

Women’s Leadership in Resident Theaters

Summary of Results and Recommendations

Sumru Erkut
 Ineke Ceder
 Wellesley Centers for Women
 Wellesley College
 August 2016

Commissioned by Carey Perloff, Artistic Director,
 and Ellen Richard, Former Executive Director,
 American Conservatory Theater, San Francisco

Supported by a major grant from
 the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation,
 with additional funding from the Valentine Foundation,
 Wellesley Centers for Women, and individual donors

Introduction	2
Background	2
Study Design	2
Definitions	4
Key findings: Issues that need to be addressed by the field	5
Recommendations	9
What can individual theaters and service organizations do?	9
What can Board search committees do?	10
What can search firms do?	11
What can Foundations and other funders do?	12
<u>How can the field support the career paths of all qualified aspiring leaders</u>	
1. Work-life balance	12
2. Culture fit	13
3. Mentoring	13
- What can mentors/sponsors do?	13
- What can aspiring leaders do?	14
4. Cross-departmental training	14
<u>Benefits of tapping into the strengths of less traditional leaders</u>	15
Acknowledgements	16
Endnotes	16



Introduction

Background

Women’s representation in leadership of member-theaters of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) has hovered around 25% for years. In 2013-14, women occupied 21% of the artistic director (AD) positions and held 38% of the top executive/ managerial director (ED) spots in the 74 member-theaters (see figure 1). There were no EDs of color, female or male, and only 6 people of color had AD positions — 5 men and 1 woman. Positions just below leadership were occupied by a more gender-balanced group, but people of color held few “next-in-line” (NIL) positions immediately below top leadership (see figure 2). The two figures depict the operation of a glass ceiling, a metaphor for the barriers facing women stuck at middle management where they can see the top but cannot reach it. The scarcity of women and men of color at the top appears to be a reflection of both a glass ceiling and of insufficient numbers in the candidate pool hired and retained in LORT member-theaters.

This study examines why so few women hold the top leadership positions in theaters and what can be done to increase their numbers. As such, it is a study of positional leadership within the members of a service organization. It is not a study of the service organization itself, LORT, which administers the national not-for-profit collective bargaining agreements with Actors’ Equity Association, the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, and United Scenic Artists in the US.

We set out to learn about the experiences of women as they sought leadership positions, to understand the reasons behind the gender imbalance. Confronted with the virtual absence of women of color in regional theaters, we additionally included a focus on race. We address both gender and race to the extent that our data have allowed.

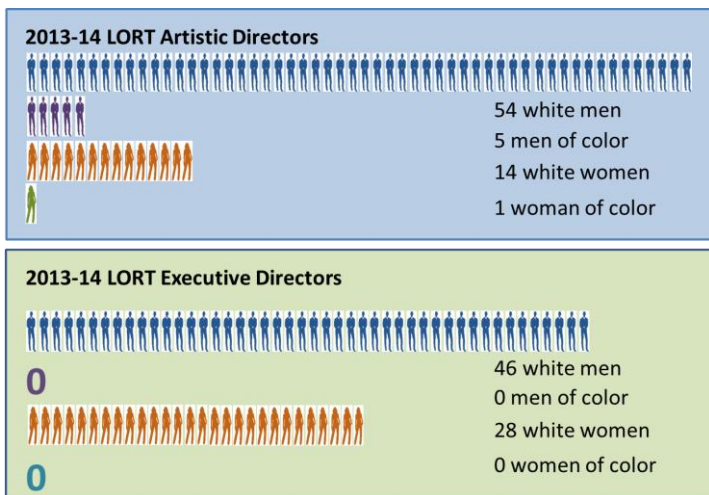


Figure 1

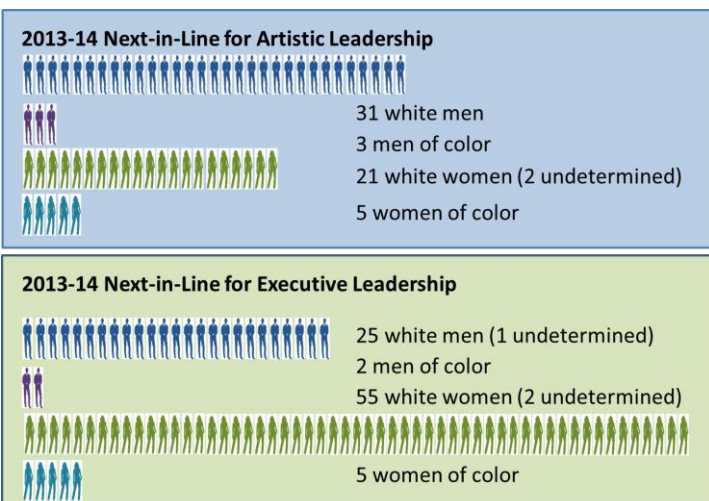


Figure 2

⊕

There are sufficient numbers of women who aspire to top leadership who can be tapped to make progress toward gender parity immediately.

