

A Framework for Board Leadership Succession

To advance diversity and inclusion at the board leadership level, chairs should adopt a formalized succession process that intentionally starts from the time a new director joins the board.

Mentorship for integration

There's always a learning curve for directors when joining a board. The first two to three years is a time for a board member to get exposure to the board dynamics and directors (while still contributing their views) and become comfortable with governance if this is their first directorship. To support this adaptation period, the board chair and nomination committee chair should team up to pair new members with a more tenured director in order to accelerate integration. This mentor would provide additional cultural or business context, observe and provide real-time feedback, gather feedback on how early meetings are feeling, and enable a safe space for questions new directors may not feel comfortable asking in front of the full room. This is also an opportunity for new members to build relationships with other directors, as close interaction time is scarce in a full board setting. Over time, chairs and nominating committee chairs could also shuffle mentors and mentees to foster a cycle of inclusion and integration.

Apprenticeship in committee

Based on a new director's functional expertise, some committee roles may be obvious, but others may be informed by the board or committee chair's thinking about where their new perspective may be most additive or by the new director's own interests. Whatever the source, giving new directors the time to apprentice under experienced directors in a committee is another important step in their development.

Committee leadership

After a period of apprenticeship (perhaps in multiple committees), directors could be considered as possible committee chair successors. A director's successful contributions as a committee member, their functional expertise, their passion and interest to play the committee chair role, as well as considerations of diverse representation across the breadth of board leadership roles will influence committee chair succession decisions. The board and committee chairs should work together on selection, development, and transition planning into the committee chair role, and ideally allow time for candidates to apprentice with a future committee chair before a full transition.

Board chair succession

Committee chair roles provide the best preparation for potential board chair succession. If these roles have had diverse representation, there should be a naturally diverse slate of candidates to consider as possible board chair successors. The sitting board chair may spend time reflecting on the most critical skills and committee experiences needed to prepare for the chair role given the expected challenges and opportunities ahead, and chart director development plans accordingly. Another important consideration is the relationship between the CEO and a future board chair, so enabling relationship-building time between the committee chairs and CEO is also a vital part of development and preparation for board chair selection and transition. Overall, the critical shift is toward

planful development of a diverse group of directors to be future board chairs. As this year's tracker shows, board diversity is on an upward trajectory, and this far more diverse class of new directors could rise to the chair position within the next five to seven years, yielding far more diverse representation at the chair level—but the process must be intentionally designed for boards to achieve this outcome.

Regardless of how the process is structured, two critical elements are intention and inclusion. Boards should enable access to opportunity and development from the time new directors join, and begin thoughtful, intentional succession planning for chair roles well in advance of a transition.

