



DiverseCity

THE GREATER TORONTO LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Ratna Omidvar's Speech at the Canadian Club Launch

January 26, 2009

We have an ambitious agenda over the next three years, but we also have a plan to get us there.

Think of our plan as our very own diversity stimulus package.

The DiverseCity plan is practical and tangible, it is about action, results and change, it has outcomes attached to it and it will result in an injection of significant doses of creativity into the leadership landscape of the city region – in board rooms, at the top level of our institutions, in Queen's Park, on Bay Street, in our media.

Our objective – accelerating prosperity through diversity in leadership – is ambitious. Our plan to get there is ambitious, too. It involves no less than eight different but complementary strategies. And we will make it easy for you to engage and get involved in a meaningful way,

1. The first initiative is called DiverseCity NEXUS

And it answers the question “If I am running an organization, how and where do I connect with excellent diverse leaders?”

NEXUS will fill that gap.

It is a corporate leadership network connecting aspiring diverse leaders to decision makers like you. We will identify leaders from a wide variety of backgrounds and sectors and create opportunities for you to meet them and so expand connections.

This initiative is a direct response to what we heard in our consultations with Toronto's diverse leaders who advised us that it was necessary to create connections for them that were pan Toronto, pan ethnic, that cross cultural boundaries and are not limited to any one group or community or sector.

We will do so by using a salon style speaker series to cement relationships. So if you are involved in this initiative, you, your diverse leaders and your decision makers will enjoy constant exposure to the expanding pool of diverse candidates.

By the end of the year we will have connected at least 100 leadership candidates in this way to decision makers. Over three years Nexus will grow both in numbers and in the strength of its networked relationships.

We are delighted to announce that the inaugural Nexus gathering will be hosted by Cisco. That is indeed wonderful news and I hope that their example will soon be followed by others.

2. Our next project is called DiverseCity Fellows

This initiative answers the question “How do we find and support leaders to engage in city building?”

DiverseCity Fellows focuses on a different kind of leader – an aspiring city builder who is deliberate about working with other leaders and across sectors, instead of in a silo. We will work with approximately 25 leaders every year over the next three years who will be drawn from all walks of life, and all sectors and will mirror most closely the Toronto of today as a vibrant group of people.

Their distinguishing common feature will be their passion for action in building a prosperous city region. They will take part in an intense program which will give them the knowledge, skills, perspectives and connections to catalyze their leadership ideas. They will learn first-hand how city builders at City Hall, in government, on Bay Street, at our Universities and colleges, at the United Way and YMCA all are part of an essential and intricate web of a successful city. They will learn how to inject their leadership ideas into this web, all within the context of a highly diverse if not hyper-diverse region.

In addition, each participant will leave behind a legacy project as a tangible, valuable expression of their leadership.

And one day soon, many will replace older faces around tables such as the TCSA.

Comparable programs in Seattle, Pittsburgh and New York have seen graduates go on to serve their city regions in their work as public servants, business leaders and non-profit executives.

The enthusiasm for this idea is huge. We have received over 150 applications from a highly talented group of people and we will have to narrow it down to 25.

3. Our third initiative is called DiverseCity OnBOARD

Our third initiative DiverseCity onboard answers the question “Where do I find competent diverse leaders to sit on boards of public institutions and voluntary organizations?”

The good news is that we already have a line up of qualified and screened candidates for you. We scout talent from the city’s diverse populations and make a match with governance/ board positions in the city regions many public agencies, boards and commissions, as well as its voluntary sector.

In time, we hope to extend our work to corporate boards but as a beginning we are focusing on public and voluntary agencies. Our prescreened and prequalified pool already stands at over 600 individuals and we have made close to 220 board appointments at institutions such as the LCBO, The Ontario Science Center, Seneca College, Bridgepoint Health, the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Civilian Commission on Police Services, The Pharmacy Council, Elizabeth Fry Society etc. In addition to the talent scouting and matching, we also provide basic and advanced governance training.

Our goal is to source at least 1000 ready to go candidates and make at least 500 appointments by 2010.

4. Our fourth initiative focuses on DiverseCity in Civic Leadership

In this stream of the project, we will turn our attention to the power and influence of politics, politicians and civic leaders. We will reinvigorate the political arena with new faces and new ideas. We will identify, train and mentor over 100 individuals in the art of running for political office or managing a candidate's election campaign.

