COMMUNITY VOICES

BOARD TALKS - DIVERSITY IN GOVERNANCE FINAL REPORT

MAY 2022 // PREPARED BY DR. MICHELLE LAM, DENISE HUMPHREYS, AKECH MAYUOM, & STEPHANIE SPENCE

Report on the *Community Voices: Board Talks* Diversity in Governance Focus Groups held in Brandon, Manitoba

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This report presents (a) the themes that emerged from discussions through *Community Voices: Board Talks Diversity in Governance* focus groups held in November 2021 and (b) the results of a systematic review of the relevant literature that is aligned to those themes.

The Community Voices initiative and this report are the results of a collaboration between Westman Immigrant Services and Brandon University, specifically, the BU CARES Research Centre, which promotes community-engaged research with Indigenous and rural community members.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Together, we can engage in meaningful discussions about belonging, anti-racism, and working together to build a community where everyone's voice matters.

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INCLUSIVITY & ANTI-RACISM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By Dr. Michelle Lam

In 2020, the Interdisciplinary Immigration Research Network (IIRN) began discussing the need for a community-based approach to building equity and belonging for Brandon and Westman. We decided to launch a new initiative, which we called *Community Voices*, to reflect our method of using a series of in-depth conversations with a broad range of community members.

Our first initiative was a broad community consultation around the topic of belonging and anti-racism. This led to important findings and recommendations, including the need to facilitate connections and address barriers, particularly as they relate to power dynamics. Governance was mentioned as an area that could benefit from further exploration.

We began *Community Voices: Board Talks* as a follow-up initiative that was focused on defining diversity within governance, identifying power dynamics, and brainstorming strategies to facilitate equity. We held three focus groups that brought together board members from numerous boards within Brandon and the Westman area. The vast majority of these boards were non-profit or not-for-profit boards.

This report is one of the major outcomes of this second *Community Voices* initiative. Specifically, this report outlines (a) the themes that emerged from the focus groups and (b) systematic reviews of literature that connects to these themes as well as suggestions for ways forward.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2021, board members from a variety of non-profit and not-for-profit boards participated in facilitated focus group discussions to talk about equity, diversity, and inclusion on governance boards.

OBJECTIVE
The objective of the Community Voices project is to provide a space that encourages dynamic, interdisciplinary, multi-directional perspectives about inclusivity and anti-racism that can be compiled and analyzed to provide constructive and meaningful information back to participants and members of the community.

The discussion questions of this Community Voices Board Talks focus group were

- What does diversity mean for the board?
- At what point do you consider yourself a diverse board?
- On boards that you would consider diverse, what kinds of power dynamics can exist?
- What strategies can you envision that might facilitate equity?
- Anything else on the topic?

FORMAT
Each two-hour facilitated session involved

- A welcome and introduction by Enver Naidoo of Westman Immigrant Services and a tour of Westman Immigrant Services for in-person sessions for interested participants
- A project overview and ethics protocols by Dr. Michelle Lam of BU CARES
- A welcome from the city of Brandon by Councillor Sunday Frangi
- Focus group discussion facilitated by Dr. Michelle Lam and supported by research assistants from BU CARES
- A wrap-up and next steps

"When individuals can't fully utilize their skills or experiences, they lose their voices."
- Community Voices participant

Your Voice Is
IMPORTANT

WHY WE NEED

MORE UNDERSTANDING ABOUT DIVERSITY IN GOVERNANCE

Brandon is the second largest city in Manitoba, with a population of approximately 50,000, or 3.8% percent of Manitoba's population. It exists on Treaty 2 land, which is the traditional homelands of the Dakota, Anishinaabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, and Dene Peoples and the homeland of the Métis Nation. In addition to Indigenous and settler community members, Brandon also experiences significant new immigration, particularly in recent decades, due to the foreign labour recruitment of a large-scale meat-packing plant and as post-secondary institutions increase enrolment of international students.

In our first Community Voices consultation, where 125 community members spoke about the need for deeper local understandings of belonging and anti-racism, one of the outcomes was the need for diversity at all levels, particularly within leadership and governance structures. Addressing issues of power, ownership, and control was a major theme in that first consultation, and participants noted that inviting people to participate in an event or program was not enough—there must be an acknowledgment of barriers to fuller participation. In light of this, we included a focus on power dynamics in this second round of consultations.

COMMUNITY VOICES

INCLUSIVITY & ANTI-RACISM

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Drawing on the themes identified in the focus group discussions, a review of the literature was made to explore, assess, and analyze existing research relating to the themes. The steps in this review included the following:

1. Screen databases with inclusion and exclusion criteria including context, dates, reliability, and source of the information.
2. Review titles and abstracts and then assess the full articles when the content of the research fits the inclusion criteria and is relevant to the emergent themes.

