

The Changing Face of Global Foundations

UniversityPhilanthropy.com Insights Paper

A review of diversity in
the leadership of global
foundations 2012-22

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Introduction

Our review of global philanthropic foundations points to a more diverse and younger group of leaders in post today than compared to 2012, with foundations in the United States having made significant progress in addressing diversity over the past decade. In comparison, European foundations appear to have made less progress in terms of diversity among its leaders between 2012-22, a period in which there has been significant focus on the importance of balance in leadership roles in public life.

In 2012, 65 percent of top philanthropic foundation leaders in North America were white males. By the beginning of 2022, the figure had dropped to 39 percent. In Europe in 2012, 67 percent of philanthropic foundations leaders were white males. By the beginning of 2022, the figure was 59 percent suggesting little serious progress has been made in the European foundation sector to ensuring greater diversity among its leaders.

58 out of 60 of the international grant-making foundations we reviewed are based in either North America or Europe, reflecting the relative maturity of the foundation sector in those regions. 30 out of 31 North American foundations reviewed are in the United States. In Europe, we reviewed 27 foundations in 12 countries, including the UK. The review also included two foundations outside North America and Europe – one in Japan and one in Nigeria.

European foundations appear to have made less progress in terms of diversity among its leaders between 2012-22, a period in which there has been a focus on the importance of balance in leadership roles in public life.

The role of the leader is not only to shape and implement a grant-making policy but also to foster a culture that best reflects the institution and the values it represents.

Context

Leaders are crucially important in setting both tone and informing decision-making. The Presidents and Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of the world's great philanthropic foundations are no different. Their role is not only to shape and implement a grant-making policy but also to foster a culture that best reflects the institution and the values it represents. Arguably, they embody the ethos of a philanthropic foundation and the contribution that institution makes to society.

Of course, the appointment of a leader is as much a statement about the collective decision of the governing board, directors or trustees as the ability of the incoming President or CEO. That said, it is the leader who both sets the internal culture and is the public face of a foundation as well as being its most important ambassador.

There has been significant focus in recent years about how foundations need to be more representative of the society that they aim to serve. This coincides with significant efforts in many aspects of public life to foster both greater gender and racial equity.

Our snapshot of diversity at 60 of the world's most notable international grant-making foundations has thrown up some interesting facts about diversity and make-up of its leaders.

White, male leaders at top philanthropic foundations

2012

2022

65% 48%

White, male leaders at top North American foundations

2012

2022

65% 39%

White, male leaders at top European foundations

2012

2022

67% 59%

In 2022 59 percent of foundations in Europe have white, male leaders suggesting that expressions of commitment to diversity in the European foundation sector look thin.

Analysis

Gender balance

One apparent conclusion is that progress has been made over the past decade in trying to strike greater gender balance at the CEO / President level. In 2012, 32 percent of the foundations in our review (19 in total) had women in the top roles. At the beginning of 2022, 43 percent of those foundations have women leaders.

One interesting result in this review is that in 2012 North America's philanthropic foundations had statistically fewer women leaders compared to European foundations. However, by the beginning of 2022 European foundations were found to be lagging in terms of gender balance.

In 2012 32 percent of North American foundations had women leaders; by 2022 that share had increased to 45 percent. By contrast, in Europe the share of foundations with women leaders in 2012 was 33 percent; by 2022 it was 41 percent.

Racial diversity

While an analysis of racial diversity can be fraught with issues, it is certainly the case that visibility is important especially for organisations that make a claim to benefit society at large. We took a look at the racial diversity among senior leaders of large international philanthropic foundations in North America and Europe in 2012 and again 2022.

Our conclusion is that racial diversity has improved notably among North American foundations since 2012. In North America 65 percent of foundation leaders reviewed in 2022 appear to be white Caucasians. In 2012 this figure was 94 percent, suggesting significant progress among leading foundations to appoint people of colour in top jobs. According to the US Census Bureau's 2020 statistics, 61.6% of the population identify as white suggesting the leadership in leading US philanthropic institutions is closing the gap with race and ethnicity demographics.

In Europe, all the foundation leaders reviewed appear to be white Caucasians in 2022. In 2012 there was at least one leader of colour. Sadly, this suggests a slide backwards in the inclusion of racial diversity at the top of leading foundations. While there are no reliable statistics available for the number of ethnic minorities in Europe, the European Network Against Racism estimates the figure to be at least 10 percent. On this basis, we would expect to see at least three leaders at the top of Europe's great philanthropic foundations who are people of colour. Regrettably that is not the case.

The comparison is more stark when you consider that, according to our analysis, 39 percent of foundations in North America have white, male leaders while 59 percent of foundations in Europe have white, male leaders suggesting that expressions of commitment to diversity in the European foundation sector look extremely thin.

