 2016. Science and Engineering Indicators 2014. <http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/seind14/index.cfm?appendix/tables.htm#c2>
- 12 Of the 36 individuals interviewed, 34 consented to having their interviews audio-recorded and transcribed.

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# APPENDIX A: REVIEW OF PRIOR RESEARCH

## The Importance of Diversity in Senior Leadership Positions

A plethora of literature has evinced the importance of diversity. Benefits to individuals include improved problem-solving capabilities, growth in cognitive functioning (Gurin, Dev, Hurtado and Gurin 2002; Chang, Astin, and Kim 2004; Lising et al 2004);, increased intellectual engagement and motivation (Gurin 1999), as well as decreased racial bias and intergroup anxiety (Levin, van Laar, and Sidanius 2003). Diversity is also associated with a number of organizational advantages including increased revenue and profits, more customers, and greater market share (Herring 2009). This may be a function of the effect of racial and gender diversity on team functions such that diverse groups tend to make more cooperative choices (Cox, Lobel and McLeod 1991) and produce higher quality, more unique ideas in brainstorming tasks (McLeod and Lobel 1992).

A growing body of research also indicates that diversity in organizational leadership is associated with a number of performance measures. For example, findings evince companies with diverse leadership tend to have higher annual revenues (Hunt, Layton, Prince 2015), [T6]stronger stock performance (Credit Suisse Research Institute 2012), as well as higher return on sales, equity and assets (Joy, Carter, Wagner and Narayanan 2007; Deszo and Ross 2012). Most germane to the non-profit sector, past studies show that organizations with diverse senior personnel and boards tend to have stronger social governance performance (Soares, Marquis and Lee 2011; Brown, Brown and Anastasopoulos 2002).

Diversity at senior levels is also an important precursor to decreasing future discrimination and workplace segregation. Homogeneity breeds homosocial reproduction such that the demographics of leadership are replicated through their preferences for those perceived to be like themselves. Since whites and often times, white men in particular, have typically dominated the top level of organizational hierarchies, they profit from in-group preferences (Kanter 1977; Elliott and Smith). Moreover, organizations that are diverse at upper levels have been shown to have employees that act against biases in their workplace interactions (Gelfand, Nishii, Raver and Schneider 2007). Indeed, research on corporate leadership shows that firms that place people of color in top leadership positions see faster growth of black people in lower level management (Dobbin and Kalev 2007).

## Diversity in the Non-Profit Sector

Although leaders of environmental organizations have articulated a desire to diversify since the early 1990s, minimal progress has been made (Taylor 2011), particularly at the upper levels. As of 2014, the senior leadership of environmental NGOs and foundations were dominated by whites (Taylor 2014). Although environmental organizations blamed a lack of job openings and applicants of color for their slow rate of racial diversification, most organizations in the study had made hires in the prior three years and only 13% and 17% of those hired by NGOs and foundations were people of color (Taylor 2014). Instead, people of color represent only 11% and 5% respectively of staff in leadership positions and boards members at environmental advocacy organizations; they rarely occupy the most powerful positions (such as president or chair of the board) in which people of color comprise less than 1% and 6% respectively. Indeed, the majority of promotions are given to white women while their non-white counterparts experience relatively stagnant career tracks (Taylor 2014). Data provided to GuideStar, the D5 Coalition and Green 2.0 indicate that this lack of diversity is also true of the most prominent environmental NGOs. Specifically, of the 23 major environmental NGOs that submitted data, people of color represented an average of only 16% of senior staff (Guidestar 2016).