The key themes explored include

- definitions of diversity
- barriers and challenges to diversifying board governance
- power dynamics within diverse boards
- opportunities for ways forward
- suggestions for action

Building on EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

By combining existing research with the themes from *Board Talks* conversations, we can link our knowledge to what is already known and further extend our own understandings.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data collection consisted of three recorded focus group discussions, held both in-person and via Zoom. Each group had 8–10 participants, all current board members serving in non-profit or not-for-profit boards in Brandon or the Westman area. These discussions were recorded, and a research assistant documented the discussions in case of recording failure. The recordings were transcribed, with personal information removed, and then the discussions were compiled for analysis. Altogether, we analyzed 64 pages (single spaced) of transcription data from the discussions.

Data analysis consisted of two separate analytical processes. First, we coded and sorted textual data into themes, which form the structure of this report. We further expanded each theme with relevant literature from the literature review. Second, we used NVivo's qualitative data analysis word frequency software to look for repetitions of content words that frequently appeared in the text.

Findings from this data analysis process were summarized and are included in this report, along with stand-alone quotes from participants where appropriate.

Knowing where we are today

Helps us know where we want to go tomorrow
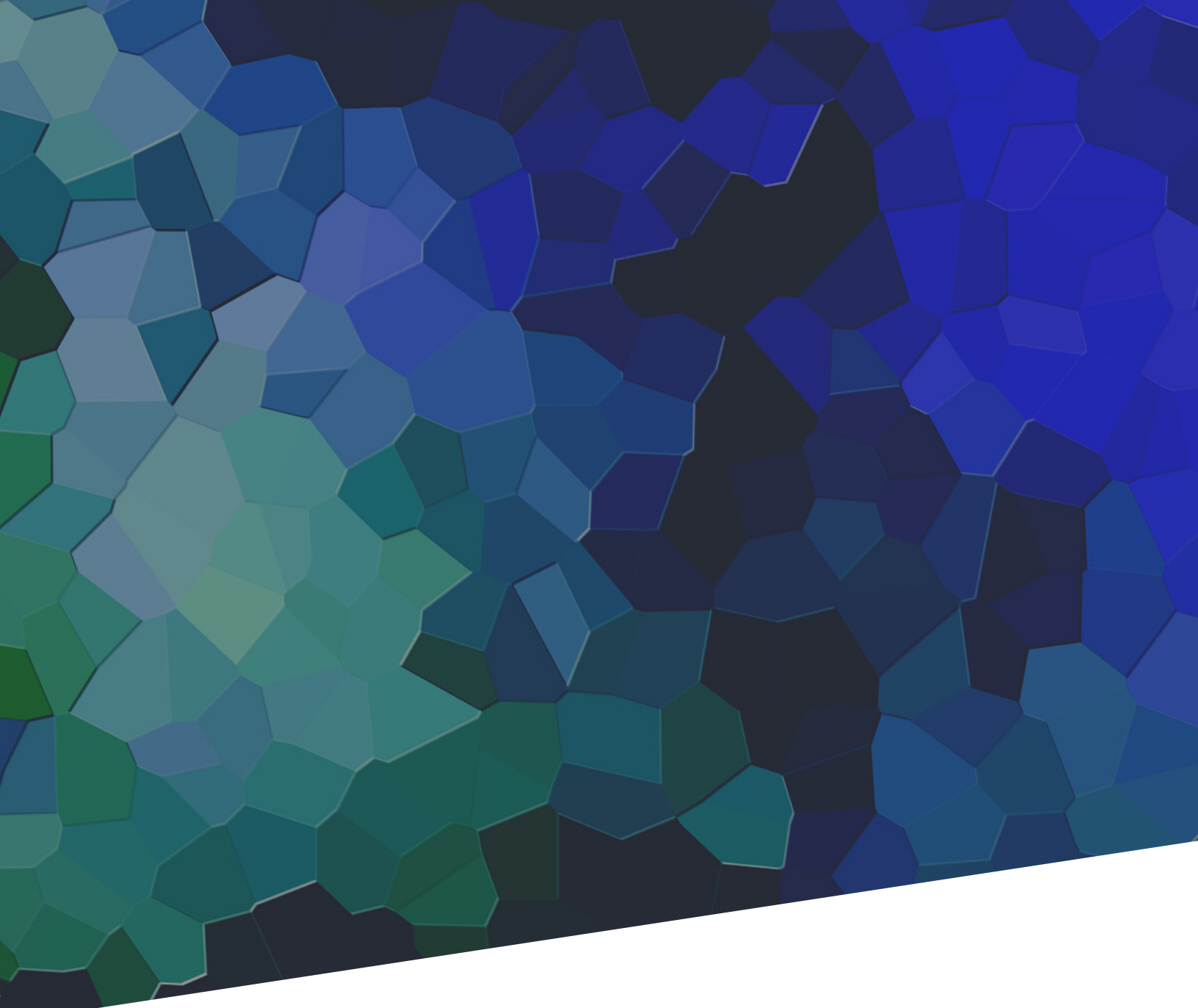
WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

