

The background of the cover features two women in conversation. On the left, a woman with blonde hair is wearing a dark jacket. On the right, a woman with dark hair is wearing a dark dress and gesturing with her hand. A large, stylized question mark graphic, colored in teal and yellow, is superimposed over the image. The title text is overlaid on the lower half of the image.

REWRITING THE RULES: YOUNG FEMINISTS IN GOVERNANCE

Research Report

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: NOTE FROM CEO

Nonprofit governance boards are often invisible spaces of power, missing from kitchen table conversations yet integral to influencing social services across Canada. As high authority agents within the nonprofit sector, board directors are sought for their expertise and extensive experience to advise and supervise the flow of resources and power from an organization to its beneficiaries. Why is it that when a majority of organizations across Canada identify youth as key beneficiaries of their services, youth voices are the ones consistently shut out from the very decision-making that governs their support systems?

In 2017, Fora established the Rise on Boards program to address and challenge this disproportionate decision-making process, envisioning a Canada where gender-marginalized youth have meaningful access to and influence over board governance. Fora defines gender-marginalized youth as young people aged between 18 and 29 who experience marginalization due to their gender identity, which can include trans, cis women, Two-Spirit, and non-binary people.

Nesting at the intersection of youth leadership and gender equity, our work and programming recognize the unique disadvantage young women and gender-marginalized youth face in accessing decision-making in systems of power from barriers that manifest through both ageism and sexism.

Our Rise on Boards program has trained and placed over 200 emerging leaders from diverse backgrounds and experiences at the board table for the first time. These Young Directors champion gender equity and shape decision-making on governance boards across Canada, changing systemic norms and breaking down barriers one placement at a time. However, there is a scarcity of existing and published data that captures and names the impact of gender-marginalized young directors on nonprofit governance in Canada. This report aims to address that.

Resulting from a seven-month research project that captured the impact and constructive recommendations of gender-marginalized young directors in Canada, this report aims to provide clarifying insights into the governance potential of young directors.

Gender-marginalized youth are not the only ones missing out due to their systemic exclusion from nonprofit governance. Given that the sectoral and economic landscape in Canada continues to shift rapidly, embracing innovation is no longer a matter of choice; it is a necessity for survival.

New perspectives and lived experiences are critical to ensuring an inclusive and sustainable sector. As sectoral leadership and individual donors continue to age, a new generation of young, feminist leaders is ready and willing to meet the challenge in collaboration with existing and seasoned board directors.

With this aim, the report investigates and uncovers the structural and systemic flaws within the existing sectoral board recruitment and governance processes, which bar gender-marginalized young directors from meaningful inclusion in decision-making. These barriers dictate not only whether young people are allowed seats at the table, but also their capacity to meaningfully engage in governance after securing a symbolic spot on the board. Our conversations with young women who have served on nonprofit boards across Canada have identified 10 unique areas of organizational impact, spanning four major categories. This confirms that when given the space to govern and lead, young women's leadership is transformative, strategic, and ultimately benefits their communities in the long term.

Directly informed by the lived experiences of 51 gender-marginalized young directors in Canada, this report outlines key recommendations towards meaningfully inclusive nonprofit governance. These recommendations respond to the lived experiences and challenges our informants have faced in practice and consider the way young leaders are currently engaged in designing the nonprofit sector and services for the future.

Sincerely,
Emma Asiedu-Akrofi
CEO, Fora: Network for Change



Acknowledgements

This research is the product of cross-country collaboration. It would not have been possible without the generous contributions of **young directors** who shared their experiences, insights, and wisdom to inform this research. Their candor, thoughtfulness, and commitment to strengthening nonprofit governance are evident throughout this report, and their voices form its foundation.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the **nonprofit organizations** that have created pathways for young directors to join their boards, particularly those that have worked to establish truly inclusive governance environments. Their efforts demonstrate the substantial value that emerges when young directors are meaningfully engaged in governance.

We extend this gratitude to the nonprofit organizations that supported consultations conducted by **Real People Collaboration (RPC)**, specifically by **Michelle Bilek** and **Farheen Khan**, on behalf of Fora: Network for Change (Fora), to inform our upcoming toolkit. Research conducted by RPC has been essential in informing the content of this report and contextualizing our findings.

The author of this report is grateful to **Tehreem Fatima** for collaborating on the design of this research and in writing this report, and to **Jennifer Vachon** for her logistical support throughout the project. Thank you also to Fora's Advocacy Interns, **Eunice Liban** and **Saachi Sharma**, for their support with outreach and recruitment for this research. We are also grateful to Amy Tschupruk and our communications team for designing this report.

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Director of Programs
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Thank you to the **many authors and researchers** whose work has informed and been referenced throughout this report, including the programmatic work of nonprofit organizations that share Fora's commitment to supporting young leaders in redefining leadership and governance across the Canadian nonprofit sector.

Fora: Network for Change (Fora) is grateful for the opportunity to spotlight gender-marginalized youth in the context of their unique impact on nonprofit governance across Canada and the necessary economic and leadership skills such opportunities provide. This opportunity is provided to us by the generous support of **Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada**, without whom the research and reporting of this project could not have been possible. We sincerely thank our partners at WAGE Canada for their continued support for Fora and their confidence in our ability to contribute to economic leadership opportunities for gender-marginalized youth across Canada.

Fora is also grateful to Kate Marr-Laing for leading the execution of this research project and authoring this report. Kate's unique lens and commitment to quality have added great value in narrating and capturing the impact of gender-marginalized young directors.

This project has been funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada.



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

About the Author



Kate Marr-Laing

(any pronouns) Author

Kate Marr-Laing is a community worker, researcher, and advocate with a deep commitment to strengthening the capacity of the community sector.

Kate Marr-Laing is a community worker, researcher, and advocate. They hold a Master of Arts from McGill University and have a research background in data science and critical social policy studies. Much of their work has centred around the nonprofit sector, from frontline service provision to sector-wide policy research.

As a Fora: Rise on Boards alum and current board chair for a nonprofit organization, Kate has first-hand experience navigating the structures of nonprofit boards and the institutional and social context in which they operate.

The passion behind Kate's work stems from a belief that transformative approaches to governance and leadership can better respond to the needs of community and reinforce networks of solidarity.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Questions and Objectives

This research examines several interconnected questions about youth inclusion and impact in nonprofit governance:

1

What is the current state of gender-marginalized youth's representation on nonprofit boards?

2

What does meaningful inclusion mean to young directors? What does this look like in practice?

3

What impact are young women and gender-diverse directors having on nonprofit boards?

4

What barriers are young directors facing that limit their engagement and impact in their board work?

5

What actions can organizations take to reduce barriers to youth impact on nonprofit boards?

With this framework, our research aims to assess the current state of gender-marginalized youth inclusion on nonprofit boards and identify barriers to impact and meaningful engagement. We also aim to understand the impact and potential of gender-marginalized young directors in nonprofit governance and recommend pathways to strengthen both.

In addition to primary and secondary research collected in this project, this report is also informed by data collected through Fora's upcoming *Pathways Towards Young, Feminist Nonprofit Governance Toolkit*, produced in collaboration with Real People Collaboration (RPC).

The final sample consisted of 51 women and gender-diverse young directors who served on a nonprofit board between the ages of 18 and 29. Informants were compensated for their participation. Of the 51 participants, 31 are directly quoted in this report. Selected quotes have been modified slightly for clarity and to remove identifying information.

Methodology and Participant Selection

This research employs an interpretivist methodological approach to center the perspectives and experiences of young directors. The analysis relies on directors' stated definitions and metrics of meaningful engagement and impact, foregrounding their understanding and interpretation of their experiences.



Pre-interview surveys gathered demographic information, board experience details, and initial reflections on governance participation. All interview participants were invited to complete these surveys, which provided important context for the interviews and additional quantitative data for analysis.



Semi-structured interviews with 51 young directors who have served on nonprofit boards across Canada. These one-hour interviews explored participants' pathways to governance, their experiences on boards, the perceived impacts, barriers they encountered, and recommendations for strengthening youth inclusion. The semi-structured format allowed both consistency across interviews and flexibility to explore unique insights from each participant.



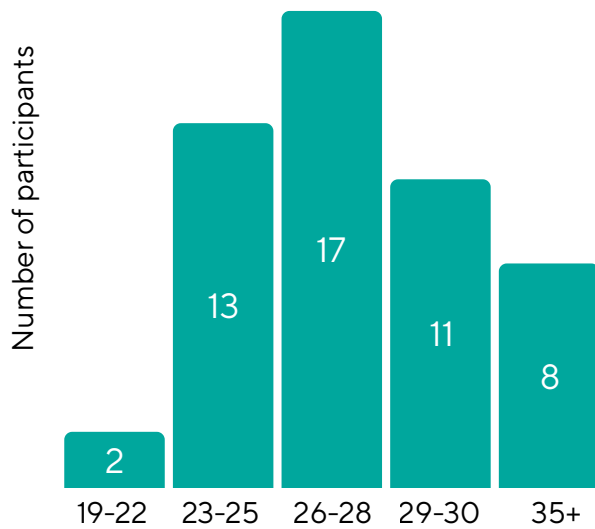
Thematic analysis of interview transcripts identified key patterns, contrasts, and insights across participants' experiences. This analysis focused particularly on understanding what constitutes meaningful inclusion, what barriers limit participation, and what impacts young directors have on governance.

Participant recruitment, surveys, and interviews were conducted between November 2024 and March 2025. Findings from survey and interview analyses were contextualized within the broader body of research and literature addressing the representation of young women and gender-diverse youth in nonprofit leadership spaces across Canada.

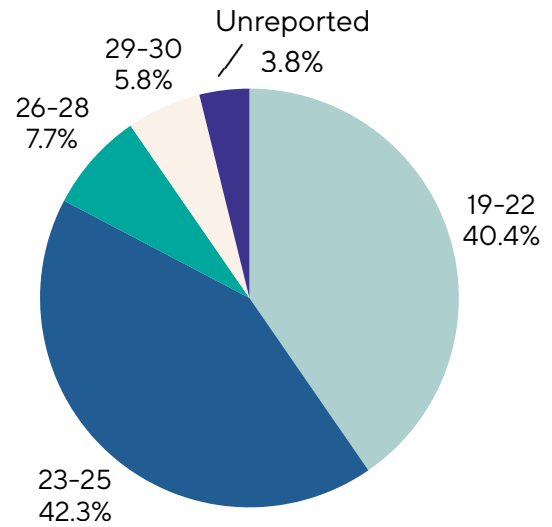
Participants were selected through both targeted outreach and open recruitment calls through email, social media, and Fora's newsletter to ensure diverse perspectives and experiences were captured. This involved reaching out to members of Fora's Rise on Boards alum network to access directors who had participated in structured governance training and placement. These participants provided valuable insights into how programmatic support influences governance experiences and its impact. Recruitment also reached young directors with no connection to Fora's programs, many of whom provided essential perspectives on youth governance experiences without structured support. This recruitment approach ensured the research captured diverse pathways to governance.

Meet the Informants

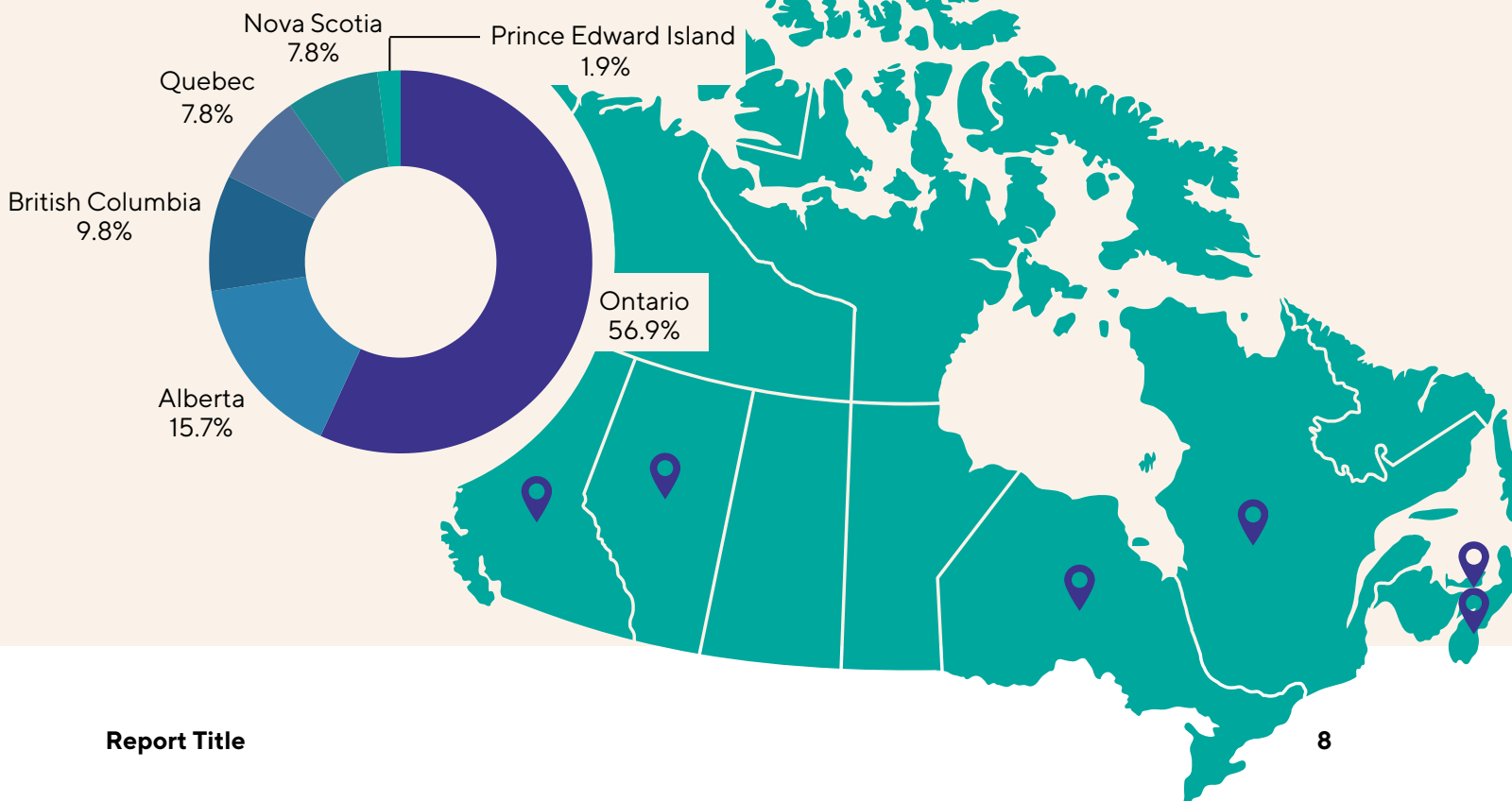
Age during time of interview



Age during first year of service



Geographic distribution



Gender Identity

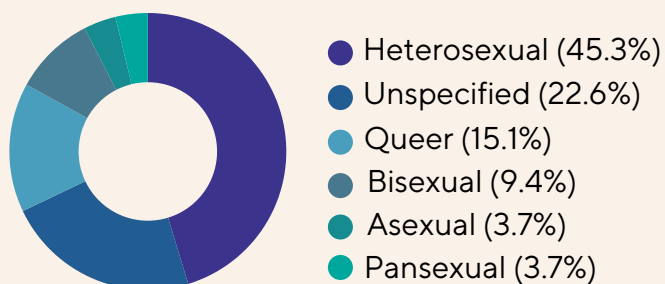
Participants could select multiple responses

100% self-identified as women

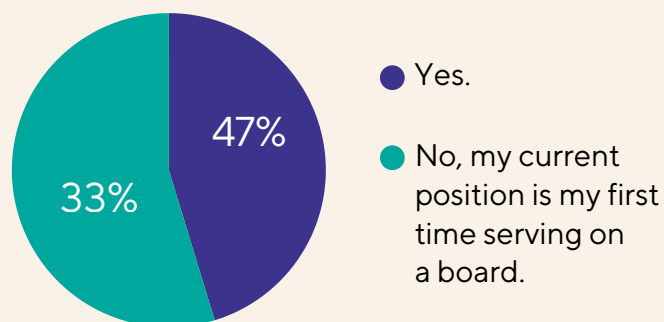
Participants also self-identified as:

- Cisgender (21.6%)
- Gender non-conforming (2%)
- Gender fluid (2%)
- Unspecified (74.4%)

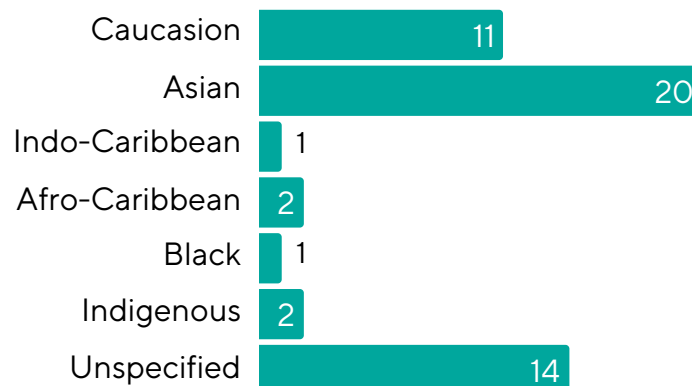
Sexual Identity



Do you have prior experience serving on the board of directors of a non-profit organization?

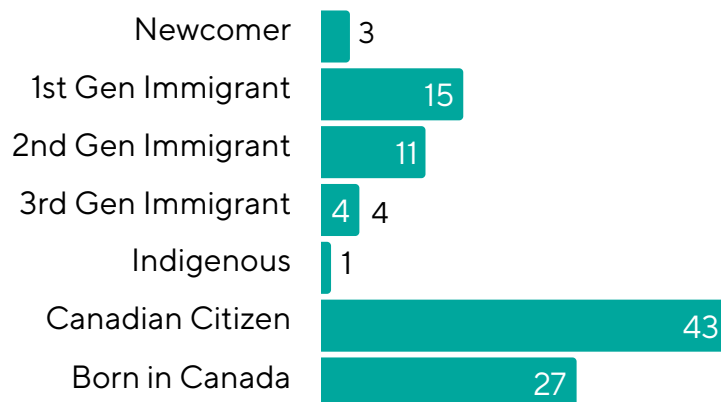


Race and Ethnicity of Young Directors who Participated

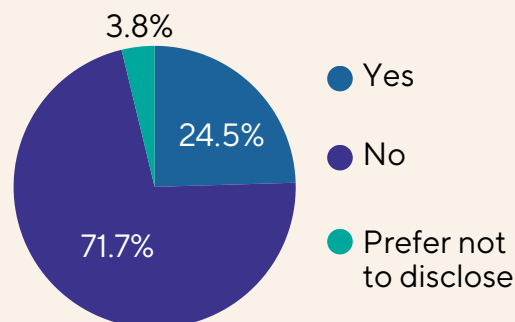


Backgrounds of Young Directors who Participated

Participants could select multiple responses



Identify as a Person with a Disability



Limitations

When interpreting this research, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of its sample, scope, and methodology.