⊕

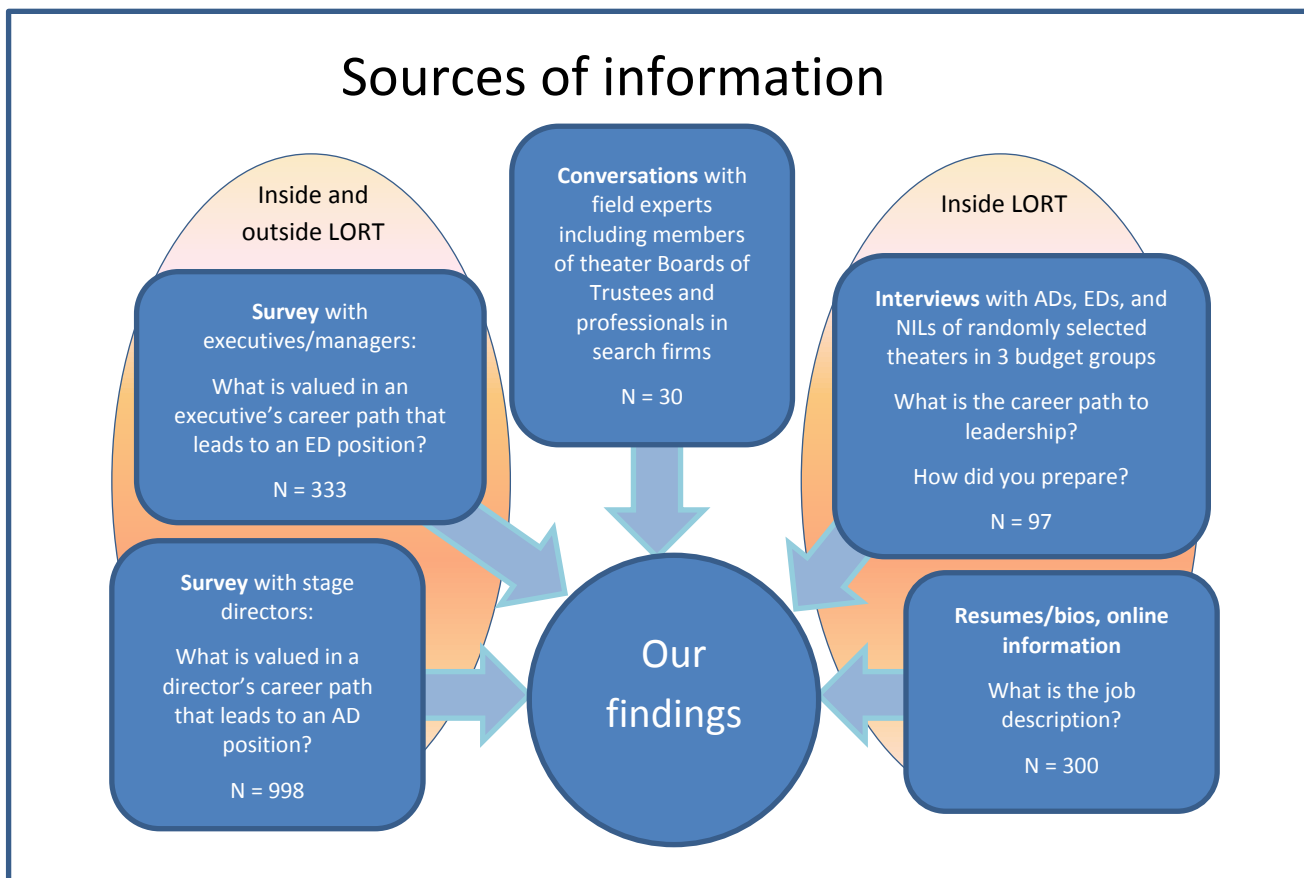
Study Design

We designed a multifaceted information gathering strategy. We conducted 97 interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including artistic and executive directors, and people on the pathway to leadership, from a randomly selected sample of 24 LORT member-theaters. The selected theaters represented three budget groups: \$2-5 million; \$5-10 million; and \$10+ million. Because top leaders have been recruited from both inside and outside LORT member-theaters, our research into those on the path to leadership involved two separate, confidential online surveys of people both inside and outside of LORT. A survey pertaining to the artistic side of the theater was conducted with director-members of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC; 998 surveys). We surveyed directors because 88% of the ADs of the LORT theaters had a background in directing. A survey pertaining to management and operations was conducted with top managers and people in positions immediately below them in theaters that are members of Theatre Communications Group (TCG) with budgets above \$1,000,000 (333 surveys), which also included LORT theaters. Information from the interviews and surveys was augmented by information from service organization sources, mainly TCG and LORT archival websites, theater websites, and resumes and bio-sketches of LORT theater leaders and those in the positions just below them (~300 documents). Further, we had extensive conversations with

30 experts in the theater field including members of Boards of Trustees of LORT theaters who had been involved in the leader selection process, search firm professionals who manage searches for top leadership positions, and key theater professionals who were referred to us by their colleagues.

All spoken information was recorded and transcribed, and analyzed with NVivo, a content analysis tool, which allowed cross-referencing with the other types of data (lists of individuals and their characteristics, resumes/bios, etc.). Survey data were examined with SPSS, a statistical software package commonly used in the social sciences. Where possible, statistically significant differences between groups were calculated. (More details are available in the full report.)