In a pilot phase we worked with 30 candidates and future campaign managers this past year. Each one of them selected a candidate to support in the last federal election and worked with him or her. A number have already declared themselves as candidates in upcoming municipal elections or are working on their nominations to provincial or federal ridings.

This is of course a non partisan effort. We have attracted leaders from across the political landscape to act as trainers, as well as professionals who work behind the scenes – so our training faculty includes politicians, past and present, political strategists, polling organizations, communications experts and so on. Our mentors are drawn from every political stripe and every jurisdiction.

Over three years at least 100 individuals will be tapped in this way.

5. Our fifth initiative focuses on the media and is called DiverseCity Voices

And it answers the question “How can we amplify diverse voices in the media?”

Certainly, there is no absence of such voices on issues such as diversity, immigration or multiculturalism. But our voices are largely absent on the larger issues that concern us too as Canadians and Torontonians – issues that we many have expertise on – such as the economy, world trade, science and research, environment and so. We will fill this void by creating a super rolodex of contacts for the city regions media institutions, so that the next time a journalist wants a comment on relations with the US, or infrastructure ideas or economic stimulus ideas, they have a source list to refer to that is made up of more than the usual suspects. The city's top media institutions are very enthused about this as are more than 50 individuals who have already put themselves forward as expert commentators on a range of issues. We will grow this list to at least 300 plus.

The CBC and the Toronto Star have already signed on to provide media relations expertise to this group and one early success has been with the CBC which has already sourced individuals from this list to feature on the National as commentators on the US election.

6. Our sixth project is called DiverseCity Perspectives and it will provide thought leadership

We know that true diversity does not simply mean changing faces around the table, but must go deeper and ultimately change our perspectives, behaviours and attitudes. We only have to look south of the border at President Obama and his approach for some constructive ideas. President Obama started his conversations on difficult subjects such as race and ethnicity with small groups of people to arrive at a new way of thinking about the way forward.

Borrowing a bit from his strategy, DiverseCity Perspectives will be a dialogue series, held in smallish groups, that will enable us to surface new ideas on the systemic conditions that encourage or discourage diversity in leadership – as for instance diversity in education, faith and diversity and so on.

The first session will start with a discussion on the R word and will explore questions on racism. How can leaders fight racism? What is the best way to talk about it given the discomfort around the word? We will publish the results in a Perspective series.

7. Our seventh project called DiverseCity Advantage asks “How do we make the case so that others can join our movement and get involved?”

We will put out a number of substantive research pieces that capture case studies and help continue to make the business case for diversity in leadership. Our first publication, undertaken by the Conference Board of Canada is available, and I urge you to take a look at it. One of the key findings of this first report was the diverse leadership in corporations and boards leads to improved financial results. These findings are from the US, but we hope we can find our own story in Canada as well.

8. And finally, in partnership with Ryerson’s Diversity Institute we will publish a progress report every year called DiverseCity Counts.

This progress report will help us determine whether or not, and how and where, we are making progress or falling behind. We will measure leadership in public, private, voluntary and electoral institutions – who gets elected, who sits on our public and voluntary boards, whose faces we are seeing in the Globe and Mail’s appointment calendar, who runs our cities in the GTA, who are the top public servants at Queen’s Park, who is teaching our children.

We will do this in a sustained manner over three years and at a given time because we know what gets measured, gets noted and acted on. In this way we will provide accountability to our partners and to the city region.

In summary, then we will:

- a) create new networks – of aspiring and existing leaders
- b) infuse our public institutions of governance, politics and media with new ideas and voices
- c) provide thought leadership by developing and publishing research, case studies and perspectives to impact on our thinking
- d) And finally, we will report out on the city region’s progress.

An ambitious plan for sure, but one where you can find your place as individuals or organizations.

You can do so by one or more or all of the following:

- Participate in Nexus by nominating members to it or hosting an event
- Identifying candidates for boards and open doors to board rooms
- Help us source diverse voices as media connections on a diverse set of issues
- Identify candidates who are interested in political leadership or put yourselves forward as mentors or trainers
- Engage with DiverseCity Fellows
- Identify good practice in your organization that helps us build our case
- And, most importantly, start talking to you friends and colleagues about the fact and evidence base that connects prosperity, competitiveness, innovation and creativity to diverse leadership.

Over the next three years, with the leadership of our partners in the room today, we will introduce at least 1,000 new and diverse leaders to leadership positions. And so we will create the leadership conditions that will propel us to innovation, creativity and prosperity.

We have a plan, we have people, we have action and we will have results with accountability.