Eligible informants were restricted to directors who had accessed board positions, limiting our understanding of the barriers to recruitment faced by those who had not secured governance roles. Within the sample, women were more strongly represented compared to gender-diverse individuals. This limits our engagement with experiences across various gender identities and with intersectional experiences that encompass racial and ethnic identities.

With 51 participants, the sample size allowed for saturation across dominant themes that emerged from the survey and interviews. As these directors came from diverse backgrounds and experiences, however, many lessons provided in individual interviews are not addressed in the report due to their low representation within the sample.

The significant diversity across the nonprofit sector also means experiences may vary substantially across subsectors, organizational sizes, and regions in ways our sample cannot fully capture. While we collected information about board and organizational characteristics to contextualize each director's experiences, we cannot make generalizations about how these factors influence youth engagement in nonprofit governance. The research also did not include a comparative analysis with boards that do not have young directors or with the experiences of young men within the sector.

These limitations present opportunities for future research that could complement and extend the findings presented throughout this report. The understanding of youth experiences in nonprofit governance can benefit from further research using different methodologies, larger sample sizes, and more focused organizational contexts.



INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The perception that board governance is primarily the domain of older, more established professionals persists throughout Canada's nonprofit sector. Age, gender, and racial bias have resulted in a governance ecosystem that significantly undervalues the potential of gender-marginalized youth, while simultaneously shutting out a significant service beneficiary demographic from decision-making.

Misconceptions fail to recognize that young directors bring unique skills, contemporary insights, and adaptive approaches to governance that directly address many of the pressing challenges nonprofits currently face—from decreases in volunteerism and charitable donations to social and technological evolutions. The absence of intergenerational perspectives among nonprofit leaders is not merely an issue of representation, but a strategic limitation as well.

Youth inclusion in nonprofit governance presents a mutually beneficial opportunity: organizations can strengthen their governance capacity and innovation potential, while young people—many of whom face significant challenges in the current job market and economic landscape—can develop valuable professional skills and expand their networks. Sector-wide support programs, such as Fora's Rise on Boards program, can help bridge this gap by providing young directors with the training and mentorship needed to navigate governance environments, while also connecting nonprofit boards with youth communities. However, to do so, the sector must come to terms with the perception bias it unconsciously or explicitly holds against gender-marginalized youth and their capacity to support nonprofit governance.

This research centres the voices and experiences of young directors who are working to navigate governance spaces and create positive change within their organizations and communities. Based on surveys and interviews with 51 gender-marginalized directors who have served on nonprofit boards across Canada, we provide evidence-based insights into youth inclusion, highlighting practical approaches to strengthen it.

This report documents the substantial impact that young directors have on nonprofit governance and explores the conditions that can foster their meaningful engagement. We analyze the barriers these directors face in their board work and present recommendations for creating more inclusive and impact-enabling environments.

THE NONPROFIT LANDSCAPE IN CANADA

The Nonprofit Landscape in Canada: Challenges and Opportunities

The nonprofit landscape comprises one of Canada's most significant and most impactful sectors. It employs 2.5 million people, contributing over 8.3% of Canada's GDP while mobilizing over 40% of the country's population as volunteers annually. Nonprofit organizations serve as a site of social innovation, democratic engagement, community building, and inclusive economic participation. The sector also delivers essential services in healthcare, education, social connection, housing, and food security. These organizations are often the first to identify and respond to community needs during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and reach populations underserved by public and for-profit services.

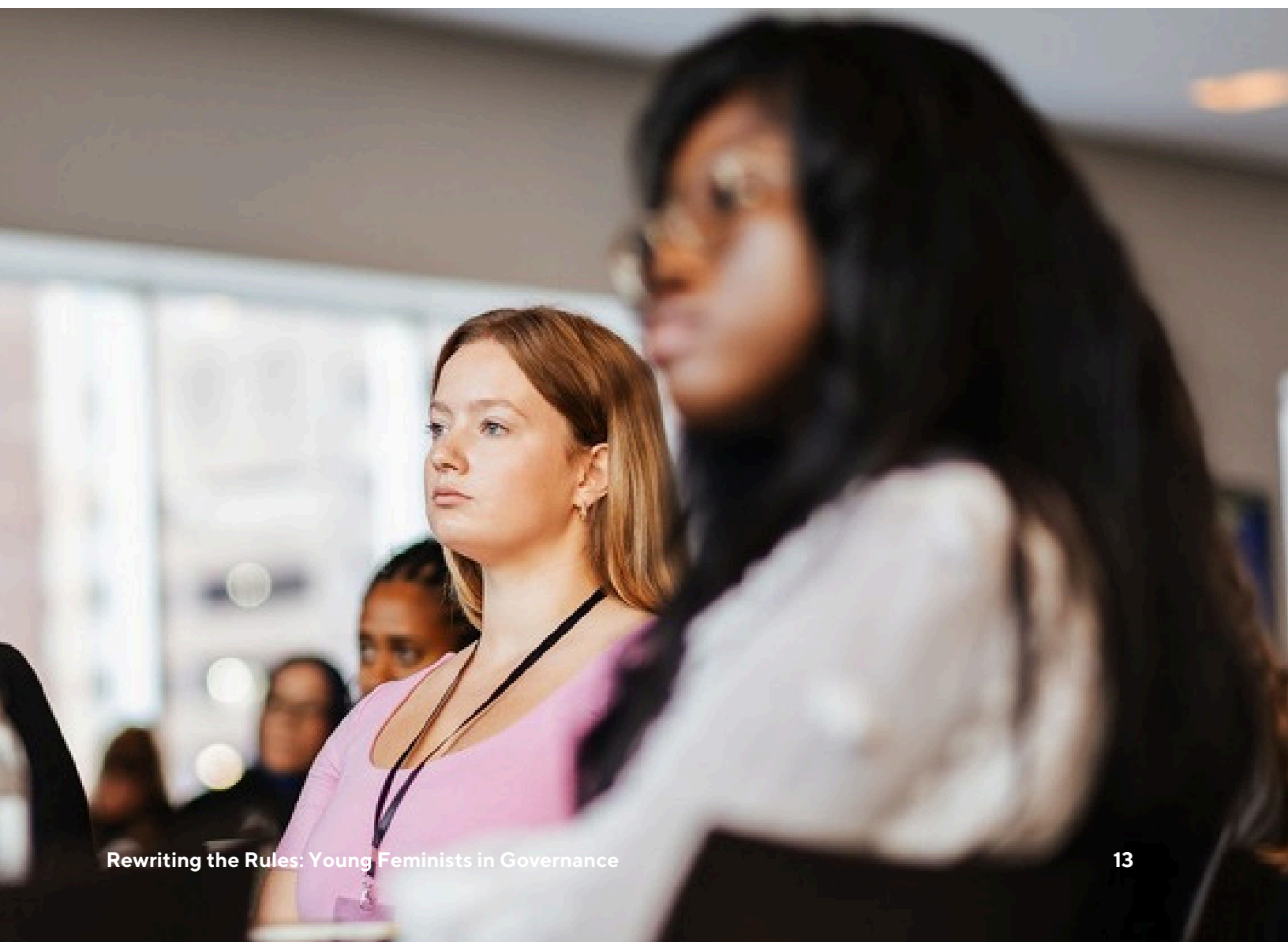
Being so crucial to maintaining the health of the social, economic, and political landscape across Canada, the sector is struggling to adapt to the current moment. Nonprofit organizations are facing increasingly complex social and economic pressures, while persistent structural inequalities restrict their ability to address these challenges effectively.

Growing demand and demographic shifts are transforming service needs across the sector. Amidst a growing, aging, and evolving population, 46% of nonprofit organizations reported an increase in demand for their services or products. Yet, only 24% indicated that their capacity to meet this demand had also increased. This gap is particularly pronounced in social services (70% reporting increased demand versus 40% reporting increased capacity), health (70% versus 36%), and advocacy organizations (64% versus 33%).

Financial pressures are increasing for many nonprofit organizations. Statistics Canada data shows continued decline in donation rates since 2010, with larger declines among donors under the age of 60.³ The continued reduction in donor giving, coupled with competitive and burdensome project-based funding models, has contributed to significant precarity within the sector, mainly because nonprofits rely on individual giving to fill unrestricted funding gaps. This is exacerbated by an increasing reliance on high-value donations from a small fraction of the donor base, which can make the sector more vulnerable to market fluctuations.⁴

Staffing and volunteer challenges further threaten operational continuity. According to a 2021 Canadian Survey of Business Conditions, a significant proportion of nonprofit employers reported concerns about staff retention (33%) and recruitment (38%).⁵ Simultaneously, organizations across the country are facing a shortage of volunteers. The pandemic exacerbated personnel challenges, and the sector has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels of volunteer engagement. As of February 2023, 59% of organizations surveyed for the Charity Insights Canada Project reported having lost volunteers during the pandemic, and 57% continued to experience difficulty recruiting volunteers.

Rapid technological advancements are creating a need for new skills within a sector already struggling to retain and attract personnel. A 2025 report from the Canadian Centre for Nonprofit Digital Resilience identified critical digital skill gaps in the industry, particularly in data privacy and security, data-informed decision-making, and data management and analysis.⁷

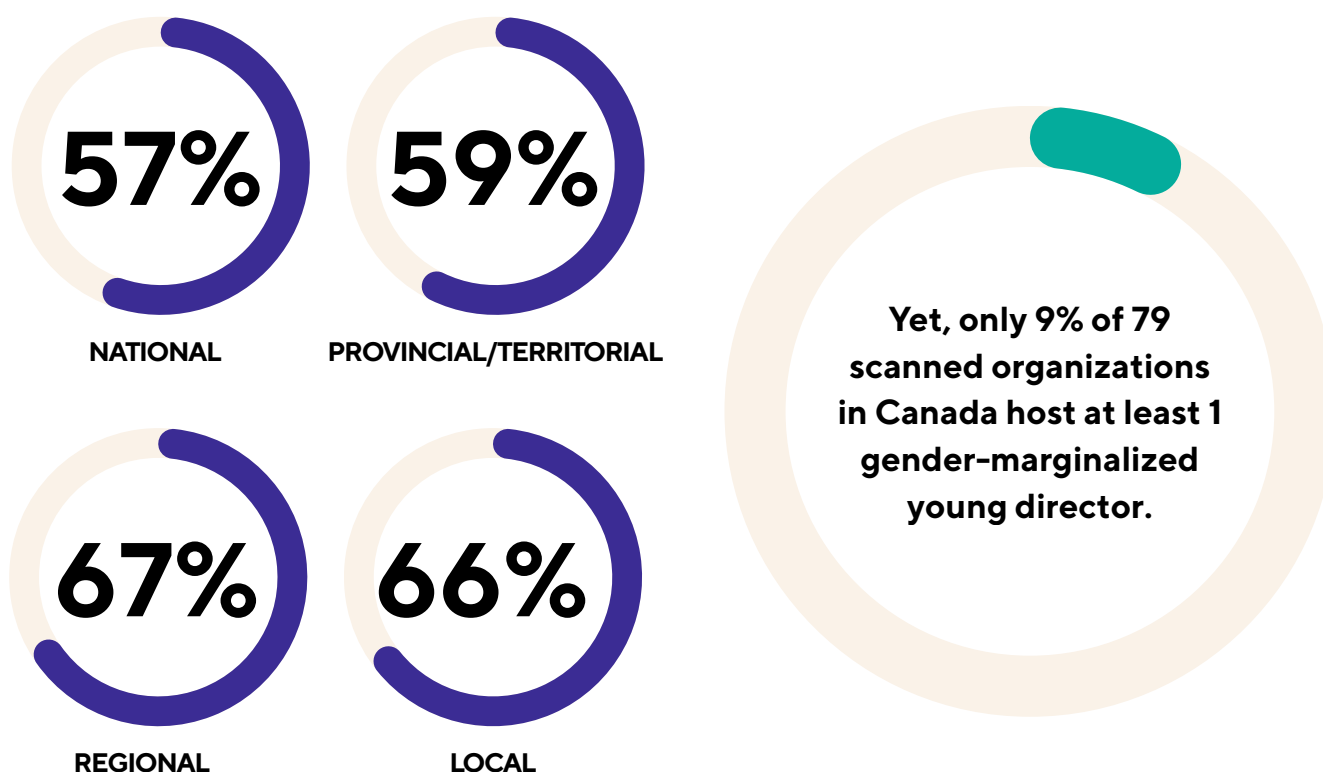


Persistent Structural Inequalities in a Sector Focused on Social Good

As organizations that must respond to complex social challenges, nonprofits require diverse perspectives in their governing boards. Structural inequalities and bias within the sector have resulted in a significant gap in representation between the communities nonprofit organizations serve and their leadership. This representation gap is not merely a question of equity; it presents a substantial risk that organizations' strategies and services will not be adequate, relevant, or sustainable.

Age imbalance in governance is evident across the sector. According to Statistics Canada's 2021 survey of charity and nonprofit boards, the median age of board members was 50 to 54, with 22% of board members aged 65 or older.¹² Data limitations on youth representation make it challenging to assess the extent of age disparities in nonprofit governance. In lieu of published data, Fora commissioned Real People Collaboration to conduct a scan of publicly available information on nonprofit board composition in Canada. This report concluded that of 79 scanned organizations, only 9% had visible representation of at least one gender-marginalized young director on their board. In contrast, between 57% and 67% of nonprofit organizations working across different jurisdictional levels in Canada serve youth.

PERCENTAGE OF CANADIAN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS (NPOS) THAT SERVE YOUTH ACROSS JURISDICTIONAL LEVELS



While this report focuses on voluntary board positions within the sector, wage disparities among nonprofit staff further highlight structural inequities and biases within the sector. It is well-documented that the nonprofit sector is impacted by the feminization and devaluation of its labor.⁸ **Compared to workers in the for-profit and government sectors, nonprofit workers receive, on average, significantly lower wages despite holding higher levels of education.**¹⁰ Notably, this gap is most significant among nonprofit organizations focused on gender equity.¹¹

The difference between the average salary within the sector and the average Canadian salary, however, is significantly less for men (3% lower) compared to women (18% lower). Being younger, racialized, Indigenous, and internationally born are also factors independently associated with lower wages within the sector compared to white, Canadian-born women.⁹⁻¹¹ Overlapping effects result in significant wage disparities for those at the intersections of these demographic characteristics, with racialized nonprofit workers making 12% less on average than their non-racialized counterparts.¹⁰

Gender disparities persist despite women's predominance in the workforce. According to Statistics Canada data released in 2025, women make up 70% of sector employees.¹⁰ However, across the sector, women hold only 47.9% of board positions.¹³ Limits in representation are even more pronounced for gender-diverse individuals, who hold just 0.8% of board seats.¹³

Intersectional representation gaps compound for underrepresented groups. According to 2023 Statistics Canada data, board roles are composed of only 2.8% Indigenous people, 9.4% people from other racialized communities, and 3.2% people with disabilities.¹³ This representation falls significantly below these communities' representation in the Canadian population and further fails to represent the 5% of nonprofit employees who are Indigenous and 28% from other racialized groups.¹⁰

Governance Inclusion in Practice: More Than Just a Seat at the Table

The data on demographic disparities tells only part of the story. Meaningful youth engagement in governance is not merely about demographic representation but about creating environments that allow the sector to benefit from the expertise and efforts of young directors. There is limited research examining the experiences of young directors on nonprofit boards with a critical lens to identify persistent forms of tokenistic inclusion, making the insights from the informants of this report particularly valuable.

Within nonprofit governance, structural barriers and biases can influence board recruitment practices, meeting dynamics, and leadership opportunities. Without intentional efforts to address these biases, boards may perpetuate exclusionary practices that limit the participation and influence of young directors. Addressing these challenges requires more than individual awareness—it demands structural and cultural changes in how boards operate.



Canadian Youth are Facing a Multi-Pronged Economic Crisis

Youth entering and settling into the Canadian workforce in the past decade have experienced a series of economic shocks in a changing labour market. From COVID-19 to the economic instability that followed, and the instability projected ahead, young Canadians are disproportionately vulnerable. In 2024, Statistics Canada reported the lowest youth employment rate since 2012, excluding the immediate COVID-19 years. This survey targeted youth between 15 and 24 years of age.¹⁸

Although the impacts of economic crises are often undermined in perceptions of youth ambition and willingness to work, the National Bank of Canada's special report, published in August of last year, underlines that youth unemployment in the most recent episode of economic instability is disproportionate to those in the past. The report highlights the lowest vacancy rates in traditionally youth-employing sectors since¹⁹ 2017.

In fact, according to the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), **80% of Canada's increased unemployment rate is attributed to youth under 35 who have faced notable struggles to find decent work post-graduation in a demoralizing job market.**²⁰

RBC also notes that this generation is unlikely to qualify for government support, such as Employment Insurance.²⁰ Youth are facing a multi-pronged employment crisis, where they are unable to find decent work required to build career foundations and gain necessary experience, while also disqualifying them from critical government support and navigating workforce entry in parallel to rapid advancements in technology, such as Artificial Intelligence. Youth unemployment and financial instability are national concerns.