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WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

In the focus group discussions, our first two questions focused on developing a collaborative definition for diversity. We asked each group to answer the question, "**What does diversity mean for the board?**" and also "**At what point do you consider yourself a diverse board?**" Answers to these questions, combined with insights from other aspects of the discussion and the broader literature around defining diversity, enable us to gain the following insights:

Representation

There was a large discussion in every focus group about what representation means. For some, this meant a formalized matrix based on either a representative sampling of the broader community or based upon a sampling of the specific populations served by the organization. This approach to representation was one that was deemed measurable with the goal being to become as diverse as possible, where skills and diverse viewpoints were represented.

Where it had been formalized, these matrix approaches involved trying to check all the boxes. Based on the discussion and the broader literature, there are several challenges with this type of approach:

- First, it involves constantly revising the matrix to ensure an accurate reflection of changing demographics. As one participant shared, "*this is a moving target [because] the immigration and make of a community is going to change over time.*"
- Second, it was difficult to combine both skillsets and cultural diversity in a way that could honour both. One participant said, "*I created a rubric around what would be a well-rounded board in terms of skills and attributes, [but] I wasn't looking at gender or ableism or people of colour or Indigenous or anything like that.*" Should boards recruit for a skill such as financial acumen and then look for diversity within that group? Vice versa? The discussion also touched on issues of power relations, often bringing up the question, "*Who is making the matrix?*" which will be explored further in the section on power.
- Third, disclosing particular backgrounds, orientations, or views may not always be something board members are prepared to share, and so care needs to be taken when attempting such an approach.

What is
DIVERSITY?

Although focus group participants tended to think of diversity in terms of protected characteristics like race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, diversity can be defined in much broader terms. Boards also benefit from the diversity of personalities, opinions, experiences, skills, and economic and educational backgrounds.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