Efforts like ours do not stand alone. Because in our further writing we often refer to LORT, TCG, and other service organizations, we want to highlight some of their initiatives that address diversification among their members. LORT formulated a diversity initiative in May 2014, and recently formed a Recruitment Subcommittee that will focus specifically on promoting and supporting promising executive leaders of color, and growing the number of people entering the field from underrepresented populations (see http://www.lort.org/Diversity_Initiative.html). TCG's Rising Leaders of Color and SPARK Leadership Programs provide intensive training and career support to leaders of color at various stages of their careers. Further TCG funds New Generations: Future Leaders, a mentorship program that partners emerging leaders with established professionals; and Leadership [U], a program sponsoring theaters to mentor early-career leaders (see <https://www.tcg.org/fifty/EDI/initiative.cfm>, and https://www.tcg.org/grants/newgen/newgen_index.cfm).



Definitions:

Artistic Director (AD): Person identified on the masthead of a theater as the head of the artistic side. Includes people who hold single leadership positions overseeing both the artistic and operational side of theaters, which is the leadership model in 21 of the LORT member-theaters.

Executive Director (ED): Person identified on the masthead of a theater as holding the top position of the operational/administrative/managerial side. In this report the ED designation includes people who hold the top operational leadership position but report to the AD/ED in theaters with the single leadership model. The top operational leader can be managing director, general manager, chief operating officer, director of finance, etc.

Next-in line (NIL): Refers to professionals identified on the masthead of a theater as holding positions immediately below the AD and ED in a LORT member-theater. On the artistic side these include associate artistic directors, literary managers, or (associate) producers. On the operational side they include general managers, or directors of finance, development, and marketing.

Gender: Coded as female and male. To arrive at a gender designation we combined first name, photos, and use of pronoun by the person and about the person for LORT theater leaders and professionals next-in-line to leadership. For survey participants, gender identification was based on answers to the gender question: female, male, other (no one checked "other"). While acknowledging that gender expression can take many forms, we worked with gender in its binary formulation of female/male, to highlight underrepresentation of a large demographic group.

Race: Coded as white and non-white (referred to as "people of color" in the report). References to racial/ethnic identity by the person and about the person in combination with photos and last name were used for assigning the race/ethnicity designation of leaders in LORT theaters and people in the pathway to leadership. When this combination did not yield a designation, we noted the person's race as "undetermined." Racial identification for survey participants was based on their answers to a direct question.

Qualified candidate aspiring for leadership: For women, "qualified" is used to indicate a cadre of female candidates whose qualifications with respect to job titles, length of employment in the theater field, experience of having founded a theater company, and educational accomplishments are not statistically different from that of men in similar positions. For people of color, we do not have sufficiently large numbers in the study samples to make general statements regarding race differences in qualifications. However, the numbers of people of color holding graduate degrees in directing as well as theater management have been steadily increasing since 2000. Designation of "aspiring" is based on expressing a wish to pursue a top leadership position and/or having applied for one.



Key findings: Issues that need to be addressed by the field

1. Familiarity and Trust

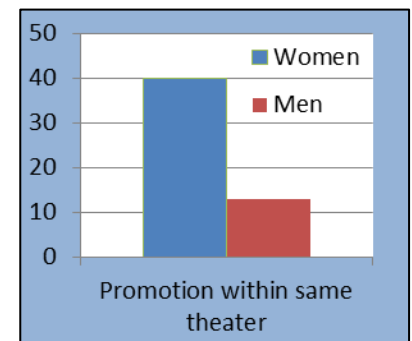
Our results indicate that, in large part, the reason there are so few women heading LORT theaters is not a question of merit, rather it is a question of trust: Board search committees are less frequently willing to trust that women have what it takes to run arts organizations.

Hidden behind a gender- and race-neutral job description is an expectation, grounded in a **stereotype**, of what a theater leader needs to look like: white and male, because white and male leaders have been the long-standing majority of those in top positions. Expecting an artistic or executive leader to be a particular type is a subtle but strong **bias** when evaluating a slate of candidates. This can steer selection committees toward unconsciously or unintentionally focusing on those they had already envisioned could be trusted to do the job. This quotation from a male Board member was representative of what we heard in many interviews: “Men tend to hire men because they grew up with men. Decision makers [on the Board] have a business background. It’s a vestige of [whom] you are comfortable with. You’d want the best person in charge [of the theater]. Men are more comfortable with men.” Even though theater Boards are largely gender balanced, traditional gender roles that favor men speaking and being listened to more frequently than women tend to favor men’s choices.

Board members’ own familiarity with leadership models in business, where similar gender disparities are present, makes them more comfortable with men as leaders and unconsciously influences them to consider a man the best person to have in charge of a theater. Below, we detail how lack of **familiarity** and — directly associated with it, lack of **trust** — stand in the way of diversifying top leadership.

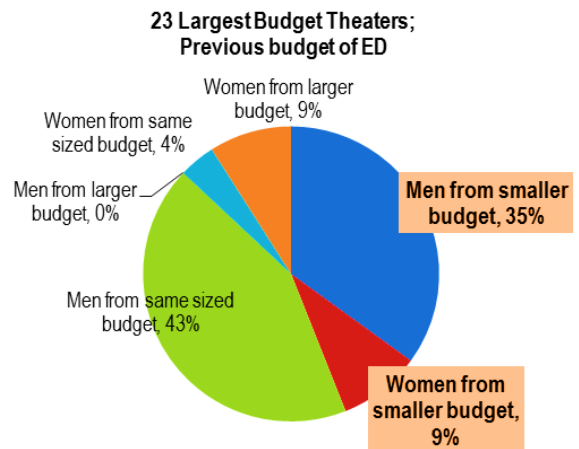
In general, women remain outsiders in theater leadership, except when those who make the hiring decision know their work: women are promoted to AD positions within the theater at which they are already employed at much higher rates than men.