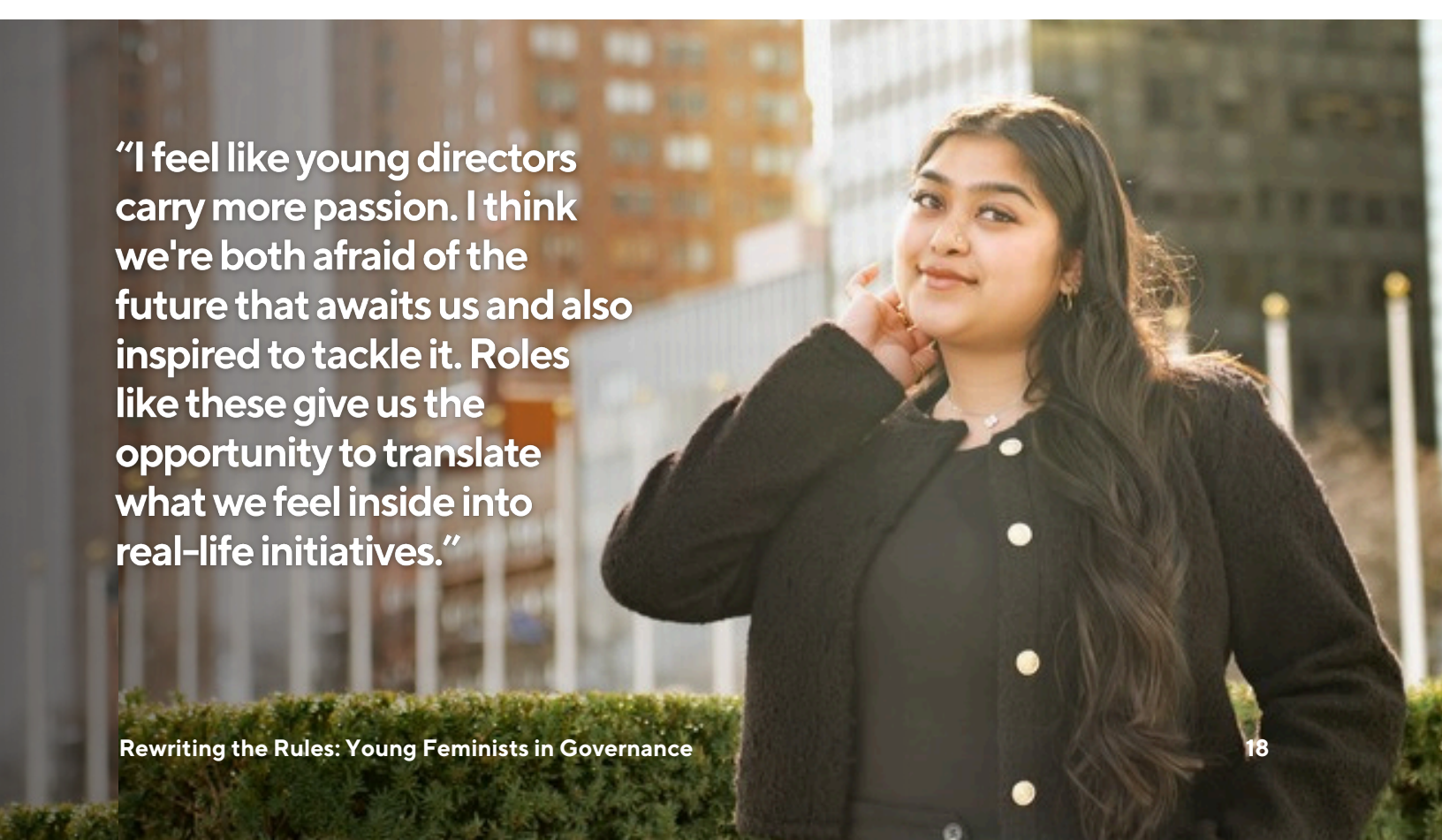
The King's Trust's Failure to Launch Report projects that youth unemployment will cost Canada \$18.5 billion by 2034.²¹ In parallel, an aging Canadian population will increase economic dependency on younger Canadians. The Fraser Institute's 2023 analysis of economic costs resulting from Statistics Canada's assumed fast-aging population rate over 20 years predicts a \$11,200 per person decrease in GDP by 2043.²² The inability to experience decent work and skill development in the foundational years presents consequential challenges in career and salary progression for many young Canadians.

The nonprofit sector plays a critical role in bridging gaps in government support. With a vast majority of nonprofits in Canada claiming youth as a target demographic for their services, organizations must maintain **a thorough understanding of the unique needs of youth and ensure this demographic's perspective at the decision-making level.**

Young directors face stereotypes and assumptions that less time within a particular institutional setting weakens their ability to grapple with the complex challenges facing the nonprofit sector.

Fora commissioned Real People Collaboration to consult board directors in the Canadian nonprofit sector on their likelihood of recruiting a gender-marginalized young director. Consultations with 41 leaders in the sector concluded that presumptions of incompetence, lack of experience, relevant skills, and networks are prevalent among the perceptions senior leaders hold of youth in the sector. To assess these assumptions, we asked the young directors consulted for this research to share the contributions and impacts of their board tenure. Many directors addressed the challenge of articulating and measuring this impact, given their focus on consensus-building and collective decision-making within the boardroom. This skill, as well as the impacts of their individual presence on governance boards, however, was evident.

As the following sections demonstrate, young directors bring unique perspectives and capabilities that make them particularly well-positioned to help organizations meet persistent and emerging governance challenges. With youth at the helm, nonprofit boards offer significant potential to develop and implement innovative responses.



“I feel like young directors carry more passion. I think we're both afraid of the future that awaits us and also inspired to tackle it. Roles like these give us the opportunity to translate what we feel inside into real-life initiatives.”

5. YOUNG DIRECTORS' UNIQUE VALUE PROPOSITION

"I think bringing the perspective of someone who has to grapple with the world as it is right now and as it might be in the next 20, 30, 40 years—I think that's huge. I think one of the most incredible things that young people are capable of is thinking sustainably and thinking into the future differently than other generations might. Because we have to. Because this is the world we're inheriting, and it's on fire in so many ways. And I think that means that we're both more attentive to risk and consequence."

Young directors are particularly well-positioned to **help nonprofit governance adapt to changing realities**. They bring a wealth of skills and experiences to boards, with fresh eyes on emerging challenges. Their passion for their work drives an unparalleled commitment to achieving the missions of the organizations they dedicate themselves to, often with great results.

The capabilities of younger directors often complement those of older board

members, creating a more comprehensive governance skill set that strengthens decision-making and operational effectiveness. Young board members bring distinct perspectives that stem from their generational standpoint and contemporary social understanding. These perspectives are further enriched by expertise in integrating emerging technologies, skill in collaborating with diverse teams, and experience as service users, volunteers, and frontline staff within nonprofit organizations.



Young directors demonstrate exceptional adaptability and innovation capabilities, bringing creative and innovative problem-solving approaches to traditional governance challenges. Fresh perspectives on board practices allowed them to effect change within the board and draw attention to chronic weaknesses within the organization.

"There have been a few instances where I've been able to see around some hurdles that have seemed immovable to others. Because I'm just not invested in the bureaucratic structure in the same way. A couple of the key issues I'm trying to resolve...[have] been going on for almost longer than I've been alive, which is hilarious, and frustrating, like how everybody just kept ignoring it."

The young directors we interviewed demonstrated comfort and experience with adaptation and change, qualities that enhanced their flexible thinking and innovative approaches to nonprofit work. Importantly, their adaptability often had a positive influence on the entire board. Many directors observed that by modeling flexibility in their approaches to governance, they helped foster greater openness to necessary change among other board members.

"There's sort of a need to adapt to the times, especially as a board that serves youth. We need to have a malleability and adaptability to where our priorities are and how we operate. You have to be able to change, but you also have to have time to have those conversations with the people around the table to then make those changes that allow you to carry forward."

Implementing adaptability into board governance was a strong focus among the directors. They were keenly aware of the challenges facing the sector, and many had joined boards immediately before or during the COVID-19 pandemic. This gave them stark insight into how organizations must be prepared to pivot in response to crises and shocks.

The insight young directors brought to crisis response often helped organizations not only survive challenges but also emerge stronger. Here, comfort with rapid change and digital transformation proved particularly valuable. By facilitating adaptations and encouraging innovation during uncertain periods, these directors helped organizations maintain service continuity and develop new capabilities that strengthened their long-term resilience.

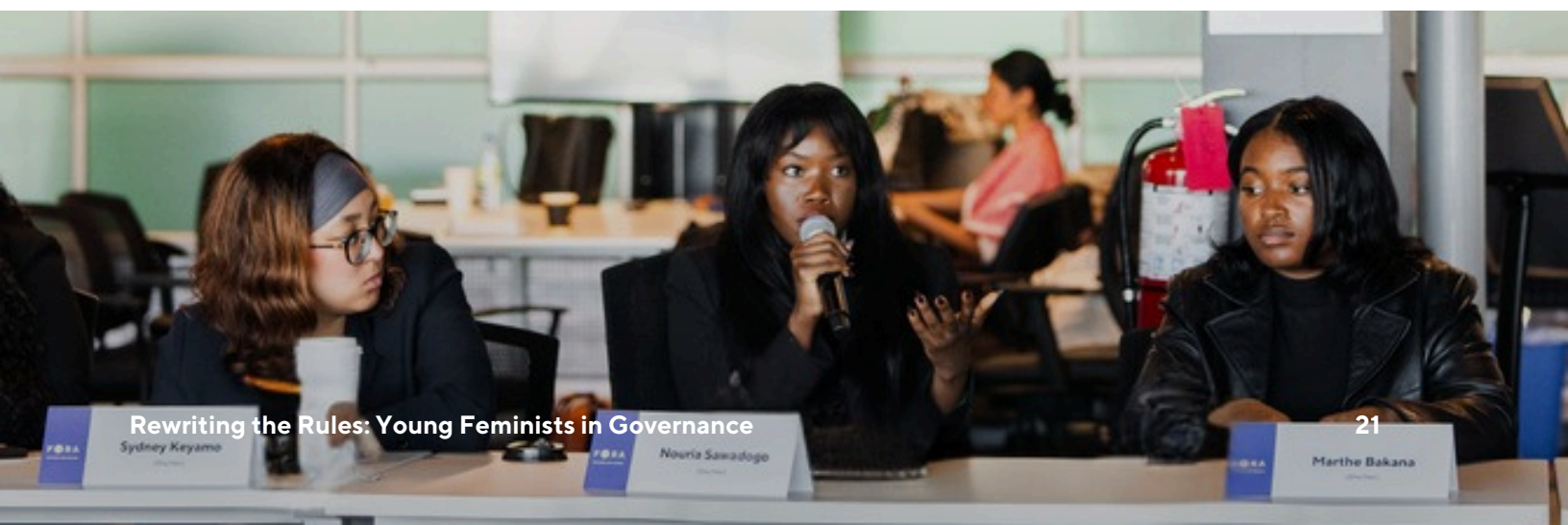
One director spoke to the evolution she was able to lead as board chair, highlighting the importance of governance adaptations to realign governance with organizational objectives and realities: "The organization really leveraged the pandemic in a way... Somehow, despite the pandemic, we managed to increase our engagement. We've grown our membership; we're in front of more people. The work, the nature of the work that we do, has really changed, so it makes sense that the way that we govern ourselves needs to change and the way that we operate needs to evolve with that."

The effect that young directors had on their boards included a real power and impact in asking strategic questions. By questioning the systems they were entering, directors created space for the board to assess their current effectiveness and identify areas where they could increase efficiency. **The unique position of young directors presents a promising ground for transforming nonprofit governance.**

The contemporary challenges faced by the sector are not new to young people—they have developed personally and professionally amidst these societal shifts.

In addition to their adaptability, flexibility, and capacity to bring innovative ideas to nonprofit governance, young directors bring technical and professional skills to the boardroom. These are often in areas where existing boards lack specific expertise. Here, young directors leveraged their skills and diverse experiences across sectors, institutional settings, and cultural environments to create substantial impacts on boards in all areas of governance and operations. The following sections highlight the specific strengths that directors brought to the table and the direct impact on the boards they served.

I think a lot of it is asking questions. Don't underestimate a youth's ability, once they're comfortable in a space, to ask some really observant, poignant questions that will have other people in the room being like, 'Huh! Why do we do that?' Or 'Why is it that we fund this or do that?' It'll make you question—which some people are uncomfortable with—but it'll make you answer those questions and challenge them. Which I think is incredibly valuable and keeps, literally, our society moving forward."



Impacts in Organizational Efficiency

Young directors brought new perspectives to established board dynamics and practices, often identifying opportunities for increased efficiency, transparency, and accessibility that might be overlooked by those more accustomed to traditional approaches. Contemporary knowledge of best practices and emerging frameworks benefited the entire organization through board policy reform and the restructuring of governance procedures. These process improvements often resulted in **more efficient meetings, increased participation from all board members, and better decision-making.**



Onboarding and Documentation Procedures

Many of the young directors we spoke to had recently joined a board of directors for the first time. **Their newness to the environment allowed them to identify critical knowledge gaps between the long-standing and new board members.** They observed that reliance on institutional knowledge and informal knowledge transfer created barriers for new board members, particularly those who did not share professional backgrounds or established relationships with current leadership.

Given this experience as newcomers to the board room, many young directors took on the project of creating more comprehensive onboarding procedures and “clarifying areas of ambiguity” in board policies and procedural documents to help new members feel equipped to fully engage in the work of the board from the start. **One director discussed this experience**, sharing that she “was able to overhaul their onboarding...materials, which was something that they were looking to do for a while. Now it's more streamlined...the more that people know from the get-go, the less catching up for everybody.”

As another young director made clear, challenges of getting up to speed with the rest of the board informed their governance improvements and ability to identify areas of focus for the organization: “So [at first] I didn't really understand the role. And as I grew more comfortable, I was like, okay, I get it, but I still feel like we're not as efficient as we could be. So, 2 years, 3 years in, I was nominated for the president's role. And when I got that, at the same time, I offered up a couple of new policies for the organization and then set some subcommittees with new directions and new mandates. So we'd be like, okay, here are focus areas—let's proceed from there. And that really helped us. **We now have 2 more consistent events that the organization is known for that I'm very happy to say I played a very key role in starting.**”



Digital Modernization and Documentation Systems

A consistent theme across interviews was the significant impact young directors had in modernizing board documentation systems. Many had recent experience working across various professional and academic fields, as well as organizing networks. Here, they had gained familiarity with innovative tools for digital communication, document storage, and dissemination. With this expertise, **many young directors helped fill a digital skills gap on their boards and led processes to enhance board communication and documentation systems.**

These improvements served multiple purposes: they increased the security of confidential information, improved institutional memory, eliminated knowledge silos, and created more equitable access to information for all board members.

One director shared the example of creating an anonymous online voting platform to respond to confidentiality concerns within the board. This helped ensure a more effective and democratic governance process.

In speaking to the power of this modernization, directors highlighted how the systems they implemented **enhanced the capacity of their often small or resource-limited teams by reducing the administrative burden of board operations.** Their strategies were also successful on larger boards, where directors introduced new platforms to streamline asynchronous communications and maintain records of board discussions and decision-making.

"There's a lot of administrative stuff that could be made a lot more efficient if they were using more up-to-date tools and technologies. And if that portion is made more efficient, I feel like it just opens up more space and time for other discussions and other learning opportunities," one young director shared.

The impact of these documentation improvements often extended far beyond the young directors' tenure, creating a lasting infrastructure that strengthened organizational knowledge management and ensured continuity of governance. These benefits made boards more resilient to member turnover.



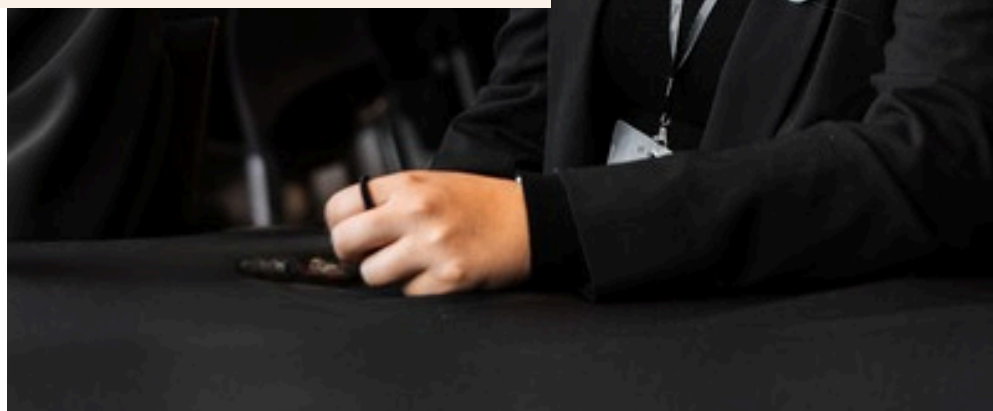
Digital Modernization and Documentation Systems Cont.

In terms of digital modernization, directors brought expertise in emerging AI software. Some directors shared examples of using AI to expedite board governance processes, including quickly building a template of a board policy document from which they could lead a more in-depth and direct discussion with other board members on the policy's content.

While many are still exploring the role AI might play in the future of the nonprofit sector, recognizing its limitations and reliable use, young directors are well-positioned to identify areas of integration of emerging AI technologies that could allow organizations to do more with limited resources.

As highlighted by a young director:

"As we look at young people's impact, it's AI and young people's knowledge around AI, and the amount of support that they can bring to organizations... Their level of knowledge and comfortability with that when the older generations are scared of it—I think that can be embraced and really fill some gaps, especially for nonprofits that are struggling. There are some really cool ways to implement AI, and young people know how to do that a lot better than most of us."



Impacts in Outreach and Fundraising



Digital Communications

Younger generations have long been lauded for their expertise and comfort with digital communications. Not surprisingly, many of the directors we spoke to for this research had employed this expertise to support the communication strategies of the organizations they served. Many had worked professionally in marketing and communications, an industry where digital methods have dominated since their entry into the field.

Those who had not worked professionally in digital communications still provided valuable insight into how their organizations could better engage with the media and online communities. Given the proliferation of digital media sources in recent years and their stronghold on how individuals and organizations can reach their audiences, many have gained experience creating engaging content for diverse audiences through their work in the community, as well as in other academic and nonprofit settings.

As one informant noted: "Strategies for outreach fundraising are all sometimes not caught up with the times of things and the new applications that are out there. There's so much social media engagement that's happening with fundraising, and just so many new tools that create a new and efficient way of doing things. So as somebody that's a little bit younger and has been in student groups and other organizations, I've had a lot more access, engagement, and familiarity with those tools."

Directors' experience in digital communication tools extended beyond social media to helping develop websites and other online platforms through which organizations could engage with their membership: "I had these web design skills as a hobbyist. And so I revamped the website for them instead of them using the budget to pay someone expensive to do it. They had an estimate or quote to revamp the website for [several thousand dollars]... That was a really big deal, because that money, we could just re-grant to someone that needs it, like an organization that'll further a goal rather than us using it on our website."