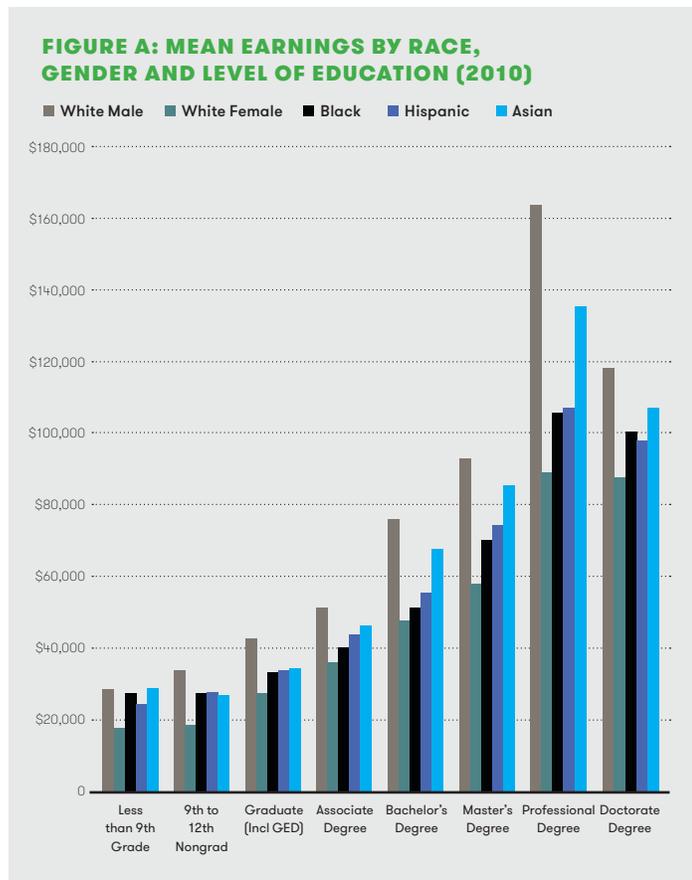
These trends are consistent with non-profit leadership in general. According to a 2009 study (Joslyn 2009), only 92.7% of NGO executive directors are white. Likewise, whites comprised 91%, 87% and 63% of a national sample of foundation executive directors, full time executive staff and program officers respectively (D5 Coalition), as well as 81% of newly appointed foundation CEOs (Branch et al 2010). Hence, while the intent may be there to diversify non-profits and the environmental sector specifically, significant action is needed to do so. As Emmett Carson (2009, p. 198), the founding CEO of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation aptly points out, "It's not enough for foundations [or NGOs] to stand with people who live in poverty or experience racism on a daily basis by including diversity as a value on their websites or in their annual reports. That's the lowest threshold. The highest threshold is when a foundation's [or NGO's] board and staff can be seen to live the values they claim through their actions and investments."

## The Pipeline to Leadership Positions

Prior research has evinced a variety of factors contributing to the low number of people of color working in senior positions across sectors and industries. This work has investigated the educational pipeline, institutional climates within organizations and discriminatory practices. In contrast, there has been relatively little work done to explore the lack of diversity among environmental NGOs or foundations and almost nothing about executive recruitment practices in any sector.

### Educational Pipeline And Qualifications

In 2012, women and people of color comprised 68% of U.S. citizens and permanent residents graduating with a bachelor's degree and 71% of those graduating with a masters or doctorate compared to 61%<sup>8</sup> and 56%<sup>9</sup> in 1991 (National Science Foundation 2014; National Science Foundation 1994). Yet basic data analysis shows that as education increases, the gap in earnings between white men, women and people of color increases (see Figure A). Moreover, research indicates that among workers with at least a college degree, people of color and white women are far more likely to cluster in a small set of occupations regardless of their field of highest degree or the selectivity of the schools they attended. This partially accounts for the difference in average earnings among those with similar degrees, along with ongoing institutional discrimination (Beasley 2011).



Despite the impressive gains in the average education of people of color over the years, leaks in the educational pipeline do occur, but they are limited.<sup>10</sup> These leaks, especially among people of color attending selective institutions — the very ones targeted by most elite organizations in a variety of sectors including the environment — are most frequently limited to STEM and other quantitative fields, and often occur in the first years of college (Beasley and Fischer 2012; Massey and Fischer 2005). Unfortunately, as Elliott et al. (1996) observe, “You can’t play if you don’t stay, and leaving science or premed for education or history usually means leaving science or premed forever” (p. 706). It is virtually impossible to pursue most STEM graduate degrees or careers without first majoring in STEM. This is especially pertinent to the environmental sector as a large proportion of senior staff in major environmental advocacy organizations hold advanced degrees in STEM disciplines. One study found that 69 percent of the four most senior employees held advanced degrees, and approximately 30 percent those degrees were in STEM fields including environmental sciences (Beasley 2015).

While a sizeable number of people of color and women express interest in STEM fields entering college, the number who ultimately major in these fields is considerably smaller. For example, out of a sample of four Ivy League institutions, only 34 and 55 percent of African-Americans and Hispanics who initially expressed an interest in science majors persisted in these fields relative to 70 and 61 percent of Asian American and white students respectively (Elliott et al. 1996).