- In the LORT-leader sample we found that the *only* pattern in hiring preferences that favored women was that female artistic directors had been **promoted** into their leadership position from a lower position within their own theater at higher rates than men (40% vs. 13%). We interpret this phenomenon in the context of **greater familiarity generating trust**. When hiring from within the theater, a female candidate was not an abstract, unknown entity; rather, those who made the hiring decision knew the quality of her work well and were therefore able to trust her as their candidate for leadership.



In the largest-budget LORT theaters, Boards have been much more likely to hire a man as their executive director, even if he came from a smaller theater, to run their larger-budget organization than they have been to hire a woman with a similar smaller-budget theater background.

- 35% of the Boards of the 23 highest-budget theaters (over \$10 million) trusted a man to be able to run a larger organization as the executive leader than he had before. Conversely, only 9% of these theaters' Boards trusted a woman to run a theater larger than her previous place of employment. Trust in "potential" was reserved for men, especially for running high-budget theaters.



A survey of director members of SDC showed that the majority of female stage directors who were or had been artistic director of a theater arrived at that position as the theater's founder. That women become artistic directors of a theater because they have founded the theater suggests that women do *not* get *selected* to run theaters at the same rates as men do.

The experience one gains by founding a theater leads to becoming familiar with most aspects of running a theater, an experience that aligns well with the necessity of gaining wide and broad experience across departments in preparation for becoming a leader.

Even though having founded a theater is an asset, Boards of LORT theaters showed greater willingness to hire male founders than female ones.

- Past founding experience currently has not benefited women for landing artistic director positions in the LORT sample: 27% of male LORT artistic directors vs. 19% of female artistic directors had founded a theater.

2. Work-Life Balance

- Requirements for a successful life in the theater (which can include extensive travel, long and irregular hours, etc.) can be active barriers against caregivers (who are mostly women) and, more importantly, lead to hidden biases quietly affecting the hiring or promotion process.

The discussion of family responsibility appears to be a taboo, and therefore presents a high and hidden hurdle to progression for those who care for others.

Despite the plethora of loud voices in blogs and during conferences on the need to address balancing family responsibilities with a theater career, our interviews with leaders of LORT member-theaters were relatively silent on how having a family may have affected their career paths. Similarly quiet on this topic were the surveys from directors and high-level managers. Not able to interpret this contradiction, we probed deeper into the topic in conversations with industry leaders. They made it clear that a woman would never bring up family responsibilities for fear of not being given the same benefit of the doubt that she would be able to continue her career as her male colleague who is presumed to have someone at home taking care of the family. The following comment from a female AD we consulted clarifies the silence: "Women are trained, at least in my field, to shut up when they have children, because it is a liability. You won't get the job!"

3. Culture fit

Simply hiring people who have remained outside of theater leadership will not guarantee that diversity will be achieved, as indicated in this comment: “I think the worst thing any artist of color could do right now would be take an Artistic Directorship at an institution that’s not a good fit and fail, because every failure for one is one that everyone pays for for ten years.” We heard comments in interviews such as, “there isn’t as much room for strong women who are not lowering their voices” and “[my mentor] didn’t seem to think that black directors could direct anything other than black work.” Success in diversifying leadership along gender identity or expression, race/ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, and class background may require making adjustments to the prevailing cultures of many theaters.

4. Mentoring

Career progression in the theater has traditionally been based on the **apprenticeship** model. People who aspire to leadership positions told us they want mentors who “look like them,” who have had similar experiences. For example they seek mentors who can understand the challenges of juggling family responsibilities, or who can speak to the challenges faced by people of color in a field that has predominantly seen white leaders.

Both leaders and those aspiring to leadership stressed the key role mentoring plays in preparing someone for a top position, but acknowledged mentorship to be in short supply.

- Not only focused, intentional time but also informal conversations can provide support. Mentors can help flesh out the variety of experiences an aspiring leader needs in order to become a viable candidate and provide more clarity about career progression which many people below top leadership told us was unclear.
- Well-positioned, aspiring leaders identified specific areas for needed growth:
 - ✓ For artistic director positions: Directing at a variety of theaters, public speaking and relationship building skills to apply during fundraising efforts, and experience producing shows is important for building their reputation. Directors of color need invitations to direct widely, beyond the works of playwrights of color.
 - ✓ For executive director positions: Fundraising, Board relations, strategic planning, and cross-departmental expertise are needed.
- Mentors can also promote their protégées to search firms and search committees who rely on these personal endorsements.
- Short of a mentoring relationship, which involves a committed and personal relationship, sponsorship is also very valuable coming from well-respected theater professionals who can champion a candidate’s qualifications with other leaders or with a search committee.

5. Affordability

Many aspiring leaders are part of an emerging generation of ambitious young people who have acquired substantial student loans for attending college and graduate school in their drive to progress through the ranks toward leadership. For them, **affordability** of a life in the theater is an important and sometimes limiting barrier.

Moving toward greater diversity will require support for the financial burden of career development for those aspiring to leadership.