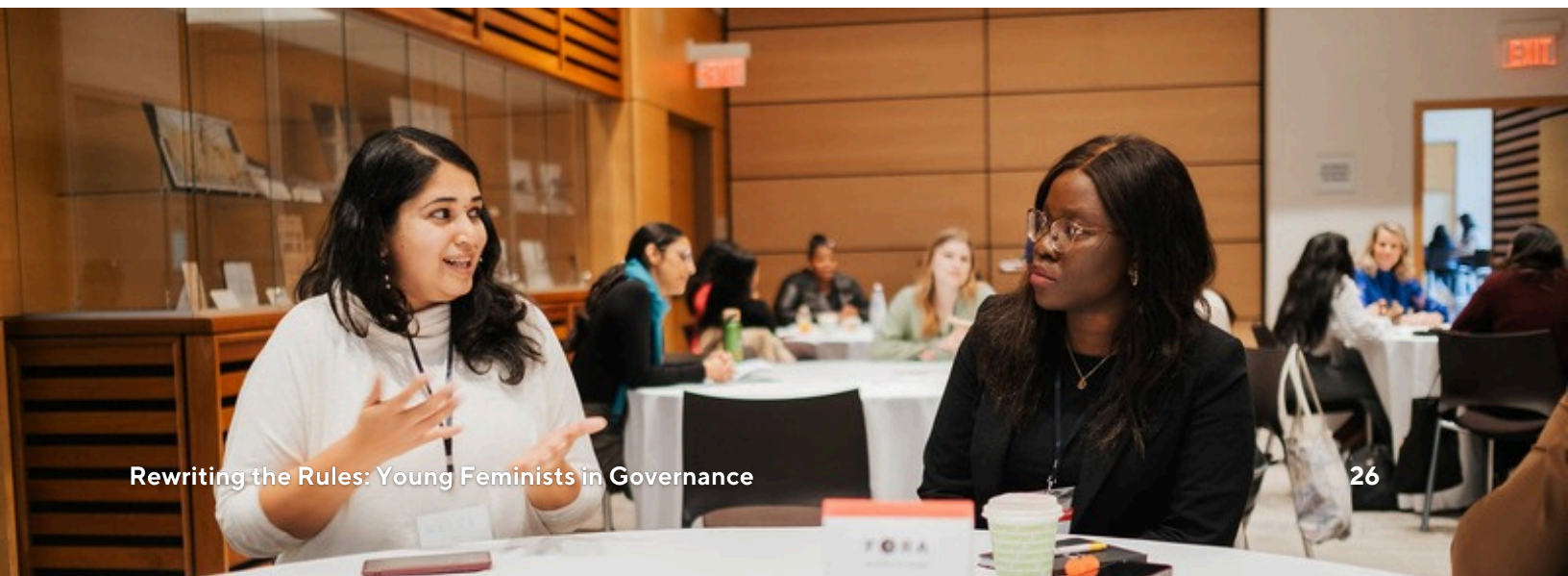
Digital Communications Cont.

Digital communication was a highly valuable skill on nonprofit boards. What was particularly notable from our conversations with younger directors around matters of communication was their skills in intergenerational reach. Many described being adept and experienced at communicating across cultural and generational divides. Many also found that these skills were not shared by other board members, who often struggled to expand their reach outside of their own demographic or communities.

"I don't think [older generations] can always communicate properly with young generations, but I think young generations can communicate across the spectrum."

Young directors have an aptitude for connecting new audiences to the missions of their organizations through communication tools. These skills facilitated young directors' ability to build new partnerships and donor relations outside of their organizations' existing audience. Many young directors helped their organizations expand outreach to previously underserved or unreached demographic groups, leveraging their understanding of diverse communities and communication preferences.

One director spoke of how she helped her organization take advantage of every opportunity to expand their outreach through all communication and marketing materials, "even the little things": "From my end, there was more of an emphasis on how do we get this out to communities that are just broader than who we serve? Or how can we make this more accessible for communities that haven't come to these events before?"





Network Bridging

The directors who informed this research had strong and broad networks. Directors had connections spanning multiple organizations within the nonprofit sector and across various industries, stemming from their past work, volunteer, and internship positions. Many had developed broad networks through participation in online communities, as well as through organizing and activism. Students, in particular, reported having broad networks among diverse youth communities. Directors also found that recent moves between regions for work and school allowed them to bridge networks between often underserved provinces and their national or Toronto-based boards.

"A lot of [the organizations'] work has been very Toronto and GTA-based... but part of their desired expansion is also 'how can we support that work more in Atlantic Canada?' And I think, as a result of my professional work, I have a lot of connections that are very aligned with that."

Young director networks often differed from those of longer-serving board members, opening doors to new collaborations and partnerships. These initiatives were frequently spearheaded by the young directors themselves. New partnerships led to program innovations, as well as the sharing of skills and resources across organizations. By introducing organizations to new collaborative networks, these directors helped integrate sustainability into organizational operations by leveraging complementary strengths across the nonprofit sector.



Connecting to Youth Networks

The immense **peer networks** that many young directors had access to proved tremendously valuable for organizational outreach.

"I do also think oftentimes, when there is one young person, many follow. So I think there's a lot of exposure that young directors can bring to these organizations... An audience that an undergrad has—they can reach a pretty big audience...and they can talk about the organization. It goes through the grapevine pretty quickly."

Young directors' ability to call in other youth was highlighted for its impact in attracting more engagement with the organization.



Connecting to Youth Networks Cont.

Youth peer networks are an incredible resource for nonprofit organizations.

A significantly higher proportion of young people in Canada are engaged in volunteerism than any other demographic.¹⁴ Combined with social media and digital communications expertise, young directors have a tremendous capacity and reach to attract engagement and excitement for their organization.

One director reflected: "I remember we started getting emails from people being like, I love the website, I love the Instagram, can I volunteer? Are you taking volunteers?... I think we welcomed 60 volunteers, and then another 40, up to like 100. The number of applicants we were receiving was so large and overwhelming. So it was more like that organic reach of people hearing what we were doing or seeing what we were doing and wanting to get involved."

Only 8% of nonprofits in Canada have 100 or more volunteers, a remarkable achievement made possible through effective online communications.¹⁵ When reflecting on why so many new volunteers might have been attracted to the work of her organization, this director spoke to the power of having youth representation in nonprofit leadership:

"I think there are a lot of barriers, and I think a lot of it is kind of in that unknown space and that lack of transparency of, like, what does it mean to be on a board? What do you have to do? What opinions can you have? How can you say that? All of that, versus **when you can see something is youth-led and youth-created, it feels a bit more accessible. And maybe that's also why we had such a big uptake of volunteers**, because it was very clear who was sort of running it."

A similar message was prevalent across the interviews, with many informants noting that when young people can see that they can have an impact on an organization's work or within a particular community, they are more likely to get involved and stay engaged.

"Ultimately, just having the visibility of a young person on the board does a lot as well to kind of inspire other young people to get involved and to know that it's possible."



Fundraising

Fundraising is a vital activity for nonprofit boards. Many of the young directors felt that youth are often excluded from consideration for board positions due to the perception that they will not be able to attract or secure operational funds. **On the contrary, our informants shared significant successes in obtaining grant funding for new and innovative projects that expanded the community impact of the organizations' work. They were also able to engage new networks and find fundraising success in areas where the board had not previously been able to solicit donations.**

One respondent shared: "**I cold-called so many companies** and tried to [solicit donations]. I just tried to use my network as much as possible. One of the contributions I made was to secure [a donation], and the founder actually came back to me, and she was like, 'Oh, I don't know how you did that one,' because apparently they had contacted them in previous years, and they never responded, or they didn't want to do it."

The informants emphasized the importance of youth presence on boards to help nonprofits navigate a period of declining donations across Canada, recognizing that their generation would soon be a significant part of the donor pool that their organizations were not currently engaging. Amidst declines in donation rates among younger demographics, the average age of charitable donors in Canada has fallen to around 54 over the past couple of decades. This aligns with the average age of board members.

3

"I noticed the board kind of grappling with a changing social environment in Canada, both from a, you know, how do we kind of ensure that we have consistent funding, but also like change the ways that we're looking at sourcing that funding, understanding that we might have a change in government soon, but also the generational shift that happens with giving for organizations that have a big philanthropic arm. And I think that in both of those ways, having youth perspectives really matters, because this is the next generation that is going to be, hopefully, giving to causes that we care about."



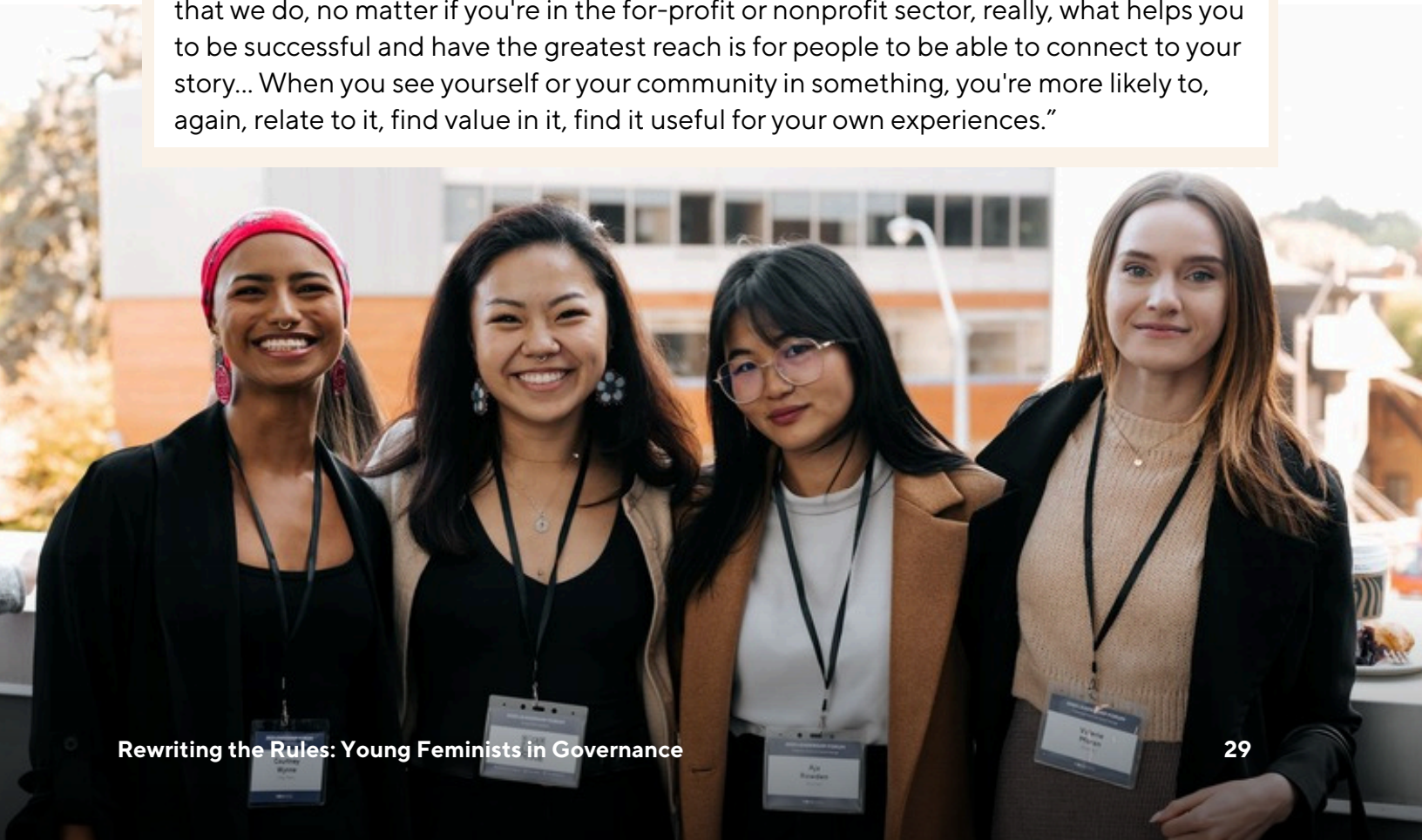
Fundraising Cont.

The young directors highlighted several ways that increased youth engagement on nonprofit boards can better connect young people with the sector's overall work. **Their inclusion in board governance may prove vital to mobilizing financial investment among younger demographics now and in the future.**

"We were able to engage a lot more younger donors, even though they were smaller in the amount they could donate. The university donors that we were able to engage—it was so nice, like you have people just donating like five bucks, their coffee change, just because they were like, 'Yeah, I think this is such a good cause, and it's so great that they're supporting fellow young people.' It's a very real thing."

This uptick in youth donations was directly attributed to donors being able to connect with the stories and experiences of young directors. Through representation, storytelling, and outreach, these directors successfully bridged networks to sustain the work of the organizations better.

"[Young people] have so many unique skills and life experiences or lived experiences that I think people are really looking to connect with. Because at the end of the day, the work that we do, no matter if you're in the for-profit or nonprofit sector, really, what helps you to be successful and have the greatest reach is for people to be able to connect to your story... When you see yourself or your community in something, you're more likely to, again, relate to it, find value in it, find it useful for your own experiences."



Impacts in Governance

One particular challenge facing many nonprofit organizations is the limited resources and funding available to engage in long-term strategic planning and adapt to social, economic, and political shifts. This constraint directly affects governance capacity and effectiveness. Young directors can play a particularly valuable role in helping organizations navigate these challenges through innovative approaches to governance and operations.



Strategic Planning

"I think it's important to have young people on board, specifically because we're not as afraid to point out that we're working ourselves to obsolescence. I think nonprofits have a very short-term view, by nature of limitation of resources and all of this. **Young people aren't afraid to point out that we might not be relevant in the next few years.**"

Young directors bring a distinct, forward-looking orientation to nonprofit governance, consistently demonstrating an ability to anticipate emerging trends, plan for long-term sustainability, and navigate organizations through periods of significant change and uncertainty. These skills were evident in their roles in strategic planning initiatives. Many of the directors we spoke to assumed leadership roles in planning and executing these strategies, collaborating with the board and executive teams to ensure their integration and effective implementation within the board governance framework.

Many of the directors had personal motivations to engage in strategic planning work, recognizing that **"ultimately we are people that are going to be impacted by the services that are provided, and so, being able to share those thoughts and shape those services is really valuable.**" I think ultimately we should be part of conversations that affect us, and we should be given spaces to be able to contribute in that way."

A notable aspect of young directors' future-focused leadership is their emphasis on multiple dimensions of sustainability. For these directors, sustainability encompasses ensuring the financial health of the organization, enhancing staff and volunteer satisfaction, designing programs for effectiveness, and monitoring community and environmental impact. Many directors hold firm commitments to environmental sustainability, social justice, and intergenerational equity that shape their approaches



Strategic Planning Cont.

to governance and awareness of essential risk mitigation strategies. This understanding helped organizations plan across longer time horizons and account for broader impact areas of their work.

"You want to be thinking about the ends; you want to be thinking about the strategic direction that you're trying to achieve. So for me, when it comes to policy work, it's really been about making decisions that have a long-term trajectory and have the ability to live through multiple cycles of the board as opposed to live and die with me or live and die with one iteration of the board."

The strategic planning contributions of young directors frequently resulted in more comprehensive and forward-looking organizational strategies that anticipated emerging challenges and opportunities. By bringing fresh perspectives to planning processes, these directors helped organizations move beyond reactive approaches to more proactive and visionary strategic frameworks.

Many of the directors we spoke to recognized the value in prioritizing the “dreaming work” of nonprofit labour—including establishing clear goals and guidelines for the organization in their work towards a future young directors imagine for themselves, their communities, and the organizations they choose to serve. Many view this work as a priority and recognize the value of a clear strategic vision in motivating organizational members and communicating the organization’s mission and vision to external parties, both to build collaborative and fruitful partnerships and attract donor investment.

One director described identifying a gap in long-term planning within the board: "Within a year and a half, I realized there was no long-term strategy for the center, and it was quite reactive. I thought when I joined the board, it was just that we were coming to the tail end of lockdowns during COVID. But once things settled down a bit, I was like, 'Oh, there's actually not a lot of long-term vision, and it's very much a response and tug and pull from funders and whatnot.' And even when I looked at the fundraising and partnership strategy, it's kind of like whoever knocks on our door, let's assess this opportunity. So I was like, 'Okay, I really think we should be pushing for more of a strategy session.' And we did get that, and I think that was one of the most valuable contributions—organizing and co-facilitating the workshops and building out the output of those discussions... And then the second piece would be being more strategic about fundraising and partnerships."



Strategic Planning Cont.

"So we did have a committee that I was a part of, and I think it was almost difficult to articulate what we could do or deliver to donors if we didn't actually lay out what our vision was. So it became a circular problem, and I think I was able to help shape that narrative."

Another director spoke further to the successes a proactive approach to visioning allowed the organization she was leading: "We had some time to do the dreamy work because we were proactive, and we got to lead. Most unifications or amalgamations happen out of need and desperation. So we didn't have that timeline or stress. So, we got to imagine exactly who we wanted to be. We were able to reach out to all the people who made [the organization] what it was and were impacted by what we're doing. So they helped us build what that dream was and who we wanted to be and reshape all of the strategy."

Many of the directors we spoke to brought complementary financial skills along with future-oriented strategic thinking. These skills enhanced budget management and fiscal accountability within their organizations by implementing stronger financial controls, more transparent reporting, and better alignment of resources with strategic priorities. These financial management contributions were especially valuable during periods of organizational transition or growth, when strategic resource allocation became particularly critical.

The future-oriented thinking and proactive action of these young directors helped organizations develop more sustainable strategies for future growth and direction. By bringing awareness to emerging trends and long-term consequences, young directors often helped boards develop strategies that prioritized sustainability alongside immediate operational needs.



Building Consensus Across Perspectives

Young directors commonly reported leading consensus-building and collaborative decision-making processes. **Directors were skilled in bridging diverse viewpoints within their boards. Their mediation of diverging perspectives encouraged productive and open dialogue and discussion.** Many had developed a comfort with facilitating conversations across different communication styles and frames of reference, drawing on their lived experiences, university work, and professional backgrounds.

"One of the things that I've been told is that I have a really great way of consensus building. If there are two people on the board seeing things in a different way, but they're kind of saying the same thing—they're just coming at it from a different perspective—I have a really innate ability to bring these perspectives together."