National estimates follow a similar pattern. In 2011 the proportion of white and Asian freshman entering with the intent to major in a STEM field relative to their counterparts graduating with a bachelors in STEM was 0.6 and 0.7 respectively while the respective figures for blacks and Hispanics was 0.4 and 0.5 (National Science Foundation 2016)<sup>11</sup>

Previous research has often cited the academic deficits of students of color to explain the relatively low number graduating with degrees in STEM (Elliott et al. 1996; Stangor and Sechrist 1998). Yet the significant amount of variation in preparedness at various levels of performance across races suggests this is not the primary reason for the attrition of people of color. (Aronson et al. 1998; Steele 1997; Steele and Aronson 1995). Beasley and Fischer (2012) found, for example, that race (controlling for high school academic performance and courses, family income, and parental education) had no significant effect on the likelihood of students entering highly selective colleges with the intent to major in a STEM field. However, group anxiety (also known as stereotype threat) had a significant positive effect on the likelihood of black men, as well as Hispanic, black, Asian and white women leaving STEM majors (Beasley and Fischer 2012).

## **Blocks And Leaks By Institutional Cultures and Social Networks**

The institutional practices and cultures of the organizations for which professionals of color go to work often serve to increase attrition of these groups throughout the career pipeline. Together, these leaks and blockages lead to the erroneous assumption that qualified candidates do not exist, particularly in occupational fields in which people of color are particularly underrepresented including STEM, finance, law, management and development. Four closely related institutional issues serve to diminish the pool of candidates for senior and executive level positions: chilly climates, wrong networks, homophily preferences, and status expectations.

### **Homophily Preferences**

Not only do differences in networks impact the likelihood of diverse hires, but basic biases – conscious or unconscious – can also have profound effects on hiring and promotion. Within organizations, homophily preferences often compel individuals to prefer to work and interact with persons who share characteristics with them that they deem salient such as race and gender. And while most groups express homophily preferences, white men are particularly likely to act on them. Research on gender has expressly pointed to the impact of gender diversity on hiring decisions. For example, one study on large law firms found that the likelihood of women being hired was positively and significantly related to whether the hiring manager was female, the proportion of female partners, and the proportion of female associates (Gorman 2005). Thus, if most supervisors or hiring managers are white men, homophily preferences may produce systematic biases in personnel decisions against already marginalized groups resulting in institutional discrimination. (Gelfand, Nishii, Raver and Schneider 2007).

## **Status Expectations**

People interact with others based in part on expectations — derived from both objective indicators (e.g., past performance) and subjective cues (e.g., prejudices and stereotypes) — of how others will perform (Miller and Turnbull 1986; Trouillard Sarrazin, Martinek and Guilet 2002). Status expectations are beliefs about the relative value of some people relative to others related to a particular task or role. These beliefs may be based on a variety of characteristics including demographics such as race or gender (Ridgeway and Walker 1995). Social categories that encourage “us versus them” mentalities such as race and gender, often elicit stereotyping — positive biases towards in-group members and negative biases towards out-group members (Cortina 2008; Fiske, Cuddy and Xu 2002; Operario and Fiske 1998). Thus, people may expect superior performance from whites relative to people of color or men relative to women (Ridgeway and Walker 1995; Ridgeway 1997) and these expectations may, in turn, become self-fulfilling prophecies (Jussim, Harber, Crawford, Cain and Cohen 2005).

One way in which this occurs is through perceptual biases — that is, when judgments or evaluations about others’ performance is based on biased expectations of a group or groups to which they belong (Foschi 2000; Ridgeway 1997; Trouillard Sarrazin, Martinek and Guilet 2002). Likewise, attribution errors — an overemphasis on the successes of dominant groups and underemphasis on the successes or skills of people of color — tend to inaccurately ascribe the mistakes of the former group to bad luck or situational factors while using mistakes of the latter group as evidence of their inadequacies (Stainback, Tomaskovic-Devey and Skaggs 2010). This reliance on stereotypes occurs regardless of the evaluator’s awareness of their biases or motivation to discriminate (Roth 2004). This is particularly problematic for job applicants of color to high-status positions because the use of stereotypes in evaluating candidates is greater when the proportion of people of color is low in the applicant pool as well as among evaluators (King, Mendoza, Madera, Hebi and Knight 2006).