6. Limited number of leadership openings may be a limiting factor for achieving diversity

- There are few opportunities for leadership positions within the LORT member-group, by virtue of the fact that there are only 74 member-theaters.
- Further limiting the availability of leadership positions in LORT is the very low turnover in some theaters' leadership. Among the 142 leaders for whom we could calculate longevity in their position (out of 148), three had been in their position for over 40 years, six over 30 years, 22 over 20 years, and 31 for more than a decade.



Is it a glass ceiling or a “pipeline” issue?

The dearth of women in top leadership of LORT member-theaters represents a glass ceiling. There are sufficient numbers of qualified women aspiring for leadership. Immediate action is possible to achieve gender equity in leadership.

Professionals of color also face a glass ceiling. There are well-qualified aspiring people of color inside and outside the theater who can be tapped for leadership to make immediate increases in racial diversity. But the number of leadership candidates of color is smaller. Concerted, long-term efforts are needed to attract and retain more people of color on the pathway to LORT-member-theater leadership.



Recommendations

Below we offer recommendations for removing barriers to achieving gender and racial equity in theater leadership. Our recommendations may be familiar:

- *Some were offered by people we interviewed;*
- *Some are examples of what was already being implemented at theaters;*
- *Some are already being addressed by theater service organizations like LORT, TCG, and their industry partners, and can be expanded and better funded;*
- *Other recommendations emerged from analysis and interpretation of the data we collected.*

Whereas our charge was focused on gender equity in leadership inside of the LORT member-group, our data collection included two large survey samples of professionals both inside and outside of LORT. Many of our recommendations are therefore likely to be applicable beyond the LORT member-theaters.

What can individual theaters and service organizations do?

Close and focused collaboration between all theater service organizations¹ can advance efforts toward leveling the leadership playing field. LORT and TCG have already developed valuable initiatives that will benefit from further expansion (see TCG's Rising Leaders of Color, based on its SPARK Leadership Program; New Generations; and Leadership [U]; <https://www.tcg.org/fifty/EDI/initiative.cfm>; and LORT's Diversity Initiative and Recruitment Subcommittee at http://www.lort.org/Diversity_Initiative.html).

The ultimate goal of this research was to make recommendations so that any qualified and ambitious person, regardless of personal characteristics, has an equal chance at the leadership position.

1. Recognize, confront, and correct instances of gender and racial bias. If progress is to be made in diversifying leadership and attracting a full range of viable candidates, gender and racial bias must be addressed. Anonymous surveys about experiences of bias among employees are likely to be a productive first step and should lead to addressing identified challenges.²
2. Open up family responsibilities and work-life balance topics for conversations both at leadership and other levels of responsibility without questioning employees' and candidates' professional commitment or availability to do their job.
3. Create opportunities for career development at both early and mid-career junctions. Develop and participate in mentorship programs specifically for high-potential women and people of color. This can include actively supporting the application of a promising professional to participate in an existing mentorship program; providing monetary support and time off for professional development; or creating affinity groups within the theater or across various theaters where leadership career paths and preparation can be discussed and colleagues can support each other's growth.
4. Attract young people to careers in theaters. Many theaters have active educational components. The field can examine and showcase successful efforts that link youth theater involvement with choosing to work in the theater.

5. Offer aspiring leaders training built on the most successful graduate training programs' models through paid internships and apprenticeships to make it possible for them to acquire skills and networking opportunities without the high cost of a graduate degree.
6. Provide wide training and involvement in fundraising. Lack of fundraising experience is named the number one reason by executive-director candidates when explaining why they failed to attain a leadership position they applied for. Because fundraising is a key element of an executive director's portfolio, opportunities for learning about fundraising such as a "fundraising boot camp" to be offered by TCG and/or LORT in partnership with service organizations for non-profit fundraisers such as Women in Development, are important for strengthening the candidate pool. Similarly, service organizations should continue to offer workshops to aspiring artistic leaders demystifying the artistic director's role in fundraising by focusing on strong relationship building and public speaking skills.
7. Take leadership in publicizing job openings and resources for training systematically, widely, and accessible without a fee. Do this in partnership with foundations who can support the efforts.
8. Develop explicit criteria for vetting leadership candidates. Industry leaders should discuss and arrive at the expected level of competence required of all theater leaders.
 - a. These criteria can be the focus of a leadership institute for high-level managers who aspire to top leadership positions.
 - b. Service organizations such as LORT or TCG can take the lead in organizing field-wide conversations (where diverse voices are solicited and heard) on job requirements for artistic and executive directors and how candidates should be scored on each job element.
 - c. When there is a vacancy, a theater can work with those newly created field guidelines and emphasize those that emerge from its self-examination of what it needs from a candidate to move forward on the theater's mission at the time the vacancy has occurred.
9. Collect specific case examples of what types of mentoring have worked and were successful from both the points of view of the protégée and the mentor. Successful models can be replicated and shared across the field.
10. Enter conversations with state and federal government to increase funding for the arts and introduce a jobs program that includes paid work at theaters or other arts institutions.

What can Board search committees do?

For change to occur, search committees (and search firms also) need to commit to supporting, coaching, and advocating for more diverse leadership in a much more informed, intentional way than in the past.