"I see myself as someone who is able to see the world through multiple perspectives and understand that not every lived experience is the norm. In those differences, one of the perspectives that I always bring is, what are the things that actually connect us? What are the shared values that, despite us having different perceptions or experiences, actually bring us together? That's how I approach my board work."

Directors received positive recognition for this role on their boards, with many members appreciating the young directors' modeling of more collaborative and inclusive communication styles. **Many directors found themselves naturally positioned as bridges between different stakeholder groups:** "I think my role is not necessarily in shaping the board's decision, but more about opening the floor and connecting these different perspectives, as everyone has something so unique to bring to the table. I'm definitely the youngest member on the board... Our volunteers are [younger], our board members are typically in their forties, and I'm in that middle [age range] sweet spot. So it's kind of like mediating, communicating, sharing."

This translation work often required young directors to bridge communication gaps between the different generations, professional backgrounds, and lived experiences represented on their boards. Their ability to recognize the value in diverse perspectives while identifying common ground helped boards move beyond polarized positions and toward collaborative solutions.

Directors also described actively seeking perspectives that might not otherwise be considered in board discussions, particularly those of staff, community members, or stakeholders who lacked direct representation.



Building Consensus Across Perspectives Cont.

This included participating in organizational programming and seeking out opportunities to meet staff and organization members. By bringing these viewpoints into governance conversations, they expanded the range of considerations and perspectives informing board decisions.

Introducing new perspectives into decision-making and leading boards towards consensus did not come without challenges. As one director noted: "There have been times with certain members of the board where my opinions have been discredited just by virtue of being a younger board member. But it has been offset, and oftentimes people, even in the meetings, have spoken up and said, 'No, that's an interesting point, let's talk more about it.' **At the end of the day, I want to make an impact in this organization in a way that is collaborative, that draws in different perspectives.** I've been reelected to the board for a reason. I've had a lot of positive feedback from different members. So I'm just trying to push through and set a path where younger people are seen as having valuable perspectives to add."

A focus on consensus-based decision-making and collaborative board processes complemented the future-focused leadership of young directors, ensuring that strategic decisions reflected diverse perspectives while maintaining a coherent direction. Together, these skills enabled boards to navigate complex governance challenges with greater inclusivity and effectiveness.



Impacts in Advancing Equity

Young directors bring distinct, equity-centred frameworks to nonprofit governance that transform how organizations approach both internal operations and external community engagement. These directors' commitment to equity extends beyond representation metrics to a fundamentally different approach to decision-making, prioritizing organizational accountability to the communities impacted by their work.

"Advocacy runs in our blood. It's at the forefront of everything we do. And I think because of that, we bring passion to every role that we take. We're constantly thinking about other people and the betterment of this world. Not to say that other generations don't have that—they absolutely do. But I think youth hold an incredibly diverse perspective on what we envision as advocacy, and opportunities like these give us the chance to ensure that the work we're doing for these communities is true, pure, and impactful." **Many directors identified their generation's familiarity and strength in seeing governance challenges through an intersectional lens. This enabled them to see a nuanced and full picture of the implications for board decision-making.**

"We experience different challenges in different ways, and so advocating for what we see in our future regarding sustainability, regarding DEI [(diversity, equity, and inclusion)]—that's one thing we're able to bring to these roles. The second thing is intersectionality. I think our generation values that a lot more than the generations that preceded us. It allows us to clarify the different directions that boards and corporations can take to create spaces for intersectionality to thrive. So you're not only integrating youth perspectives, but you're also integrating the perspectives of people of different genders, of people of different ethnicities."

In bringing an equity lens to the board, young directors were able to lead assessments of internal organizational cultures and policies as well as community impact. **Young directors often found themselves unique on their boards in their ability to apply intersectional equity frameworks to their governance work.** Many were able to identify priority areas for change and implement their proposed initiatives.

"One of the things that I felt I brought that was unique is I was consistently one of the only voices advocating for the immigrant experience, advocating for folks who just experience this world differently due to things like our race... I see myself as someone who is able to see the world through multiple perspectives and understand that not every lived experience is the norm."

Our findings here reflect those from broader sector research on equity practices in nonprofit organizations. A 2023 report by the Equitable Recovery Collective found that organizations led by those from underrepresented backgrounds were significantly more likely to implement equity-enhancing practices across all aspects of their operations.¹⁶ This was reflected in the numerous examples shared by most young directors of their ability to identify and often take action on equity advancements within the boardroom.



Promoting Staff and Volunteer Well-Being

A standout contribution by young directors in advancing equity initiatives was in advocating for staff and volunteer welfare. Many noted that their perspective as recent frontline workers within the nonprofit sector provided crucial insights often missing from board discussions. This firsthand understanding of staff experiences, combined with their expertise applying an equity lens to governance, enabled young directors to identify and address systemic issues that were undermining employee well-being.

"Having other young people who had experience working in the sector and similar roles created a closer relationship to, and maybe a more nuanced perspective around, the challenges that our staff were experiencing in their day-to-day jobs. I think that for folks who've moved into other roles for a very long time, where they've been distanced from frontline service delivery positions with the nonprofits, it can often be challenging to make sense of or grasp, yeah, just the day-to-day realities of what it means to work in an organization of this size in this type of community. So yeah, I think the closeness to the work, to the community, was probably a fairly significant perspective that young people on our board brought for sure.

Young directors' emphasis on promoting staff well-being extended to volunteers. In survey responses provided by young directors, several noted their efforts in securing safeguarding policies for volunteers, especially youth volunteers engaging with their organizations. **This demonstrates the unique value of incorporating the voices and perspectives of a service demographic directly into the governance structure of an organization,** as young leaders were able to proactively understand the specific challenges volunteers and youth might face and work to safeguard them accordingly.



Promoting Staff and Volunteer Well-Being Cont.

One director spoke of their direct role in shaping staff well-being and seeing improved relationships between the staff and board as a result of the actions they were able to set in motion. Their recent professional experiences had provided them with a wealth of examples to draw from when the board considered how to improve working conditions for staff and bring a fresh perspective and new approach that proved effective.

"Many of our board members had been part of one industry and worked within that industry for the bulk of their careers... And by some twist of luck and chance, I happen to have worked in 4 different sectors across the last 4 years before joining the board...I think the breadth of experience, especially when it came to the human resources work, came in really handy.

I was part of the strategic planning for the organization's next 5 years... and I took on spearheading the staff well-being pillar in the organization. And I remember when having conversations with our staff towards the start of the strategic planning work, it was very clear that they were exhausted and not very hopeful. Because although they wanted these things to be better, they wanted to have, you know, more flexible work arrangements. They didn't know what was possible. Towards the end of my time on the board, you could tell that staff were extremely appreciative of all the changes that had come and that they had seen 'Okay, like, this wasn't just talk from the board'."



Responding to Community Needs

Young directors' commitment to equity extends beyond internal organizational dynamics to transform how nonprofits engage with the communities they serve.

By applying intersectional frameworks to service delivery and community engagement, these directors help organizations reach previously underserved populations and develop more responsive programs. Their ability to recognize and advocate for diverse community perspectives strengthens the vital connection between governance decisions and community impact.

"I am not self-made, I'm community-made. I feel like a lot of things that I do, like advocacy, are not for my own well-being, but for the community. And I think that's kind of the vision that I use to walk everywhere I go. And so truly, I think it had a very strong, very pivotal impact on the way that I experienced my director role because at every step I took, I feel like I was advocating for those communities."

Young directors often reported being the only member of the board who shared specific lived experiences with the organization's clientele. In these positions, several directors shared examples of providing insight into current gaps or weaknesses in organizational programming that older board members could not explain.

Many directors spoke to the value of client representation at the board table, often expressing frustration over the lack of representation of youth in decision-making spaces that impact young people's lives. **They found that youth status was often missing from conversations about bias and discrimination, with many older board members assuming that they could speak to the youth experience.** While all board members have experienced youth, young directors highlighted that these experiences are time-bound and context-specific.



Responding to Community Needs Cont.

The directors we consulted were skilled in intergenerational communication, working to translate diverse experiences for older board members who often lacked a foundation of understanding in the issues raised. While taxing, these directors saw educating the board about the realities of their clientele as central to good governance and informed decision-making. Many were the sole advocates for important elements of their clientele's experience. In representing community experiences within board spaces, young directors helped organizations build towards more responsive programs and services.

Comments from Consulted Young Directors:

"Nobody on the board actually used that service, of course, because it was a campus-based service, and none of those people were undergrads. So that was like a very interesting moment of disconnect between the service delivery and the service provider, and the service user—I'm now both of those things in a way, which is interesting. Just being a student and being a younger person at that time made me see their projects in a different way, which was useful."

"I'm very critical of organizations that are focused on youth but do not have a single young person in their decision-making and their executive team, or even someone more senior, right? I think that is something I have always been critical about, because while you do have valuable contributions from years of experience, I would assume there is a central piece that you may be missing without having someone who is experiencing life as a youth, day to day, right now."

"You need someone who has seen the issues in motion, who understands fully and organically what is happening, where there are gaps."



Advancing the Sector

Many of the young directors we interviewed brought valuable experience from community organizing and advocacy. These directors often approached their board work with a strong understanding and deliberate consideration of the broader social contexts and structural inequities impacting their work.

Directors' activism experience fostered skills in questioning established systems and imagining alternative possibilities. As one director observed, "Young people always have been at the forefront of social change and big societal transformations. And I think right now, with the alignment of incredibly drastic social circumstances, a lot of us have these visions of what we would like to see for the future, and I think we're going to see a lot of people in these roles start taking more dramatic action."

Many directors viewed their board service as an extension of their commitment to systemic change, rather than simply organizational stewardship. Their awareness of the root causes of challenges facing nonprofit organizations positioned them to advocate for transformative approaches, rather than merely incremental adjustments to unsustainable models.

"Young people, I think, could really move the nonprofit sector forward faster...and maybe break free of some of the kind of systemic structures that it's trapped in—the power dynamics of how funding works and the capitalism of it all. Like, I think young people are able to envision different ways of working and building relationships that I think could be really valuable."

The transformative potential of this perspective is significant. **Young directors' particular skill sets and experiences position them to lead the transformation of organizational models** towards ones that can better respond to the current and emerging challenges facing the sector.

Impacts on Young Directors

This report primarily focuses on the impact that youth have on nonprofit governance. Board service has resounding benefits for young directors. Many of the informants consulted for this research described how meaningful engagement on nonprofit boards catalyzed significant personal and professional development. Opportunities to participate in governance provided a platform for skill development, community engagement, and network expansion, equipping directors to carry their experience forward in leadership positions both within and outside the nonprofit sector.



Confidence Building

Having an impact on board governance can help young directors understand the value of their perspectives. A consistent challenge many directors faced during their board terms was building the confidence to speak up, share their ideas, and promote investment and support for their initiatives. Many directors developed this confidence as they saw the positive impact their contributions had on decision-making and organizational operations. This confidence translated to other professional contexts.

When asked whether their board tenure had impacted their professional lives, one director spoke to a common sentiment among directors:

100%... I'm doing a work placement right now for school, and I'm really surprised at how we're in meetings, and I'm just adding my piece right away... I think it's helped me get a lot more comfortable in meeting spaces. And just feeling like... more just self-assured."

Another director explained that their board service helped them understand that while their skillset may be different than older board members, they learned to "not see it as a disadvantage, but also really as an advantage that I can contribute in ways that other board members aren't able to."

A lack of youth representation on nonprofit boards means that youth do not have clear scripts for how their unique knowledge and expertise can be applied to governance work. This, combined with a systematic undervaluing of their perspectives, makes boards of directors an intimidating and challenging domain to navigate.



Professional Development

Experience in nonprofit governance allows youth to explore how they can translate their ideas into a governance context. Supportive and constructive board experiences further build youth confidence in their ability to make an impact within the sector and encourage continued engagement.

Many directors had the opportunity to engage in board and committee work that expanded their skill sets and allowed them to apply their expertise in new institutional contexts. Directors highlighted their development in stakeholder engagement, financial management, event planning, recruitment, program evaluation, and board health assessments. These practical governance skills provided valuable professional experience that many young professionals struggled to access elsewhere.

"I think it helps me feel more fulfilled and more engaged in my community...But in terms of my professional life, I think it definitely gives me more skills that make me more than a researcher, I would say, because I do research in my everyday life. But if I didn't have the governance experience, if I didn't have the finance experience, then maybe I wouldn't be able to manage projects, maybe I wouldn't be able to understand what context the nonprofit clients that we have are working in."



New Perspectives on Leadership

Board service exposed young directors to diverse leadership styles and governance approaches. Many directors reflected on how this exposure nuanced their perspectives on good governance and equipped them to adapt their decision-making to serve organizational priorities across different settings better.

Some directors had limited engagement with community-based organizations prior to their service on a nonprofit board. One of these directors explained how board service expanded her understanding of what effectiveness looks like in different governance contexts: "I think in my corporate roles... things are boxed to 30 minutes. You go over 1 minute, and it's like I'm taking up too much space... and that is a marker of efficiency and effective decision-making... [In this nonprofit board role], when people talked for 5 minutes, everyone else was actively listening... And it made me just see different forms of decision-making...and that no one form is better than the other, they just have their pros and cons."



New Perspectives on Leadership Cont.

A broadened understanding of what is possible in organizational governance, combined with the confidence to lead this change, has already helped many directors effect change in their new positions.

"It sets a really good standard for you to have gone through a positive board experience...and then you can be like that torchbearer for a really archaic institution that may need the flip, right?... Having the confidence and knowing what's possible in a board has given me the toolkit to be at this really archaic board table and be like, 'No, I'm not settling, because I know that there's better ways to do things'."



Network Expansion

Board service provided young directors with access to valuable professional networks often inaccessible to those early in their careers. Many directors found that the relationships they established on their boards created ongoing opportunities for collaboration, mentorship, and professional growth.

"I had a really good experience with mentorship [on the board], and I'm still in touch with that person... She actually really helped me professionally this year, and they put me in touch with someone that I now work for. So even though I wasn't working with them on that board anymore ... having that person in my network and them knowing my skills, what I can do, they recommended me to someone, that made a world of difference in the professional world."

Notably, some directors were able to leverage their board experience to demonstrate their learning and secure employment.



Network Expansion Cont.

"I was able to kind of leverage this experience... in job interviews and stuff like that, and just sort of speak to things that I had learned. I think having the Rise on Boards program and my subsequent board experience really ... amped up my CV and my resume, and so that alone, I think, was a huge perk of having done this."

Board service creates a positive cycle of engagement for young directors within the nonprofit sector, positioning them to champion inclusive and effective governance models throughout their careers.

"Once you join a board, you're kind of more inclined to join other boards. Just because it's, you know, it's demystified. And you can see the impact that you're having. And then also, your networks are building, so then you get asked to join other boards."





Community Engagement

The directors we spoke to carried strong, mission-driven motivations for joining nonprofit boards. Directors recognized the unique impact one can make at the board level and were keen to drive positive change and make tangible contributions to their communities. Board experiences were an important site for them to act on their ideas and gain experience leading the strategic direction of community-based organizations.

"I've done a lot of volunteering throughout my life as well, but hadn't had a chance to be involved in the operation or strategy side of nonprofits... I think there's a different level of impact that you can have when you're working with the leadership team of an organization, with the board, rather than just kind of executing what's already been determined. So I've really enjoyed that side of the nonprofit experience."

Directors highlighted how these leadership positions provided opportunities for them to engage with other like-minded women and gender-diverse individuals with leadership experience within the nonprofit sector. **Board service provided a platform to further develop skills in mobilizing and engaging with communities.**

"I feel like I really got to know community building and what that looks like or means in the everyday through this experience."

Seeing a gap in community representation in sector leadership, several of our informants took on board service to be an example for other young people in their communities.

"I always saw myself as someone who felt like they could contribute and had an important perspective to share and invaluable insights. And I wanted to be able to do it in that capacity, to role model and to show other professionals in my field, and also ones that look like me and identify closely with me that it is possible to take on leadership."

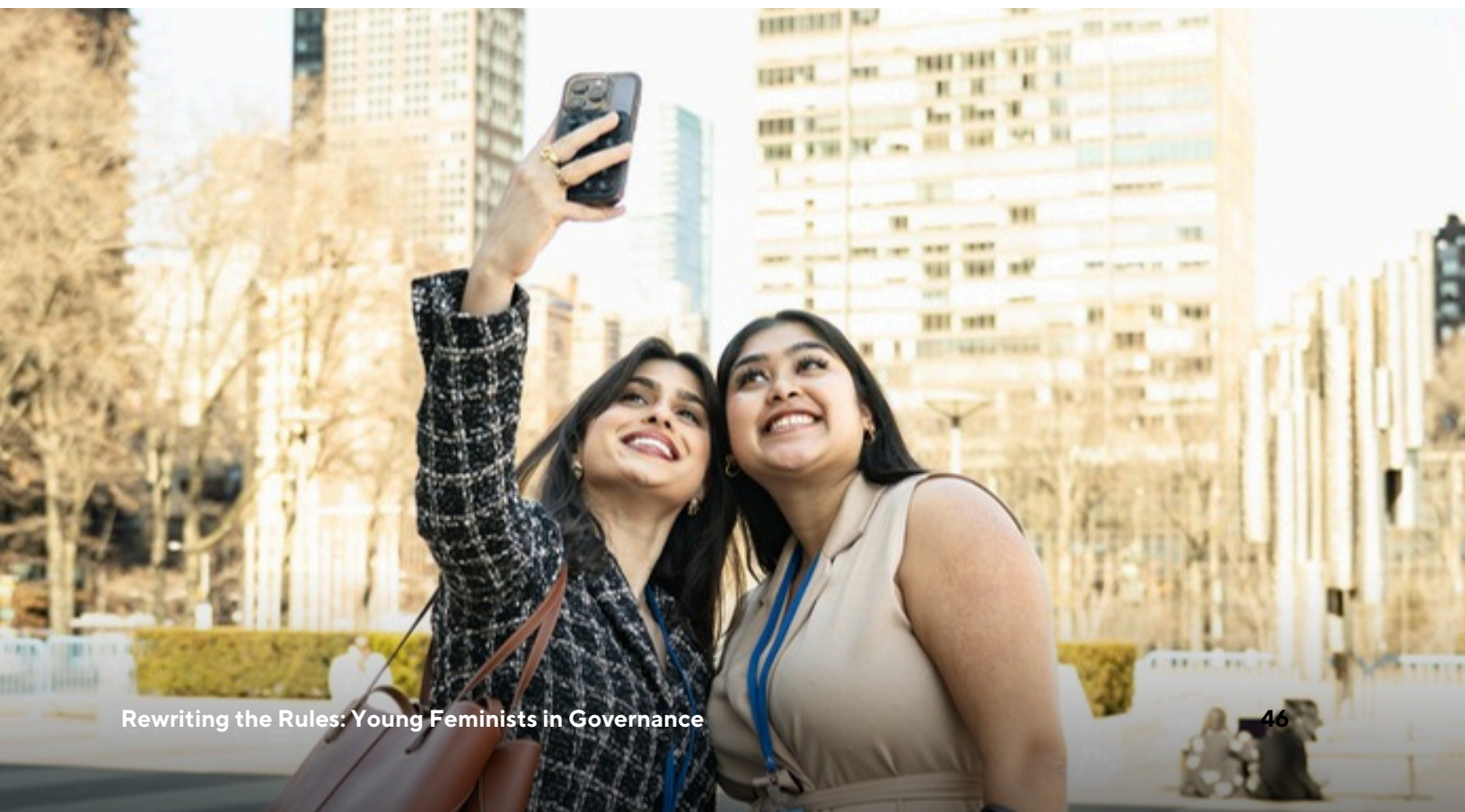


Creating a Positive Cycle of Engagement

Meaningful board engagement supports young directors in developing valuable skills and confidence, which they then carry forward to other leadership roles. This creates a positive cycle of engagement within the sector.