Status expectations may also impact achievement by directly altering the behavior of those being stereotyped (Jussim 1989). For example, a 2005 meta-analysis of student achievement concluded that between 5% and 10% of the variance could be accounted for by teacher expectations (Jussim and Harber 2005). Such expectations affect achievement as well as productivity on a long-term basis (Clark and Weinstein 2002). Whether low expectations are overt or subtle, the result is the same. Individuals who are expected to achieve poorly perceive their interactions with supervisors as less positive than those who are expected to succeed. These effects are particularly strong for people of color (Gill and Reynolds 1999; Jussim, Eccles, and Madon 1996), and the accuracy of these expectations tends to be significantly lower for people of color than for whites (Downey and Pribesh 2004).

## Wrong Networks

Social networks have become an important focal point in research on labor market disparities. In particular, evidence repeatedly shows that the resources related to social networks, a.k.a. social capital, tend to cluster by race and advantage white men (Green, Tigges and Diaz 1999). A central feature of this work is extent to which blacks and Hispanics are excluded from job-finding networks (e.g. Royster 2003) or disadvantaged by the networks they do have (McDonald and Day 2015). In particular, examinations of “the wrong networks” emphasize black and Hispanic embeddedness in networks that lead to lower-paying, less prestigious jobs than whites (Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo 2006).

Research on social capital consistently shows whites are advantaged by racially insular job networks (Royster 2003). Indeed, one study found that white employees were far more likely to refer same-race job candidates than their non-white counterparts. Specifically, while 76.9% of white referrals were same-race, only 65.2%, 41.6% and 41.2% of Asian American, Hispanic and African American were same race. Because of their disproportionate representation within the organization, white insular-networks resulted in far more white referrals than any other group (Fernandez and Fernandez-Mateo 2006). Moreover those referred to job openings by white and male contacts earn significantly more than those referred by women or people of color (Green, Tigges and Diaz 1999; Smith 2000). Likewise, even after controlling for individual and employment characteristics, white male-dominated networks provide more access to job information and to more prestigious jobs than other networks. Hence, reliance on same race/gender networks is beneficial to white men while detrimental to women and people of color (McDonald 2011).

What these findings equate to in the real world is differential access to jobs by race. For example, a study of professional job-seekers found that white candidates were significantly more likely to have used prestigious job contacts at a company than their African American counterparts (Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel 2000). While 81% of whites had interviews directly with upper management or within a hiring department, only 21% of African Americans were interviewed at these levels. Instead, most African Americans interviewed on campus or with personnel in human resources. As a result, significantly fewer African Americans were hired in the company. When researchers held referral methods constant, however, being black actually had a positive and significant impact on the likelihood of being hired. That is, when African American applicants were not limited by the “wrong networks,” they had greater success than their white counterparts (Petersen, Saporta, and Seidel 2000). Thus, as McDonald and Day (2015, p. 532) note, the “invisible hand of social capital helps to maintain race and gender inequality” through the maintenance of wrong networks for people of color.

## Chilly Organizational Cultures

Organizational climate is a manifestation of an organization’s culture, which reflects an organization’s policies, practices, and commitment as well as employees’ perceptions of them (Schneider 2000). Most germane to this study is the diversity climate, which concerns perceptions of how policies, procedures and practices that communicate how diversity and anti-racism are prioritized (Gelfand, Nishii, Raver and Schneider 2007).

While a chilly diversity climate may be subtle, the effects on individuals can be significant. By triggering feelings of marginalization and isolation (Turner and Myers 2000), these climates can increase stress and job dissatisfaction, while diminishing creativity which may ultimately result in higher exit and/or lower entry rates (Lim, Cortina and Magley 2008; Pearson and Porath). In one study, 15% of women who had graduated with at least a bachelor’s degree in engineering chose not to enter the field or pursue graduate education in engineering, citing a bad culture (Fouad and Singh 2011). The aggregate impact of hostile or uncivil environments on an organization can therefore include decreased cooperation and commitment as well as considerable organizational disruption (Pearson and Porath).

While targets of incivility and chilly climates may be expressly aware of the impact, perpetrators are likely to be unaware of the effects of their actions. Instead, they frequently perceive themselves as unbiased — endorsing egalitarian values and publicly condemning racism — and often use non-racial, rational justifications for discriminatory behavior (Dipbove and Hlaverson 2004). Perpetrators are likely to view discrimination as an historical artifact, and inroads people of color have made are perceived as the result of unfair advantages bestowed by affirmative action policies. Hence, they may perceive their targets as being too aggressive and unfair if they make claims of bias or discrimination (McConahay 1986). Often times, the disproportionate incivility toward women and people of color is subtle, such that behaviors are attributable to non-racial factors such as a target’s hypersensitivity. They therefore permit women and people of color to be mistreated, while perpetrators maintain an unbiased image to themselves and others (Cortina 2008).