1. Support greater diversity in leadership by becoming and staying conscious of common human errors in decision making, of which most people are unaware (see Nobel Laureate, Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, fast and slow*). Take the Implicit Associations Test (IAT) at [https:// implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/) to learn about biases. Biases one is not aware of can influence the hiring process starting with the decision of who sits on search committees and gets a voice, through the description of the position, to the selection of candidates to be interviewed, and ending with how candidates are assessed during the final selection steps. Ensure that in every conversation decision makers actively question themselves whether unintended biases have influenced process or outcomes.
2. Search process recommendations:
 - a. When a vacancy occurs, engage in a serious self-examination: what does the theater need to change to (re-)align with the mission; where has the theater not met its goals? Do this self-examination to arrive at the skills and experiences that the theater needs to include in the job description for the next leader to better meet its goals.
 - b. Ensure search committee membership is diverse. The committee chair needs to guarantee not only that diverse voices are present but that they are heard and respected. Decision making by unanimous agreement is recommended because research suggests it can amplify women's voices and their authority in ways that "majority rule" does not.

- c. Conduct an external search — which also allows internal candidates to apply — for major leadership positions. These offer an opportunity for Board search committees to consider the widest view of the candidate pool, and expose them to candidates whom they may not yet know personally.
 - d. Give serious consideration to the intention behind the Rooney Rule,³ particularly the reasons why it is needed in the first place. Interview several applicants from an underrepresented group when there is a vacancy. Make it a routine practice to review a search firm’s track record of *placing* diverse candidates in similar positions before hiring a search firm. Insist on diverse candidates in the slates that are presented.
 - e. Evaluate a slate of candidates for whom personal and demographic characteristics have been disguised (“blinded”) when selecting whom to interview, so as not to be influenced by characteristics irrelevant to doing the job.
 - f. When interviewing candidates for an artistic director position, look for skill and enthusiasm for speaking in front of a variety of large and small groups, relationship building skills, and willingness to support development efforts, which are key components of fundraising responsibilities for artistic directors instead of emphasizing actual fundraising experience.
 - g. PAUSE, when you are about to make a selection, to slowly and deliberately evaluate that the choice is not based on familiarity, comfort, and implicit trust of what is known but rather that it is justified on the basis of the theater’s identified needs and the candidate’s ability to meet those needs.
 - h. Provide support to the theater’s leadership team during a period of transition to a new leader.
3. Ongoing Support:
- a. A significant factor in any leader’s success is how actively the Board engages with them, mentors them, supports them, and learns from them. The process doesn’t stop with the hire, it begins with the hire. Provide the necessary support that leaders need (e.g., child care, protection from gender- or race-based backlash, professional coaching for managing a large team) throughout the leaders’ career.
 - b. Take on conditions of employment and salary equity as one of the Board’s priorities in its role of overseers of the theater’s operations.

What can search firms do?

1. When vacancies occur at any level, redouble the efforts to look wide and deep inside and outside of LORT, including within smaller theaters, before deciding on who the best candidates are.
2. Build and present a slate of candidates based on credentials that are race- and gender-blind. Information such as names, schools attended, and even home address can unconsciously influence evaluations.
3. Become more open to recruiting from outside of the theater world, a move that may be particularly important for recruiting professionals of color into the managerial side of the theater.
4. Place a greater value on women theater founders, particularly minority women founders, than currently is done. Theater founders have accrued many cross-departmental skills and invaluable experiences in founding and running a theater.
5. Be cautious during a hiring process about using and relying upon psychometric testing that is not evidence-based as being gender- and race-neutral, and avoid testing tools that have been benchmarked against a male “norm.”

What can Foundations and other funders do?

1. Provide financial support for searches led by firms that have a demonstrated track record in placing diverse leaders.

2. Provide financial support for mentorship opportunities and formal mentorship programs that train the next generation of leaders who are currently underrepresented in top leadership.
3. Endow positions in larger institutions specifically targeted to mentoring of future female leaders and female and male leaders of color.
4. Provide funding to research and implement childcare options for theater staff, including visiting directors.
5. Provide support for non-profit theaters to evaluate and implement the wider implications of a theater's mission as a public good to attract more diverse, wider audiences.
6. Sponsor retreats for theater Trustees to examine hidden biases that can influence leader selection processes and those that affect every-day interaction with theater professionals, and offer support for effective ways of overcoming them.
7. Sponsor retreats for theater Trustees to examine the business case for diversity in the context of their fiduciary responsibility for a non-profit organization as a public good that serves the widest possible audience.
8. Support arts education in K-12 systems to seed the pipeline with interest in theater careers as a viable option.

Effective models of conscious efforts toward full representation are available and can be adapted to a given theater's mission; some of these efforts focus on diverse programming or inclusion of diverse populations at all levels of employment, others focus more on how to change leadership hiring processes by including a "Rooney-Rule"-type requirement, which generally refers to having candidates from underrepresented backgrounds among those who will be interviewed for an open position.

How can the field support the career paths of all qualified aspiring leaders?

1. Work-life balance

The tension between the deep silence on the topic of work-life balance among higher-leadership voices and those on the ground expressed in a myriad of blog posts, conference presentations, and informal conversations suggests that the issue of family responsibilities is a "taboo" topic in the theater world. Inaction to address this issue keeps many women and some men from becoming viable candidates and also creates a "leaky pipeline" when those who struggle with work-life balance drop-out.