"Once you join a board, you're kind of more inclined to join other boards. Just because it's, you know, it's demystified. And you can see the impact that you're having. And then also, your networks are building, so then you get asked to join other boards."

The young directors who informed this report are committed to leading advancements in inclusive and effective governance throughout their careers and are well-positioned to help foster more equitable pathways to leadership for generations to come.



6. FOUNDATIONS FOR IMPACT: BEYOND TOKENISM TO MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

Defining Meaningful Engagement

Young directors interviewed for this research made clear distinctions between tokenistic inclusion and meaningful engagement. Many had previously experienced tokenism in various settings, commonly citing experiences of consultation without follow-up or action on their ideas, engagement on separate youth councils that had no decision-making authority or role in implementation, relegation to a youth role without opportunities to influence broader board work, and dismissal and devaluation of their ideas and contributions due to their age.

"It's one thing to create a youth position on your board and have a young person at the table. That's the first step, honestly, and if you don't go beyond that, what's the point? It looks good on paper. But that's not really engagement, that's presence—totally different."

Meaningful engagement was often defined as "not just listening, but action," requiring the tangible integration of youth perspectives, ideas, and initiatives in decision-making and implementation processes. Young directors reported feeling most engaged when their input was actively sought, thoughtfully considered, and integrated into board operations.

"Meaningful engagement would look like, not just 'Oh, like if you have something to say, say it,' but more like, 'Oh, you're saying something, we're listening. And that's actually a very important perspective. And we'll take that, and we will put it into consideration. But we'll also act on it, and we'll do the research, and we'll take what you suggested and put it into actual practice in action.' I think that's what it looks like to me."

At the core of meaningful engagement is equal influence in decision-making processes and a genuine recognition of the value young directors bring to all areas of board governance.

"Meaningful youth engagement in governance looks like young people at the table, feeling confident that they can speak up and they can weigh in at the same level, and feeling like their opinions are valued at the same level as everyone else's and allowing them to be engaged on all matters of business, not just ones related to youth."

This recognition includes acknowledging the unique lived experiences and identity-based perspectives that young directors bring to the table. Organizations that demonstrated meaningful engagement validated these perspectives as legitimate forms of expertise that complement other professional experience.

The Value of Meaningful Engagement

The experiences of the directors consulted for this research revealed a clear connection between board environments and the impact young directors were able to have. When directors experienced authentic inclusion and meaningful engagement, they were able to apply their skills and expertise more fully, building the confidence to expand their influence and responsibilities. Conversely, when directors experienced marginalization or tokenistic inclusion, these imposed challenges limited their ability to navigate board dynamics, communicate their ideas, and make tangible contributions.

Environments where young directors felt meaningfully engaged and included in the board's work noted a culture of bi-directional learning between younger and older board members. These relationships fostered a culture of growth and learning that recognized that governance is a learning opportunity for all board members, regardless of age or experience. This bi-directional approach stands in contrast to tokenistic models where young directors are positioned only as learners or beneficiaries of experience from older board members.



Building Impact-Enabling Environments

Young directors consistently emphasized that meaningful inclusion means integrating new perspectives into governance practices. In effect, this requires boards to welcome rather than resist cultural evolution.

"If you have new directors, you have to understand that they have to have a space to be able to impact the culture within the board. The culture within the board needs to change with the people who are on the board. There has to be room and space for that."

Boards can create space to include young directors by preparing existing leadership for culture shifts. Informants for this research recommended that boards make explicit plans regarding how they will invite and respond to new ideas and perspectives, including how they will facilitate conversations that challenge the current board culture by new directors.

"Be willing for the culture to change and for the culture to be challenged...Have that conversation with your board before you go seeking youth engagement on your board. And have that conversation with the youth when they join, of 'We had this conversation. We are open to challenges to our culture. And this is how we expect those kinds of conversations to happen. How about you?'"

Board leadership can play a pivotal role in transitioning the board to an environment that is receptive and responsive to youth ideas. Chairs can generate support for youth engagement from the entire board structure and set expectations for how members will engage with challenging ideas. Doing this work before onboarding a youth member reduces tension in the board space and prevents unproductive resistance to young directors' contributions. A culture that values constructive challenge creates a platform for youth to have a positive impact.

Some directors noted that they experienced more resistance to culture shifts within nonprofits during periods of stress or recovery, such as after the COVID-19 pandemic. They highlight, however, that these transition points present ideal opportunities for organizations to integrate change and bring new voices into their organizations. Disruptions to current governance systems create opportunities for flexibility, restructuring, and reassessing priorities. Embracing new perspectives during challenging transitions can help organizations recover, become more resilient, and adapt better, ultimately positioning them to serve their mission more effectively.

Key Elements of Meaningful Engagement

Based on this research, meaningful youth engagement in nonprofit governance is characterized by:



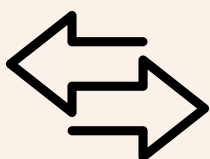
Equal voice and influence
in decision-making processes.



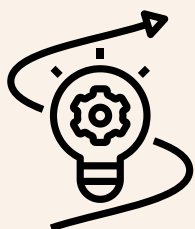
Action-oriented responses
to youth contributions.



Recognition of diverse expertise,
including lived experience.



Intergenerational learning
between younger and older
board members.



Organizational receptiveness
to cultural evolution and change.

How Young Directors Feel in their Roles

**Strongly
Disagree**

**Somewhat
Disagree**

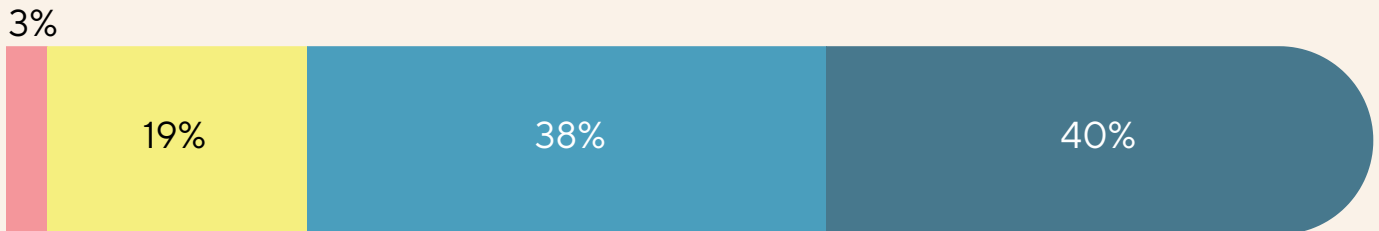
Neither

**Somewhat
Agree**

**Strongly
Agree**



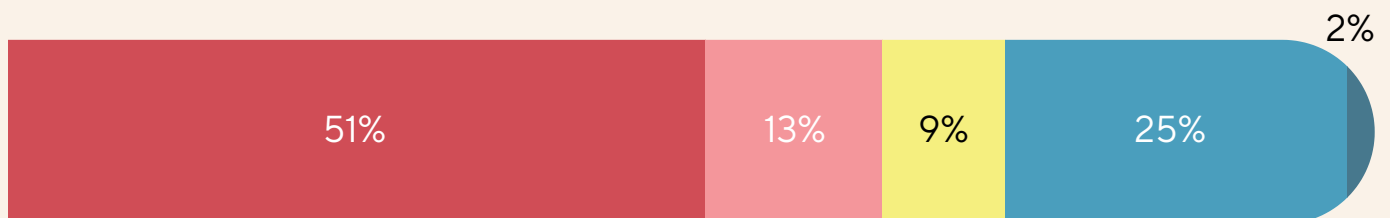
I feel my perspective is reflected in the decision-making of the board.



I feel that my perspective is represented in the values of the organization.



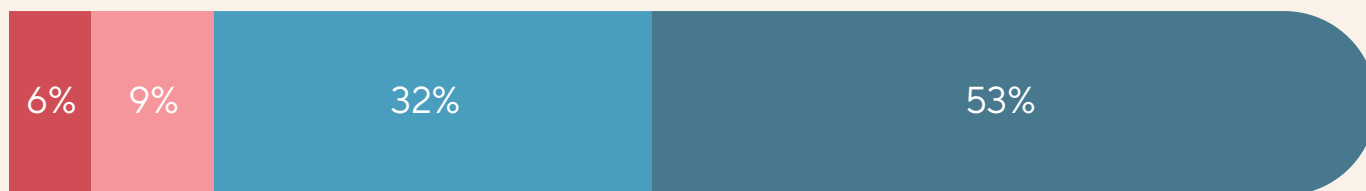
I feel the need to hide part of my identities from other board members.



**I feel respected and welcome to express
my lived experience to the board where relevant.**



I feel that my skills and expertise are recognized by the board.



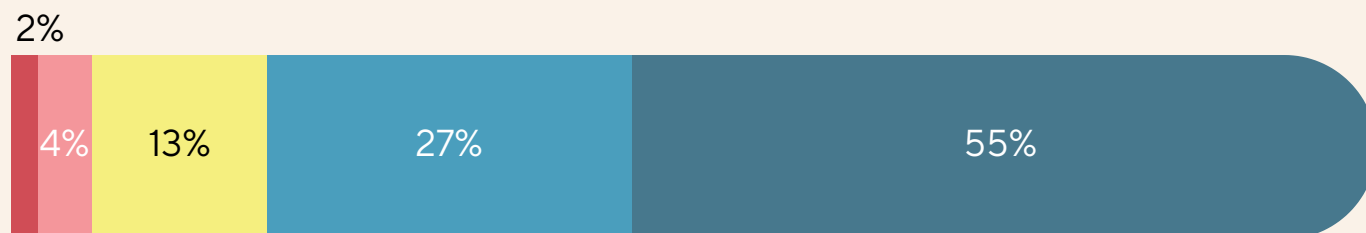
I feel comfortable asking for help during board and/or committee meetings.



I feel comfortable expressing my opinions during board and/or committee meetings.



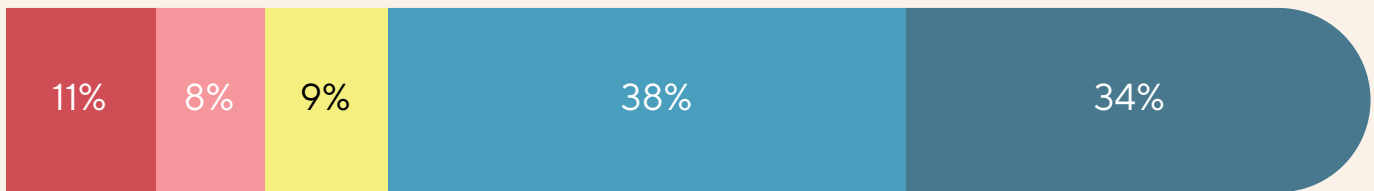
I feel supported and encouraged by other board members to participate fully.



I understand what is expected of me in my role on the board.



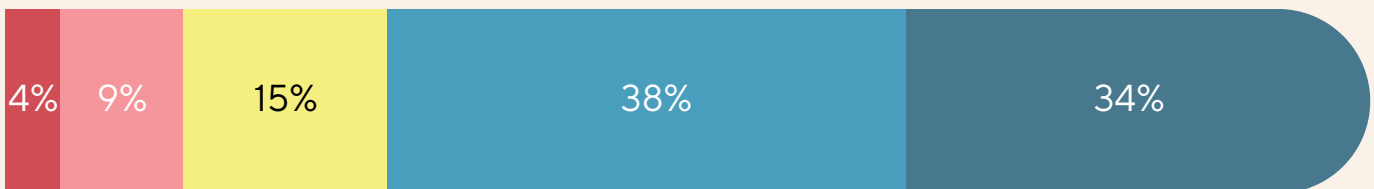
I feel that my orientation to the board equipped me to participate fully in the work of the board.



I receive sufficient information and communication from the board to allow me to engage fully in decision-making processes.



I would benefit from more mentorship from other board members.



81%

Of high-impact respondents reported inclusive board environments that encouraged full participation.

7. BARRIERS TO MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Young directors face numerous systemic and organizational barriers that can limit their ability to contribute to nonprofit governance fully. The experiences of the directors consulted for this research revealed persistent barriers that pervade various organizational contexts.

In the following sections, we address the barriers that commonly inhibit meaningful engagement. The presented recommendations aim to reduce these barriers and foster a more inclusive and effective governance environment. These recommendations are drawn directly from the experiences and insights of young directors. Recognizing the diversity of the nonprofit sector, as well as the backgrounds of young people joining boards of directors, we encourage organizations to adapt and implement these recommendations in ways that align with their unique contexts, while ensuring that meaningful youth engagement and inclusion remain a priority.



Outreach and Recruitment

Meaningful youth engagement begins at recruitment. The recruitment process should clearly communicate the organization's commitment to inclusive governance and establish expectations for how the perspectives of young directors will be valued and integrated into decision-making.



Barriers Outreach and Recruitment

Limited Understanding of Board Structures

Young directors identified a knowledge gap among youth regarding “what nonprofit governance is and why it’s important.” Here, they highlighted that while the work of nonprofit organizations is often quite visible to the public, their internal structures are not. This means that many people do not know what a board director role entails or how they can apply themselves within these positions. Among youth, this knowledge gap creates a significant barrier to entry that prevents many from seeking board positions, regardless of their interest or capabilities.

“How do I know if I want to join it if I don't even know what it looks like or what I am joining?”

Self-Perception and Qualification Gaps

Even with an understanding of what board governance entails, many young people do not see themselves as qualified for board service. Directors highlighted a general perception that board placements are only appropriate for those more established in their careers, a perception reinforced by the current lack of representation of youth on boards. **As a result, many young people falsely perceive that their experiences cannot translate to governance contexts.**

“I wouldn't be on the boards I'm on if I wasn't directly invited to sit on the board. I never would have put my name forward because I didn't feel like I would be qualified... It's hard to recognize the ways in which your experiences do bring value, especially when you're young and you have limited experience. Just because it's limited in terms of time, it doesn't mean it's limited in terms of richness and what you can bring to the table.” **Without direct encouragement or clear communication about the value of youth perspectives, many potential young directors self-select out of governance opportunities.**



Barriers Cont.

Outreach and Recruitment

Exclusionary Recruitment Approaches

Traditional recruitment processes for board positions often unintentionally exclude young candidates through the language used, qualifications listed, and channels employed for outreach.

Young directors have identified that many postings are not reaching youth communities, noting that board recruitment often occurs through professional networks and online communities where youth are underrepresented. Even when recruitment advertisements do reach diverse youth communities, our informants observed that board recruitment postings often list required qualifications that systematically exclude younger people, such as years of experience or specific professional credentials.

One director emphasized the importance of a reflective recruitment process that tailors its language to facilitate youth engagement. For them, this required "revisiting or reflecting on the types of experiences you're looking to have on the board and maybe thinking about where those experiences come from? Is it only one place or many? And what experiences are we excluding that could be valuable?"

Recommendations for Outreach and Recruitment

Expand outreach channels to include spaces where young people are already engaged.

Reconsider qualification criteria to ensure they value diverse experiences and do not create unnecessary barriers based on length of professional experience.

Revise recruitment language and process to explicitly welcome youth participation.

Provide transparent role descriptions that outline governance responsibilities, time commitments, and expectations.

Engage in honest conversations about board service, highlighting the opportunities it presents.

Onboarding and Information Sharing

Effective governance requires an understanding of institutional knowledge and board processes and procedures. Accessible and transparent onboarding and information-sharing practices enable directors to navigate new organizational contexts, make informed decisions, and engage on equal footing with other board members.



Barriers Onboarding and Information Sharing

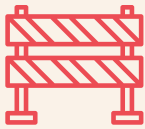
Lack of Organizational Context

Background knowledge of an organization's history, culture, and operations significantly impacts young directors' ability to contextualize board discussions and make meaningful contributions. Directors highlighted that many boards did not provide documentation of institutional knowledge, limiting their avenues to gain a better understanding of the board context.

"It was a bit of a challenge going in, of just understanding what the organization does and getting up to pace. I got a bit of an orientation, but there's still some times when I'm in meetings, and someone will say an acronym or mention an organization in passing, and I'm kind of like, Can we back that up? I'm not actually sure what you're talking about there."

This context gap often leaves young directors feeling hesitant to participate fully in discussions where they lack background information, resulting in the exclusion of their ideas from the board. Information asymmetries often concentrate decision-making authority within select members of the board, creating an inequitable ground for participation from all board members.

"Sometimes I struggled to engage because I didn't feel like there's an entry point for mentorship or context... Sometimes it felt like, you know, maybe 3 people knew what was going on, and those people were not my mentors directly set up by the board, and they were also very, very busy. And so the ones that I could lean on also, I would say, had limited visibility into the general landscape of things. And so because of that, I felt like I never was able to engage quite deeply and found it hard to navigate how to really build up that knowledge more."



Barriers Cont.