# APPENDIX B: STUDY METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the findings obtained from a study of the practices employed by major environmental NGOs and foundations as well as the executive search firms they employ in an effort to diversify their senior staff.

## Sample Frame

The 85 participants that took part in this research came from a convenience sample of three types of organizations:

- \* Major U.S.-based environmental advocacy organizations (i.e., members of the Green Group – an alliance of approximately 36 of the nation’s largest environmental organizations — as well as environmental organizations that were recognized by the Foundation Center as having been among the top 40 NGOs that received the most foundation funding in 2012.
- \* Foundations that are significant grant makers to environmental advocacy organizations (i.e., those listed among the top 50 foundations awarding the largest dollar value in grants to environmental organizations in 2012 according to the Foundation Center) organizations
- \* Executive search firms which Green Group CEOs identified as having been used frequently by environmental advocacy organizations in the recent past.

Within these organizations, we sampled three different types of actors: CEOs from environmental advocacy organizations and foundations; human resources directors and chief operating officers from environmental advocacy organizations and foundations; and principal consultants or practice leaders at executive search firms.

## Study Design

The study has two complementary components: a semi-structured, in-depth interview administered to 36 individuals, and an online survey (derived from closed-ended questions in the interview schedule) collected from 49 additional participants. The interview, the primary component of this research design, allowed us to delve into the whys and hows search practices while the survey provided an opportunity to identify quantitative trends. Interviews and surveys took place over the course of four months, between September and December of 2015.

## Interviews

The interviews, which lasted approximately 75 minutes each, were semi-structured such that each participant was asked a series of open-ended and closed-ended questions, but were provided the opportunity to discuss any other topics they believe are relevant. This allowed the researcher to explore new topics that arose during the interviews and to follow up on compelling responses. Interviews with participants in the DC Metro Area primarily took place at participants’ offices, while the majority of other interviews took place via videoconference and a small number were completed over the telephone.

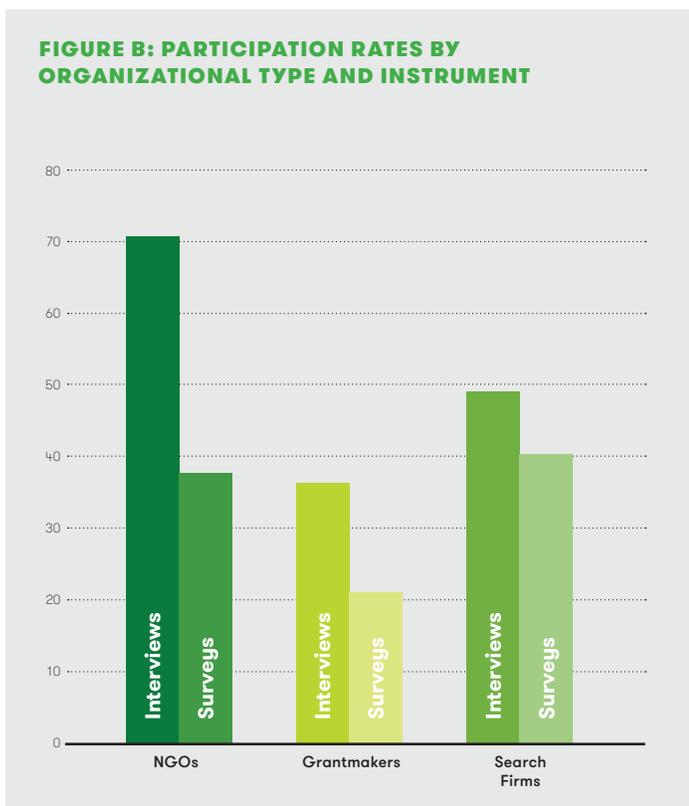
## Surveys

The online surveys were derived from closed-ended questions asked during the interviews. Survey data was collected through an online survey administered on surveymonkey.com that allowed the researcher to apply skip logic to questions and administer an electronic consent form through WuFoo, an online affiliate. All interview participants were asked the same closed-ended questions that appeared in the survey and their answers were entered into the survey database by the interviewer.