1. Through consciously instituting and advertising family-friendly policies, theaters can bring the subject of family-life balance into the open, and inspire others and the whole field to adopt policies that benefit, support, and retain qualified employees.
2. Create new or offer better and affordable child care options for staff, and extend them to visiting directors. Models are available in industry and academia where on-site day care may be available for those who need it. Alternatively, theaters can recommend vetted local programs and negotiate with those programs admission for (temporary) care of (visiting) artists' children; provide additional accommodations for visiting artists' caretakers without considering this an extra burden; and provide these accommodations to both male and female (visiting) artists.
3. Put in place a more objective selection process at every level of responsibility where selection criteria are clearly spelled out and equally applied to each candidate. When a placement has been finalized,

work-life balance should be put on the table explicitly to build a safety net around the new hire's needs in order to fully support her/his chances at success.

4. Include an open conversation with each employee about the work-life balance in annual review sessions.

2. Culture fit

Culture fit involves creating safe spaces and ensuring support for people who enter leadership in environments where they were previously un(der)represented. Interviewees reported incidents where they felt pushed to the side, unseen, and underappreciated for their contributions. Gender identity and expression, race/ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, and class background all are potential sources of disadvantage or even discrimination. Many groups may benefit from a conscious adjustment in the culture of their place of employment.

1. Address how the theater can attain a supportive cultural fit between the theater's dominant culture and an employee's individual culture. It is imperative to start conversations with the dominant and the individual culture on equal footing when striving for adjustments without pushing the dominant culture to be the default for success.
2. Provide a safe space for discussion of differences. Train Human Resources employees to be receptive to concerns of unconscious bias or discrimination and bring in outside experts to lead workshops about this topic. Deliberately discuss retention efforts for a non-traditional employee or leader. Discuss how the organizational culture can adapt its "practice as usual" to be more welcoming to and supportive of diversity in hiring and retention.

3. Mentoring

Informal and formal relationships are often the basis for career success and progression. The recommendations below focus on how mentors can structure relationships with aspiring leaders to help them along on their career path, and how aspiring leaders can take the initiative to find the right mentoring opportunities. Further, existing leadership institutes for aspiring leaders developed by service organizations where specific skills for progression are discussed, modeled, and practiced can be expanded to include public speaking for fundraising purposes, relationship skills for interacting with high potential donors, interviewing skills, management skills, interacting with the media. These can all be taught and practiced in workshop settings with feedback from colleagues both in higher and similar levels of management. Examples already exist in the many efforts TCG has funded, like the New Generations Program, where mentors and mentees are paired for an intensive 18-month residency.

What can mentors/sponsors do?

1. Talk up a protégée's qualifications to enhance their visibility.
2. Give time and attention to a direct report's career development even if there are not enough resources to serve as a full-fledged mentor. Every relationship, even a casual one, can promote career growth.
3. Promote relationships and networks for aspiring leaders as a deliberate and routinely practiced sponsorship activity with search firms, Board members, philanthropists, and other influential people.
4. Support skill development by assigning manageable-sized tasks to people who are exploring a leadership path. Provide guidance but let them do the task from start to finish. If the task fails, mentors can help the person learn from the failed outcome; if it succeeds, mentors can help publicize it.
5. Invite aspiring leaders to sit in on meetings of departments whose functioning they need to learn more about. On the other hand, dispel the myth that a professional has to have mastered ALL relevant skills before becoming a viable candidate.
6. Introduce protégées to Board members, and invite them to attend Board meetings.
7. Include conversations about how one develops a career in the theater with every annual review. These conversations should also include particulars about the realities of career progression both within and

outside of the protégées' theater. Offer emerging leaders who have reached the stage of becoming candidates the opportunity to do practice "mock interviews."

8. Recommendations specific to the artistic side:
 - a. Promote female directors' opportunities to direct plays at a variety of theaters so that they can build networks of artists who can speak to the breadth and depth of their directing experience and leadership potential.
 - b. Promote directors' of color opportunities to direct a variety of plays beyond works by playwrights of color so that they can expand their portfolio and build networks of artists who can speak to the breadth and depth of their directing experience and leadership potential.
 - c. Demystify fundraising responsibilities of artistic directors by stressing that they primarily entail relationship building and presentation skills as the public face of the theater. Provide a variety of and frequent practice opportunities. Provide guided opportunities to witness and practice interaction with high potential donors so that aspiring leaders can in turn deepen their own relationships with them.
 - d. Provide experiences of producing plays, or mentor in key skills related to producing.
9. Recommendations specific to the managerial side:
 - e. In addition to Board exposure, offer opportunities for attaining cross-departmental expertise, including producing. Provide set-aside time to achieve these.
 - f. Translate "strategic planning" as planning for the future in the context of a theater's mission and values in order to make it less intimidating as a topic. Provide time to participate.

What can aspiring leaders do?

1. Seek out several people who can serve varying mentoring functions. Mentors have different strengths, and can provide different types of support and guidance.
2. Initiate projects and recruit more senior people either inside or outside of their own theater to receive "hands off" guidance to accumulate accomplishments they can highlight in their resumes.
3. Cultivate a large network of relationships, including relationships with peers. Even if none of them become a strong mentoring relationship, these relationships are still valuable for career progression.
4. Cultivate relationships with search firms. Ask specific questions that can help guide growth.
5. Seek out Board experience by serving on the Board of other organizations.
6. Look for opportunities to do practice "mock interviews" with seasoned leaders.