Onboarding and Information Sharing

Many young directors also reported that a lack of organizational context made it hard to define their role on the board or find areas where they could meaningfully contribute: "It gets really hard to say, 'Yeah, I want to do this specific thing or that specific thing' when you don't necessarily know how it fits into the greater picture of what's actually needed from the organization or from people... But at the same time I didn't feel like I knew what to ask for, what kind of impact I could make or how I could help."

Exclusion From Information

Young directors were significantly disadvantaged when board-relevant information was shared in spaces where they were not present. Exclusion from information inhibits directors' ability to make informed decisions and engage meaningfully in board work.

"It feels like the discussions are happening elsewhere."

Others were excluded from certain meeting spaces, such as in-camera sessions: "They would have the in-camera, but I wasn't included in that either... I definitely feel like I should have been included there, and it definitely contributed to why I think I didn't feel fully engaged and like I could fully participate."

Exclusion from the information required to follow board discussions and make informed decisions significantly limits directors' ability to engage meaningfully in board work. Many stressed that these dynamics made it difficult to determine which questions to ask to gather this information, as they were unsure what had been addressed in other contexts.

Many young directors emphasized that these exclusionary dynamics made it difficult to determine the extent of their knowledge gaps, as they were unsure of what had been addressed in other spaces. This uncertainty made it challenging to identify which questions to ask in order to gather the necessary information, effectively preventing many from being able to advocate for their own information needs.



Barriers Cont.

Onboarding and Information Sharing

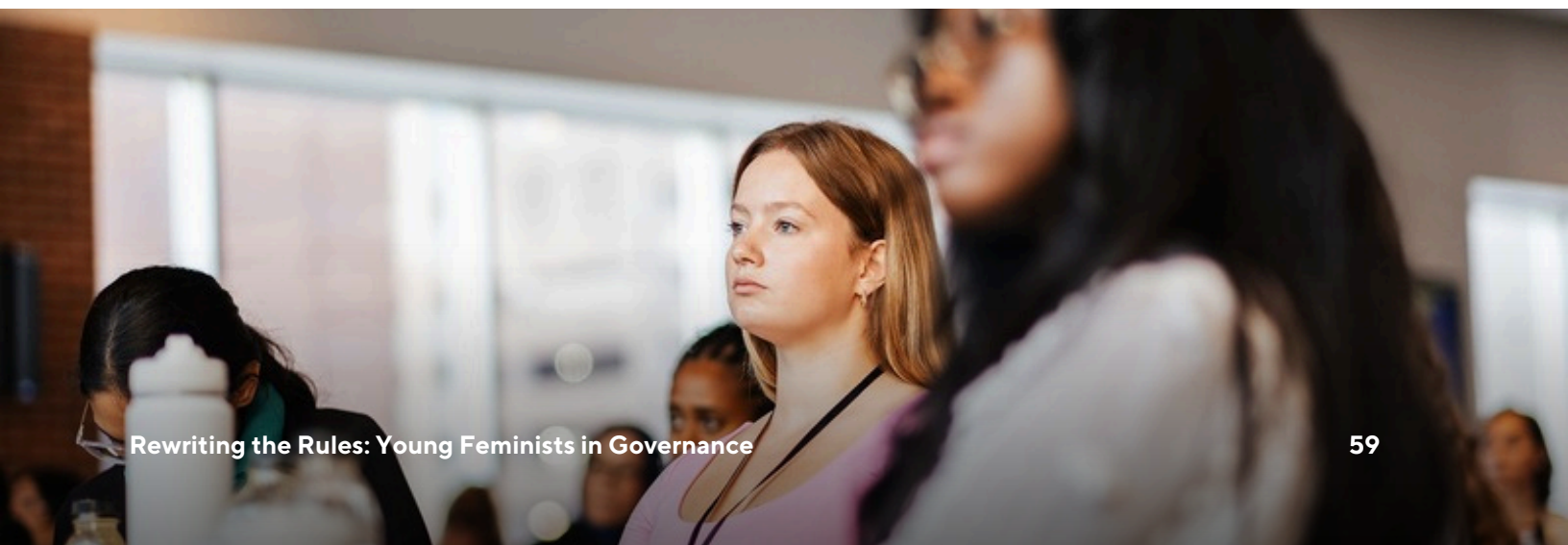
Rigid Meeting Procedures Without Support

Formal governance procedures can create significant barriers for directors who may not be familiar with traditional board protocols. Without proper orientation and training, these procedures become obstacles to participation rather than tools for effective governance.

Directors noted, in particular, that a rigid adherence to Robert's Rules of Order created an intimidating board environment that discouraged participation and open communication.

"I would say [rigid enforcement of Robert's Rules of Order] was a barrier sometimes of people being like, 'Thank you so much for stepping up. But you're doing it wrong.' If I had no self-confidence, which was the experience in the first couple of boards, for sure I'm never gonna speak up ever again. I'm never gonna put my hand up in these board spaces... A lot more skills are necessary and board onboarding, especially with younger people who might not have been in so many board spaces before, like, make people feel less [bad] if they do something that is outside of the current board culture."

Additionally, time-bounded and rapid discussion formats in board meetings can systematically disadvantage directors with novel viewpoints. Directors found that communicating ideas unfamiliar to other board members often required additional context and explanation—time that rigid meeting structures may not accommodate. This creates a barrier to the diversity of thought and meaningful collaboration that can strengthen board governance.



Recommendations for Onboarding and Information Sharing

Create comprehensive onboarding processes that provide all necessary context and knowledge for board integration. This information may address:

- Organizational history, values, mission, and strategic priorities
- Governance structures, policies, and procedures
- Current projects and initiatives
- Key stakeholders and partnerships
- Board roles and expectations

Integrate education on board procedures and responsibilities into the onboarding process.

Capture and organize institutional knowledge in a centralized and accessible format.

Assess how information flows to prevent unintentional exclusion through informal channels.

Explore flexible approaches to governance that encourage full participation while maintaining necessary structure.

Encourage feedback and seek input on board processes.

Relationship Building

Throughout the interviews, young directors drew attention to the relational nature of board work. Many found that building relationships within the board was crucial for them to exercise influence and make meaningful contributions. Developing these connections meant directors could better understand the perspectives and communication styles of other board members, which in turn helped them communicate and translate their ideas and experiences to others with greater clarity.

Many directors emphasized the importance of understanding the backgrounds and current work of other board members. This information helped directors find their own place within the board and identify where their contributions could have the most impact, given the mix of skills, personalities, and interests among other members. Many highlighted that these relational foundations provided a [platform] to “unlock future impact or future influence.”

"I think those pieces would be helpful for me, just as an individual to understand more about, how do these people contribute to boards? How do they understand, how do they think about, you know, the work that they do and how their values shape the work they do on the board. And so I think having more of those conversations to understand more of people's journeys, and how they've got to where they've got to is something that would be very helpful for me to understand as someone who's very new to the board space."



Barriers Relationship Building

Navigating Unfamiliar Cultural and Interpersonal Dynamics

Many directors faced barriers to building connections within the board, including the challenge of navigating established relationship dynamics and unspoken cultural norms.

"There's underlying dynamics that I walked into right when I joined the board, and it takes a really long time when you only meet once a month to figure out what those dynamics are and where you want to align yourself in those dynamics. Which was part of the relation building, right, is trying to figure out whose views I really align with, and who I support, and who would support my ideas versus the people that just have very different perspectives, because we're unified by a particular mission, but it doesn't mean that we're all the same."

Another director named insider dynamics as a significant barrier for new directors' integration into the relational fabric of the board: "One [barrier] is established relationship dynamics. Coming into a space with established relationship dynamics between people who have been on this board before and little in-groups, the use of acronyms or inside jokes-type things. That just kind of gets brushed past, and this person isn't fully brought into the culture."

Directors facing these barriers found they had to first spend considerable energy breaking through these barriers to establish connections within the board before they felt they were able to effectively engage and feel well-received within governance processes.



Barriers Cont. Relationship Building

Limited Opportunities to Build Relationships

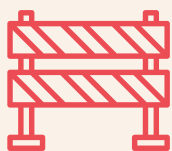
Beyond interpersonal dynamics, structural limitations also hindered relationship building for many young directors who found they had few opportunities to connect with other directors during their board terms. Formal meetings alone provided limited room for engagement with other members.

“It's just harder to connect with people when you're only talking to them online in a big group. And then also in person, where it's still a big group, like if it's a conference, there are lots of things happening. We're not really getting a chance to build a lasting connection.”

When boards did not prioritize creating opportunities to build relationships between directors, young directors often struggled to find allies, understand board dynamics, and create the connections that enable effective collaboration. Challenges in establishing relationships on the board were greatest for directors who reported that they had not received an introduction to other members when they first joined the board or who only engaged with other members during formal meeting times. Here, informal time around board meetings, separate social gatherings, and engagement in committee work were helpful for directors to build relationships.

Remote meeting formats were also consistently identified as a barrier to establishing relationships with other board members. While useful in allowing for flexible and accessible participation for all board members, many young directors emphasized the value that in-person meetings had in helping them better establish connections within the board.

“Professionally and personally, and culturally, reciprocity is really big for me. And this element of genuine, authentic connection. But that's really hard behind the screen.”



Barriers Cont.

Relationship Building

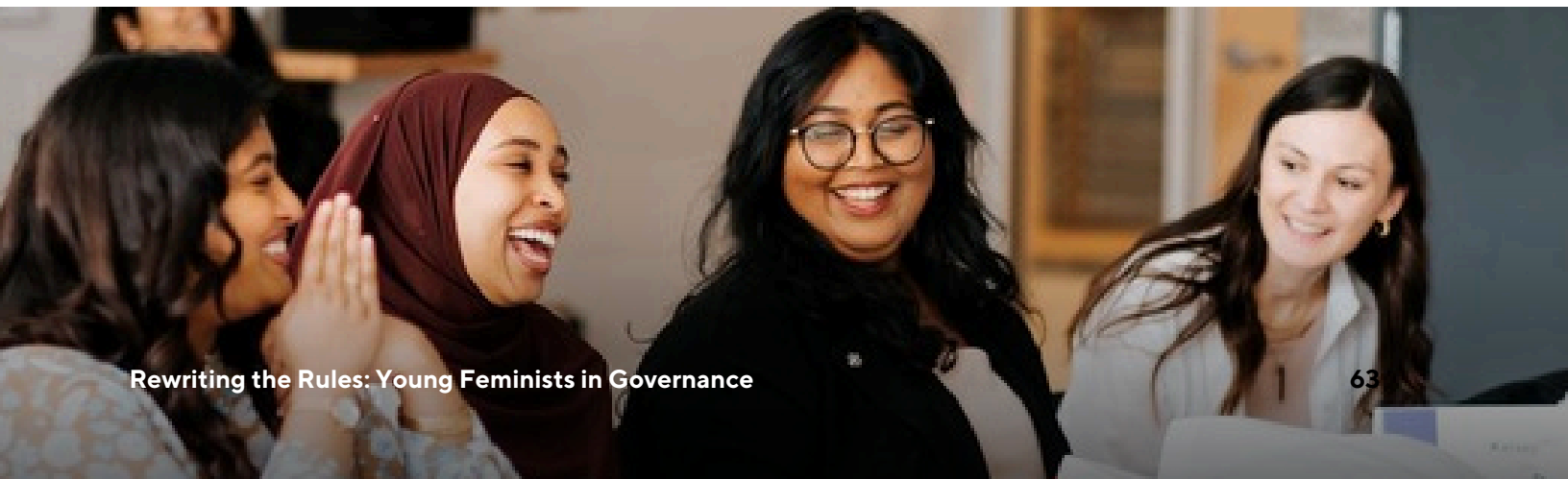
Hierarchical Mentorship Models

Directors held nuanced perspectives on mentoring relationships within their boards. Many young directors touted board mentors as essential to feeling integrated into the board's work. These relationships helped them establish initial connections with other members, gain a better understanding of board dynamics, and provide an essential space for them to ask questions outside of formal meetings.

"My informal mentor...was so impactful. Game changer. Helped me understand deeper what was going on, helped me be a little more critical, and use my voice a little bit more."

Other directors, however, spoke to the inherent power dynamic that can accompany mentorship. Directors shared that this could hinder their ability to engage as peers with other board members and contributed to them feeling constrained to a learning role rather than being invited to contribute and collaborate on an equal footing with other board members.

Informants shared experiences where older board members would assume a mentorship role, despite that not being welcome or appropriate. One director provided an example of how mentorship dynamics can be taken advantage of by other board members to undermine youth and gain leverage within the board space: "I also have had people assume mentorship and speak on my behalf when that wasn't the case; we didn't have that relationship. But they were trying to take advantage of me to leverage that power... like, 'Oh, this young woman's not gonna have the power to stand up to this'."





Barriers Cont.

Relationship Building

Establishing mentoring relationships within a board space requires thoughtful consideration to ensure that young directors feel they can access resources without feeling constrained by the board's dynamics. Here, directors shared that fruitful mentorship models often integrate a bi-directional learning approach that differs from a traditional “mentor-mentee” relationship. The structure of these relational dynamics differs, but they share an underlying understanding that all directors are learners and a respect for the teachings that everyone can bring to the table.

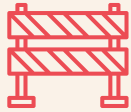
“The organization that I run, we've built mentorship into it. We're trying to create an ecosystem where we all train and learn from each other. But I don't know that that's common across all boards.”

Being the Only Youth on a Board

Many directors were the only youth on their board. They addressed the challenges of being the sole representative of a demographic, both as youth members and as members belonging to other systemically underrepresented groups in board leadership.

“I was the youngest person. Also, there was like one other [person who shared my ethnic identity] on the board, so sometimes I feel like what I had to say didn't really resonate with the entire board... Not everyone can pick up on those things because they don't have those lived experiences. And so I think that was maybe where there was like a little bit of a disconnect in terms of how my role could have shaped those board decisions because...it was hard for me to, I guess, communicate where I was coming from, and for them to kind of empathize with that.”

Young directors who were not the only representatives of an underrepresented group on their boards reported feeling that their ideas were more readily accepted and that they were quicker to establish relationships and connections among other board members. Directors highlighted the benefit of a shared understanding among youth, in particular, that can foster more collaborative and engaged dialogue around young directors' ideas.



Barriers Cont.

Relationship Building

"I've had a lot more success when I'm not the only young person in a space."



Directors further made clear that one young director cannot represent all young people. Having multiple youth members can engage different ideas and perspectives relevant to the youth experience.

"While you have a young director on a board that's never had a young director, that's bringing a new perspective. But one person is not going to be able to represent the views of so many from different lived experiences and socioeconomic backgrounds."

Emotional Labour

Directors emphasized their commitment to fostering relational connections, bringing a positive energy to the board, and working to bridge gaps in understanding diverse lived experiences. By building relationships and fostering collaborative and motivating board environments, young directors found a footing within the board. This enabled many to make significant impacts during their terms. A key lesson from these directors, however, is that this work can demand significant emotional energy.

"People love the energy. They so desperately want to be motivated and appreciate someone with a positive attitude. I feel at the same time, I think it's very easy to feel overlooked sometimes when that is the energy you put into a space. It takes a lot of energy, especially if you're an introvert, and so sometimes you can come away feeling good because you've energized other people, but you fall exhausted."



Barriers Cont. Relationship Building

One director shared their experience with a board that was supportive and welcoming of the new ideas and perspectives they were able to share. They note, however, that: "it didn't take away from the emotional toll that the meetings would have... If I was to comment and share my perspective, I definitely found myself catering and code-switching to an audience that may be really new to those experiences. And I wanted to be as polite and as aware as possible that they're learning. And so sometimes leaving those meetings, even if they went really well, I would still feel exhausted."

Recommendations for Relationship Building

Include multiple youth members on boards of directors.

Create intentional relationship-building opportunities among board members, in person when possible.

Encourage established board members to actively welcome new members.

Ensure mentorship models emphasize bidirectional learning between board members, recognizing the value that both older and younger directors can bring to these relationships.

Engage young directors between formal board meetings through check-ins or integration into committee work.

Share the work of building cross-generational understanding. Established members should take initiative to understand the social and cultural contexts that shape youth experiences.

Creating an Inclusive Board Culture

Meaningful engagement of youth on boards requires an inclusive board culture that is welcoming and receptive to new ideas and diverse perspectives. Inclusive cultures foster open communication and collaboration, allowing young directors to bring their full range of experience and expertise to the table.

The directors we consulted for this research drew attention to the work that is involved in establishing an inclusive board culture to overcome deeply entrenched systemic, institutional, and interpersonal power dynamics that often pervade the board room: "It's not about just adding young people, but being intentional about the ways that the board hears the opinions of, and works with the realities of what it means to be a young person in today's world."

Throughout the interviews, directors shared challenging experiences navigating interpersonal dynamics and board cultures that were hostile to their presence and contributions. These harmful power dynamics restricted youth's ability to have a positive impact through their board service.

"I'm acutely aware of how my age reflects on who I am as a professional or what it is that I do... Sometimes it can make me feel a bit insecure as I'm trying to navigate what feels like a world that isn't set up for me, right, as a young woman essentially."



Barriers

Creating an Inclusive Board Culture

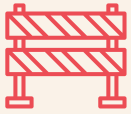
Stereotyping and Microaggressions

Young directors frequently encountered stereotyping, microaggressions, and differential treatment based on age and other identity factors. These attitudes often manifest in ways that undermine the confidence and standing of young directors on the board.

"I think, especially when I was in my first term, I was not taken very seriously because of how young I was... That didn't help in terms of credibility and being taken seriously. And I think that, being at the intersection, as well as being a young racialized woman on that specific board, there were a lot of microaggressions—people saying racist things to me and questioning why I was there despite being publicly elected to be there as they were, and so that was difficult... One of my colleagues was very petty about my candidacy, and she called me an intern. Despite, you know, at this point I have [a substantive number of] years of specialized experience. I work on...deals involving hundreds of millions of dollars."

Many directors shared experiences confronting direct racism and discrimination in their board settings. Few reported support from other members in addressing and navigating these dynamics on the board. These intersectional experiences create layered challenges for young directors as they navigate governance spaces.

One result of these dynamics was that directors hid aspects of their experiences and identities, despite recognizing that these contributions could bring value to board discussions. One director spoke to this experience regarding her socioeconomic background: "...from what I can sort of pick up, a lot of [the other board members] did grow up quite wealthy. And I think that it was unfortunate that I wasn't able to really bring that experience to [the organization] because it was relevant to the work that we were doing. And it was almost like I didn't even want to say what part of [the city] I grew up in or say certain things to make myself seem like, 'Oh, she's poor,' or 'Oh, she grew up poor.'"