## Recruitment

Solicitations for interview participants were made through tailored form letters sent to the CEOs, HR managers and a small number of COOs of environmental advocacy organizations and foundations, as well as to the environmental or non-profit practice managers of executive search firms soliciting their participation. Individuals were provided with a scheduling link that allowed them to select the date and time of their interview as well as designate whether it would be conducted in-person or online. Individuals who elected to participate in a video or telephone interview were automatically provided with an electronic consent form. As displayed in Figure 2 we received a high rate of participation for both surveys and interviews. Of the 23 NGO, 23 foundation and 19 search firm executives contacted for an interview, 74%, 39%, and 52% respectively participated. This yielded 36 interviews.

Individuals who were solicited for an interview but were unable or unwilling to participate in this lengthier part of the study were invited to participate in an online survey that took approximately 20 minutes to complete. This was augmented by requests to additional individuals from the sampling frame. A total of 83 NGO, 30 foundation and 16 search firm executives were invited to participate in the survey. This resulted in 49 survey participants and a response rate of 40%, 23% and 44% of NGO, foundation and search firm representatives respectively. The email requests for participation contained a direct link that allowed those who wished to participate to access the survey and electronic consent form.



## Data Management and Analysis

All respondents were assigned a unique identifying number, and their first and last names, as well as their organizational affiliations were removed from the files used for analysis. A separate key file containing IDs and names was encrypted and stored on a flash drive locked in the principal investigator's office. All recorded audio interviews<sup>12</sup> were transcribed; only the unique ID number of interview subjects appeared on the transcripts or any related files used for qualitative analysis. Transcripts and related files were kept on the principal investigator's computer and were protected using an encrypted password that only the PI knew.

The primary method used to analyze interviews was constant comparative analysis. This technique, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is one of the most commonly used qualitative techniques available. The strategy involves taking one piece of data (e.g. one interview or journal entry) and comparing it with all others from the same and then different groups in order to identify patterns and develop theories about the relationships between various pieces of data (Tesch 1990). The survey data was protected on Survey Monkey using a Secure Sockets Layer (SSL) protocol that encrypts data transmitted and collected when subjects take a survey. Once all subjects completed the surveys (and the PI had entered survey responses for interview participants), the data was imported into STATA where it was cleaned, coded and analyzed. Because of the exploratory nature of the research and due to the relatively small sample size (N=85) only basic descriptive analysis was used.



## **DIVERSITY DERAILED:**

LIMITED DEMAND, EFFORT AND RESULTS  
IN ENVIRONMENTAL C-SUITE SEARCHES

**A REPORT BY MAYA A. BEASLEY, Ph.D.**

[www.DiverseGreen.org](http://www.DiverseGreen.org)

Many thanks to all of those who participated in surveys and interviews. Your willingness to participate is a positive sign of your interest in diversifying this sector and this report would not have been made possible without you. And special thanks to all of those involved in this work for lending their expertise and drive to see it to fruition.

**“If you can’t find diverse pool of candidates something is desperately wrong with your search practice.”**

SEARCH FIRM CONSULTANT

**“Some have made [diversity] part of the core mission, others haven’t. Some had great experience of doing this, others haven’t. Some are more diligent about finding a diverse candidate pool, others aren’t. There’s a pretty wide disparity we found amongst search firms that are doing this.”**

CEO OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL NGO  
DISCUSSING SEARCH FIRMS

**“It goes back to our organizational commitment to making sure that if we can at least find those core elements of the job, we can decide that ... we’re willing to actually train this person for three months on the job for some of the specifics that they probably don’t have but they have a lot of the core pieces.”**

COO OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL NGO

**“It’s really easy at the beginning of hiring process for an organization to say that it wants diversity. [But] they give up on it pretty early on.”**

SEARCH FIRM CONSULTANT ADDRESSING  
ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

**“They always think they’re going to get the superstar who’s also diverse, who’s also going to result in them achieving their biggest ambition ever. Diversity is wrapped up for sure in that unicorn.”**

SEARCH FIRM CONSULTANT

## **DIVERSITY DERAILED:**

LIMITED DEMAND, EFFORT AND RESULTS  
IN ENVIRONMENTAL C-SUITE SEARCHES



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[www.diversegreen.org](http://www.diversegreen.org)

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