4. Cross-departmental exposure/training

Theater leaders need expertise to oversee a wide variety of theater functions. Getting exposure or training in different departments' particular roles can be a challenge, especially when aspiring leaders are already overloaded with the day-to-day tasks of their assigned positions.

1. Board of Trustees, artistic and executive leaders: Promote communication across departmental divisions as a business strategy that will also help aspiring leaders gain insights into what their counterparts in other departments are doing. This is particularly important in larger theaters whose departments often operate as separate silos.
2. Aspiring leaders:
 - a. Take the initiative to sit in on meetings of departments with which to become better acquainted. Work or volunteer at a smaller theater where cross-departmental expertise may be easier to gain, as more of the work is shared by fewer people and communication may be more accessible.

- b. Aspiring executive leaders: Produce a show to explore how to effectively collaborate with the artists in a theater.
- c. Aspiring artistic leaders: Understand that “fundraising” can be taught and learned, and that it is primarily relationship building and an effective articulation of the theater’s mission to a variety of audiences.
- d. Overcome the temptation to think you need to master *all* cross-departmental functions before you feel confident enough to pursue leadership positions.

Benefits of tapping into the strengths of less traditional leaders

Diversifying leadership can introduce benefits emanating from the strengths of professionals who are currently underrepresented in theater leadership. Presented below are strengths our data allowed us to identify among less traditional leaders.

1. Directors of color, in particular, have claimed the skill of being able to attract not only an audience of donors but also an audience that goes beyond the “usual” theater goers as one of their strengths. Some of them have developed specific, effective models for attracting more diverse audiences to grow the theater, which can be adopted by other theaters. These skills should be favorably noted among candidates for leadership positions.
2. “Creative Producers” have experience spanning artistic and administrative departments of a theater, and present a group of professionals that is currently more gender-balanced in LORT member-theaters. Search firms and Board search committees should consider a background in independent producing as a strong qualification for leadership.
3. A large number of women, especially women of color, have extensive skills and experience through having founded a theater. This invaluable background should be noted by search firms when building their slates of candidates and by Board search committees when considering these candidates.
4. Female stage directors of color report being comfortable with fundraising, which is a skill many directors report needing more experience in. They represent an untapped reservoir of candidates that should not be overlooked in artistic director searches.



Targeted outcome:

Balance the playing field for leadership along gender and race lines in a focused and targeted manner. This is a critical first step toward full representation, in programming on stage and in staffing off the stage.

Endnotes:

¹ LORT, TCG, SDC, AEA, TDF, The Broadway League, IA, URTA, ATPAM and others.

² As recommended by <http://www.cookcross.com/docs/UnconsciousBias.pdf>

³ The Rooney Rule saw its origins in American football where the racial backgrounds of head coaches and players were vastly unbalanced (70% black players vs. 6% black coaches), until conscious changes in hiring practices were sought. The Rule generally refers to having candidates from underrepresented backgrounds among those who will be interviewed for an open position.

Acknowledgements

We were invited to become the research partner of the American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.) by with Carey Perloff, its Artistic Director, and Ellen Richard, A.C.T.'s former Executive Director. We are grateful to them for their vision and support. Shafer Mazow, a Wellesley alumna, recommended us to them. Thank you, Shafer, for making the connection. Alex Sanger, former member of the Wellesley Centers for Women's Council of Advisors, recommended us to the Toulmin Foundation, which generously supported the research. Without this support the research would not have become a reality. Thank you, Alex. We also thank the Valentine Foundation, Wellesley Centers for Women, and individual donors for additional financial support.

Fran Kumin was an early supporter serving as a valuable resource. Thank you for your unwavering patience for answering questions and reading drafts with utmost care. Martha Richards and Nora Hussey were also early supporters who gave invaluable insights. We also appreciate the help and support from Laura Penn and her colleagues at SDC.

Carey Perloff and Ellen Richard not only conceived the project but gave us guidance and introductions to key theater professionals. We received input from many people, most notably from (in alphabetical order) Laurie Baskin, Jennifer Bielstein, Elena Chang, Jeremy Cohen, Curt Columbus, Kelvin Dinkins, Teresa Eyring, Jamie Gahlon, Angela Gieras, Kate Goldstein, Julie Hennrikus, Bethany Herron, Megan Hinckley, HowlRound, Greg Kandel, Susie Lampert, Joan Lancourt, Nancy Livingston, Shellen Lubin, Susan Medak, Jonathan Moscone, Victoria Nolan, Rose Oser, David Riemer, Gus Schulenberg, Tim Shields, Seema Sueko, Donna Tambascio, Patrick Thompson, Erin Washington, Harold Wolpert, Kay Yun, and the members of WCW's writing group.

We had help from interviewers Colleen Royal and Daniel Saroff, data analyst Amanda Richer, research associate Betsy Starr, student assistants Sarah Fechter and Dominique Lafontant, and are deeply indebted to Laurel Wills who organized our vast amounts of data, helped with analyses, and provided critical feedback to our writing.

Above all, we thank the theater professionals who gave us time for interviews, sent their resumes, and completed surveys, and members of theater boards of trustees and search firms who agreed to be interviewed.