Barriers Cont.

Creating an Inclusive Board Culture

Working "Overtime"

Young directors often felt they needed to work harder than other board members to prove their credibility and value due to the biases and prejudices held against young people in professional settings. Many spoke of engaging in extra preparation before board meetings to ensure the framing and communication of their ideas and questions would be well received among older board members. This experience was particularly common among racialized young directors in majority-white spaces.

"I felt like I always had to work a little harder than you, you know, average person that was sitting across from me. Because it's like I need to show you that I've done my research...and I know what I'm talking about. I think my biggest fear is to be, like, dismissed for what I can bring to the table."

These dynamics contribute to feelings of isolation and exhaustion in the board space: "I don't think that everybody else here has all these concerns about how they're going to appear or how they're going to look to other people when they're contributing. It's definitely just me."

Directors spoke about an uneven playing field, where young directors and directors from underrepresented groups in board leadership are often held to a higher standard than other board members. Young directors noted dynamics where more established members would often arrive less prepared and be less engaged in meetings, but did not feel that they could act similarly without repercussions.

Pressures to take on more labour than other board members were sometimes explicitly assigned. These pressures to overperform create additional stress and workload that can lead to exhaustion and burnout.

"I've also seen instances where, and I was almost a victim of this, where the younger people are expected to do a lot of grunt work just because they're young and they're treated kind of as an assistant position. And they end up working twice as hard as anybody else, and then they burn out and leave because nobody else is doing anything."



Barriers Cont.

Creating an Inclusive Board Culture

Pigeonholing as Youth Representatives

Many directors reported that their ideas and contributions were only listened to when they directly related to the youth experience. Here, directors noted the challenge in being taken seriously for their diverse skills and perspectives across all areas of governance.

"We're all on those boards because of our own experiences, because of the things that we value, and the skills that we have. I would love to see a future where young directors are valued as directors rather than just a young perspective."

Another respondent shared: "I find that sometimes it is a dichotomy—people can only see that you're either ... a youth or you're a professional, and they can't see both. So I wish it were a bit easier to represent both sides."

Directors noted that being restricted to the 'youth voice' reflected broader dynamics of stereotyping, where older board members would make assumptions about the perspectives and contributions young directors could offer. This made it difficult for young directors to present ideas outside of predetermined expectations. When young directors attempted to contribute perspectives that didn't align with their imagined 'youth role' or challenged established board thinking, they often encountered resistance. Many young directors reported that their attempts were met with dismissal or skepticism.

"Older folks will reinforce this idea that if you bring alternate perspectives, that you just don't understand or you haven't been in the work long enough."

Pigeonholing board directors to a specific role or set of ideas prevents organizations from benefiting from the full range of insights and capabilities young directors bring to the table. To combat these dynamics, directors highlighted the importance of boards taking the time to get to know youth board members, identify their skills and expertise beyond representing a youth voice, and actively listening to all that they have to say.

"Just because it's not or hasn't been your experience doesn't mean that it's not theirs... Embrace the change. Young people bring a range of innovative solutions, valuable perspectives, and skills to the table. Find out what those are."

Recommendations for Creating an Inclusive Culture

Assess organization readiness for youth inclusion before recruitment begins, ensuring the organizational culture is prepared to integrate youth perspectives.

Implement anti-bias training to build awareness of power dynamics that impact board governance and equip directors to respond to instances of bias and discrimination.

Develop feedback mechanisms to create space for directors to share their needs and concerns.

Practice active listening during board discussions.

Establish board norms that welcome constructive challenge from diverse viewpoints.

Connect skills to opportunities across all governance areas, ensuring young directors can contribute meaningfully beyond youth-related matters.

Distribute administrative responsibilities equitably to ensure young directors aren't disproportionately assigned supporting tasks based on age-related stereotypes. 2

Resource Accessibility

Equitable access to board governance requires addressing material barriers that can disproportionately impact young directors. Despite their commitment, many young directors face competing time commitments, financial constraints, and limited access to professional resources, which can hinder their full and meaningful participation.



Barriers Accessibility

Meeting times and location

Young directors often juggle multiple responsibilities, including education, career development, and caregiving, creating significant time pressures. Directors highlighted that board structures often incorporate the competing demands of older board members, but felt that these considerations often failed to extend to the daily realities of youth members. Directors described how their boards typically scheduled meetings to accommodate professionals working a 9-to-5 schedule, without consideration of class schedules, service industry work, or the multiple part-time jobs many young people balance.

"I'm also a full-time student, and I'm working full-time as well. So just being able to juggle the other things that are happening in my life, while also being a contributing member and a reliable leader in this organization, can sometimes be a challenge."

While many directors' boards had virtual or hybrid meeting formats, meeting location was also raised as an access challenge. Directors in larger urban centers who did not own vehicles found accessing meeting locations particularly challenging. Many found they had to dedicate substantial time to commuting or incur considerable expenses on rideshare services to reach locations that were most easily accessible by car or to those who lived closer to expensive downtown cores.

Economic challenges of unpaid governance work

Young directors identified the financial burden of serving on the board as a significant barrier to participation. These challenges include both direct costs and the opportunity cost of committing time to unpaid volunteer positions.

"Sometimes you do need to travel, and maybe you can't get time off work, or it's expensive. If there's not a generous expense policy for board members... I've had to turn down experiences because I can't get the time off work, or I can't afford to do this, or I've had to pay out of pocket to go do something. So that is, that can be a huge, like, actual barrier."



Barriers Cont.

Accessibility

Economic pressures facing younger generations have intensified in recent years, creating additional barriers to engagement in unpaid board work. For's Young Feminist Economy report (2024) found that 48% of young leaders expressed concerns about their ability to afford basic necessities despite being employed or in education.

"I'm talking to a lot of young people who are struggling to work extra jobs to keep up with inflation and rent. So I think there's an element of that for some people to be able to take this on with it being a volunteer position."

This financial barrier presents a significant equity concern that systematically excludes¹⁷ diverse voices from leadership spaces within the nonprofit sector. Without addressing these costs, boards risk limiting participation to those with financial privilege.

"The people who are privileged enough to be able to do unpaid work are the people who are going to do it, whereas the people who we might want to do this work can't do it unpaid and can't offer that time to do it."

Access to Resources

Beyond the direct financial costs associated with board work, directors noted disparities in the resources they could leverage compared to more established board members, creating an uneven playing field for participation. These disparities encompassed financial and professional resources, including time availability—a fundamental constraint for many young directors

Many directors reported having less schedule flexibility than older board members, who were more established in their careers, despite the assumption that youth would have more available time. Some encountered perceptions that their professional commitments were "less important" than those of older directors and that they should be more easily accommodated by board schedules.



Barriers Cont.

Accessibility

The resource gap becomes particularly evident in leadership positions, where the disparity in professional support systems creates additional challenges for young directors taking on extra responsibilities.

"Most of the people who've held the chair role have, if not an assistant, a team of people to lean on to really support them through the chair role."

Directors from communities significantly underrepresented in board governance also noted the challenge this creates in limiting their networks and sources for mentorship: "So we're just feeling like we're doing the work but also figuring it out at the same time. We just don't have a lot of mentorship opportunities within our own community."

Recommendations for Accessibility

Create flexible participation options that accommodate diverse schedules.

Prioritize the physical accessibility of meeting locations.

Provide advance notice of meeting dates and times.

Reimburse directors for expenses associated with participation and travel for board-related engagements.

Ensure equal access to resources needed for effective board participation, including technology and administrative support.

How Barriers Limit Potential Impact



Confidence and Imposter Syndrome

Young directors face numerous barriers to meaningful engagement in board spaces that can foster feelings of isolation and uncertainty. Many directors in our research described struggling with self-limiting beliefs that arise from experiences of marginalization in professional settings.

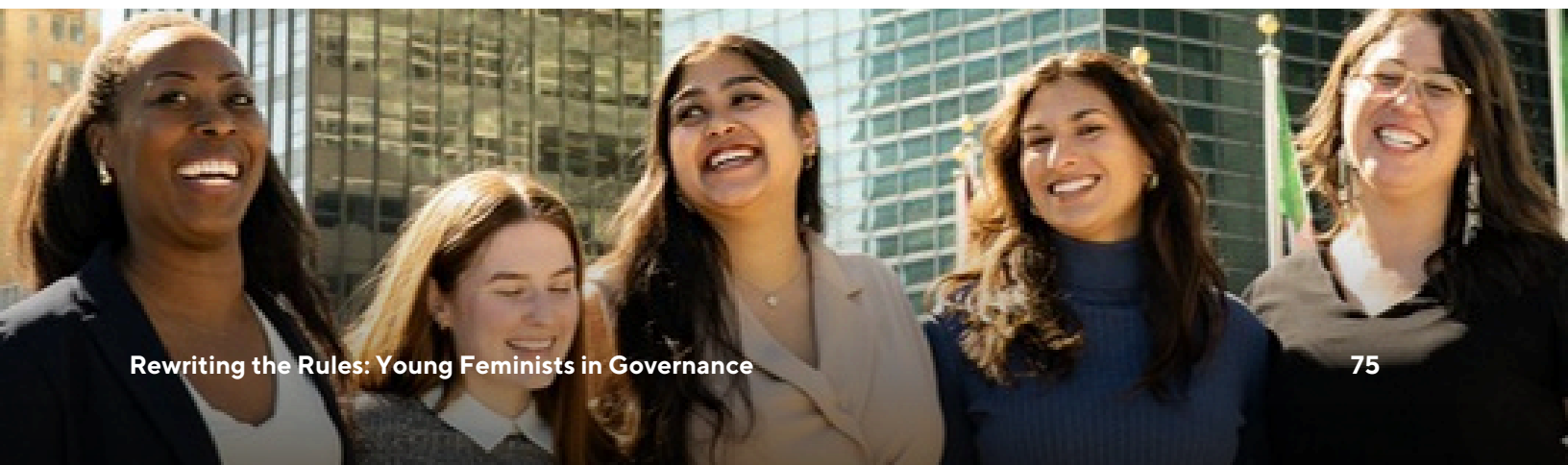
"No one has ever said to me, 'You're a young woman. You don't know what you're talking about,' but I felt that about myself."

These internal barriers often prevented young directors from speaking up when their perspectives differed from other board members or from pursuing leadership opportunities within the board.

"I think another [barrier] is just fear. And I think tied into that is imposter syndrome and all those other things that make youth scared to engage in these high-level spaces. As empowered as we feel, we also feel like what we're contributing sometimes is wrong or misunderstood. Or, you know, not as impactful or important."

Directors emphasized that supportive feedback from other board members can be impactful in helping them overcome these barriers. Specific affirmation of their contributions created an environment that encouraged more authentic engagement.

"I think it would have really gotten to me if I hadn't had other board members saying, 'Hey, I've really appreciated when you mentioned this specific thing.' Some of that very specific feedback has really made a positive difference in helping me recognize that I can lean into my experience to deliver value on this board."





Misaligned opportunities: Underutilized Skills and Expertise

The gap between young directors' capabilities and their engagement in board work represents one of the most significant yet easily addressed barriers to meaningful youth engagement in governance. Many directors consulted for this research possessed specialized knowledge and skills that went unrecognized or underutilized by their boards. Often, their participation was directed towards channels that did not align with their interests or expertise.

Directors reported not being consulted before being assigned to tasks and committees. Others found that barriers to building relationships meant they struggled to position themselves within the network of skills already on the board or to share their backgrounds with other board members so that they would be considered for relevant opportunities.

"[Young people] come with a whole toolkit of experiences or resources. One of the most frustrating things for me is seeing young people or students discredited or pushed aside because there's this idea that they don't know certain things. And I see young people who are so intelligent or have so many really cool, untapped skills that aren't being accessed. But even worse than that, sometimes just not seen or valued."

Meaningful engagement requires organizations to intentionally explore the unique interests, experiences, and expertise of young directors, then create opportunities for these strengths to be applied to governance work.



The Cost of Exclusion: Disengagement and Withdrawal

When barriers persist, young directors often make the conscious choice to disengage from board work. These directors are strategic about where they invest their limited time and energy and are quick to identify tokenistic inclusion. Many choose to withdraw their engagement when they do not feel that their presence on the board is impactful or that other board members value their contributions.

"I think youth, especially this generation, they don't do things lightly. And if they're really giving their time and energy to something, they want to feel like that they're not just there as a [token youth member]"

For young directors from marginalized communities, the cost of engaging in non-inclusive governance spaces can be particularly high. These directors may choose to protect their well-being by withdrawing from environments where they experience harmful interactions.

"People can say, 'I'm actually not willing to open myself up to continuous microaggressions or negative social interactions with a board.' ...I think that the current lack of diversity on boards is definitely a barrier to young people, especially young people who are queer, who are trans, who are racialized, or who experience other aspects of structural marginalization."

Reducing Barriers to Meaningful Engagement Benefits the Entire Board

Creating inclusive environments for young directors strengthens engagement across the entire board. When directors discussed the barriers that impacted their participation, they identified how procedural improvements and culture shifts could benefit all members' engagement. Their inclusion highlighted exclusionary practices that had become normalized, creating inequitable dynamics among established board members.

"Oftentimes, and I've seen this happen, that extra support that you're offering to those young people actually will benefit everyone else on your board, and they kind of want that extra help, too."

Improvements implemented specifically for youth inclusion—such as comprehensive onboarding, accessible meeting formats, and transparent communication channels—ultimately enhanced participation across all age groups while nurturing a culture of continuous growth. In this way, intentional youth inclusion can serve as a catalyst for governance evolution that deepens engagement, strengthens inclusion, and builds collective ownership among all members.

"Because ultimately it's not a young director thing... as a board, you should be looking at how you provide yourselves with continuous learning opportunities, regardless of age or experience."

Intentional youth inclusion can serve as a catalyst to strengthen board governance to improve engagement, inclusion, and ownership in board work for all members.

Scaling Youth Impact in Nonprofit Governance

While many organizations face resource constraints that limit their ability to invest in development, training, and support for new board directors, sector-wide initiatives offering structured support to young directors offer an efficient solution to these challenges.

Within the nonprofit sector, an increasing number of structured support programs are being developed to provide training, mentorship, and support for young people interested in board governance. These programs significantly reduce barriers to entry into nonprofit board governance, equipping young people with the necessary tools to navigate board dynamics and make a meaningful impact within their organizations. They can also help develop expectations and expertise among young directors regarding inclusive governance practices that participants can apply throughout their careers. For organizations with limited capacity to provide comprehensive onboarding and support, these programs offer a pathway to engage young directors while ensuring they receive the preparation needed to contribute meaningfully.

By investing in structured support models, the nonprofit sector can address both individual and systemic barriers to youth engagement. These programs create sustainable pathways for meaningful engagement in board governance for a significant number of youth, whose expertise can, in turn, improve youth inclusion across the sector.



Program Spotlight

Rise on Boards

Fora: Network for Change addresses the underrepresentation of young women and gender-diverse youth on nonprofit boards through its Rise on Boards program. This initiative exemplifies how structured support models can systematically address barriers to meaningful youth engagement across the nonprofit sector.

The Rise on Boards program offers comprehensive board governance training and facilitated board placements with partner organizations for gender-marginalized youth aged 18 to 29. Young directors receive ongoing support during their one-year board placement through both an external coach and a designated mentor on the board. Fora's approach helps bridge the gap between nonprofit organizations and youth communities while raising awareness among young people about governance opportunities they might otherwise not consider accessible.

"I guess I would just emphasize the value of organizations like Fora, whose mandate is to kind of support young people who are gender marginalized and who want to access these spaces because without organizations like this... I think a lot of people wouldn't know where to start."

The program's governance training provides foundational knowledge that enables young directors to navigate board environments with greater confidence. By offering structured education on governance roles, responsibilities, and processes, the program addresses knowledge gaps that often hinder young directors from applying their expertise effectively in board settings.

"I wouldn't have the confidence to just go and apply to it if it was outside of the setting where I had so much continuous support with mentors and board training, especially the training. Because it's really hard to just launch yourself into a space and not even know at all what board governance is."

Program Spotlight

Rise on Boards Cont.

Many directors noted that this structured training gave them credibility that benefited both them and their organizations: "[The Rise on Boards program] definitely helped to build credibility. Because through Fora, I got the training. And then I served on a board. So I came in knowing a lot of things... People who've been on that board for, like, even 10 years, they're like, '...How do you know so much?' And you realize, Oh, it's because most people, when they join a board, they actually have never done any formal type of training to learn how a board works and how to be a really good board member."

The mentorship component fosters relational bridges that support young directors in navigating complex board dynamics, providing a dedicated space for questions, encouragement, and guidance that helps them maximize their impact.

Through both direct programming and broader sector advocacy, initiatives like Fora's work toward creating more inclusive governance environments that benefit from diverse age perspectives. Their approach recognizes that addressing underrepresentation requires more than simply adding young directors to boards—it requires creating the conditions for their meaningful inclusion and influence. By partnering with structured support programs, nonprofit organizations can connect with qualified youth and benefit from the full extent of their expertise while ensuring these young directors have the support they need to thrive in governance roles.

8. CONCLUSION

Young women and gender-diverse directors can provide the leadership that nonprofit organizations need to adapt sustainably to the pressing challenges facing the sector. The evidence gathered in this report demonstrates how these young leaders drive impactful and lasting change within their organizations.

The capacity of young directors to recognize the impact of their contributions to board governance can hinge on the flexibility of the board environment. Boards must prepare to integrate new perspectives into their governance structures and practices, adapting with evolving leadership to better serve their missions and the needs of their constituents.

Throughout this report, we have identified key barriers that limit meaningful youth engagement in nonprofit governance. These barriers are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, emerging from structural inequities, organizational cultures, and interpersonal dynamics that systematically exclude and marginalize youth perspectives. Building equitable foundations for governance requires a comprehensive approach that addresses all aspects of board operations—from recruitment and onboarding to meeting design and decision-making processes.

Our research points toward a compelling vision for the future of the nonprofit sector where boards leverage intergenerational learning to strengthen organizational governance. The recommendations provided throughout this report create a roadmap for organizations to ensure their inclusion of young directors is meaningful and sustained. These directors are transforming expectations about what effective governance can look like and leading this change on their boards. By investing in young directors, organizations can help build a nonprofit sector that is more adaptive, resilient, and effective in delivering on its transformative potential.

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