Age and youth

While age is a no less complex matter to consider, we looked at the average age – where it has been possible – of foundation leaders. Our research suggests that the average age of leaders at top foundations has declined since 2012.

We took a sample of 30 foundations where we were able to confidently ascertain from publicly available information the age of the leader in 2012, and again in 2022. In 2012, the average age of 30 leading foundations was 60. 40 percent were 65 or over, while 23 percent were 70 or over. By 2022, the same sample of foundations showed the average age of their leaders was 56. Just 17 percent were 65 or over while seven percent had a leader who was 70 or over.

In 2012, 15 leaders were under the age of 60, while in 2022 17 leaders were under the age of 60. While it is difficult to draw too many conclusions from this assessment, we can be certain of one thing - there has been a marked decline in the number of foundation leaders staying in post beyond 65.

Gender balance

2012

2022

Women in top
foundation leadership
roles

32%

Women in North
American foundation
leadership roles

32%

Women in European
foundation leadership
roles

33%

Women in top
foundation leadership
roles

43%

Women in North
American foundation
leadership roles

45%

Women in European
foundation leadership
roles

41%

People of colour

2012

2022

People of colour in top
foundation leadership
roles

7%

People of colour in North
American foundation
leadership roles

6%

People of colour in
European foundation
leadership roles

4%

People of colour in top
foundation leadership
roles

20%

People of colour in North
American foundation
leadership roles

35%

People of colour in
European foundation
leadership roles

0%

Age & youth

2012

2022

Average age of
foundation CEOs or
presidents

60

Share of foundation
leaders who were 65 or
over

40%

Share of foundation
leaders who were 70 or
over

23%

Average age of
foundation CEOs or
presidents

56

Share of foundation
leaders who are 65 or
over

17%

Share of foundation
leaders who are 70 or
over

7%

Foundations reviewed

Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, US
Arcadia Fund, UK
Arcus Foundation, US
BBVA Microfinance Foundation, Spain
Bernard van Leer Foundation,
The Netherlands
Bertelsmann Foundation, Germany
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, US
Bloomberg Philanthropies, US
Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation, US
Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation,
Portugal
Carnegie Corporation of New York, US
Cartier Philanthropy, Switzerland
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, US
Christensen Fund, US
Children's Investment Fund Foundation,
UK

Citi Foundation, US
Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation,
Italy
Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, US
Dalio Philanthropies, US
David and Lucile Packard Foundation,
US
Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, US
Fondation Botnar, Switzerland
Fondation CHANEL, UK
Fondation de France, France
Fondation L'Oréal, France
Ford Foundation, US
Fundación MAPFRE, Spain
Fundación Telefónica España, Spain
Gerda Henkel Stiftung, Germany
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, US

Grameen Crédit Agricole Foundation,
France
Howard G. Buffett Foundation, US
IKEA Foundation, The Netherlands
John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur
Foundation, US
King Baudouin Foundation, Belgium
Kresge Foundation, US
LEGO Foundation, Denmark
Lloyd's Register Foundation, UK
Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies, US
Mastercard Foundation, Canada
McKnight Foundation, US
MetLife Foundation, US
Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, US
Nestlé Foundation, Switzerland
Oak Foundation, Switzerland

Open Society Foundations, US
Robert Bosch Stiftung, Germany
Rockefeller Foundation, US
Silicon Valley Community Foundation,
US
Skoll Foundation, US
Susan T. Buffett Foundation, US
Toyota Foundation, Japan
Tony Elumelu Foundation, Nigeria
W.K. Kellogg Foundation, US
UBS Optimus Foundation, Switzerland
United Postcode Lotteries, The
Netherlands
Volkswagen Foundation, Germany
Walmart Foundation, US
Wellcome Trust, UK
William & Flora Hewlett Foundation, US

Approach

The purpose of our research was to take a snapshot of the diversity of leadership in the world's top foundations. Many foundations talk about the importance of diversity in their grant-making philosophy. We wanted to know how is diversity reflected institutionally among foundations at the President and CEO level.

UniversityPhilanthropy.com and The Cape Partnership drew on the Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD) list of leading private philanthropic foundations. Using the OECD data we then narrowed the list to those institutions which undertake international, cross-border philanthropy. The short-list was 63. We decided to work from a sample of 60.

For the data relating to 2012, we drew primarily on published annual reports augmented by web research, including media articles, to ascertain the identity of the leader. For the 2022 data, we looked at foundation websites for information about the leaders between 3-10 January 2022. For the assessment on age, we took a sample of 30 foundations where we were able to confidently ascertain from publicly available information the age of the leader in 2012, and again in 2022. We apologise for any incorrect conclusions drawn from our research.

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