Diversity Is a Process

Often in direct contrast to a representation approach to diversity was the definition of diversity **as a process.** In this view, checking boxes based on cultural background, ethnicity, gender identity, and so forth was "*not broad [enough]*" because it focused on particular aspects of diverse members (tokenism) but did not consider ways of changing practices or addressing power imbalances. In this view, diversity was not an end goal. As one participant shared, "*I don't think there's a certain point where you can sit satisfied as a board and say, 'Okay, we're diverse.'*" Instead, it was "*diversity as an ongoing process*" that involved "*steps being taken to mitigate structural barriers for participation.*"
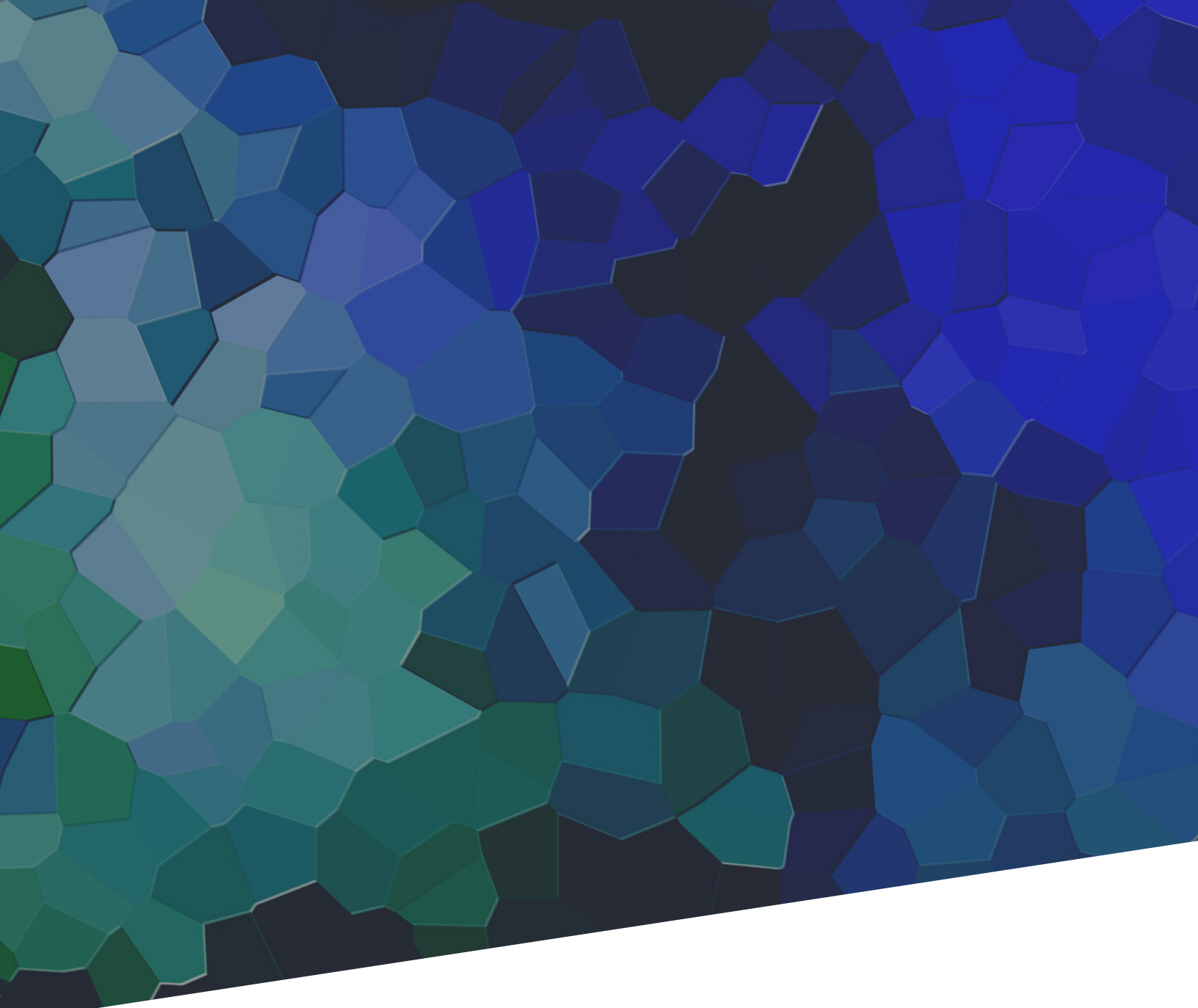
Important Considerations: Who Is the Organization for?

Diversity at the board level involves considerations about the connections between the mandate of the board and the populations they serve. In the words of one participant, "*Participation should reflect programming.*" For example, if the board exists for a particular segment of the population (e.g., women, older people, rural people), their board diversity may reflect that. It is confirmed in the literature that diversity within boards may contribute to helping ensure organizational programs reflect the populations they serve (Buse et al., 2016). Diversity reflected in organizational decision making can support meaningful involvement of stakeholders and better contextualize the governance processes of the organization (Quetzal Tritter & McCallum, 2006). Instrumentalizing community integration may include a variety of pathways. Two of these pathways include policies and practices at the board level and a board culture that manifests inclusion behaviours (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013; Ely & Thomas, 2001). For example, one group spoke about the need for a diversity mandate to be reflected in their documentation, and another spoke about the benefits of a public-facing statement about what diversity for a particular organization might look like. Diversity statements and the integration of diversity into an organization's core mission and values have been found to enhance diversity and improve the experiences of diverse members (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013). In addition to this, participants raised the point that internal perspectives on diversity might be different than how those outside the organization may view it, and so these types of statements might be valuable.

What is
DIVERSITY?

Adding diverse board members is only effective when the board addresses issues of power and equity.

BARRIERS
& CHALLENGES

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

Many participants noted the different difficulties a board faces when trying to diversify its demographics:

- **Pushback,** a negative or unfavourable response to diversifying efforts, was commonly mentioned in the focus group discussions. Pushback was mentioned by participants as something observable within their boards when board members did not see the need for diversity or required convincing in order to see the benefits, as in *"How do you sell it to your board?"* As one participant said, *"You have to be sold [on the idea] in order to put all that extra effort."*

  Pushback also existed within the focus group discussions themselves. This could be seen through the use of diminishing language and pointing to areas where boards are *"good enough."* There were statements about not knowing where to start or how to get there, such as *"It's hard to find somebody that fits this role and is Indigenous or of colour or something like that"* or *"We can only recruit so many people."* There were also protective statements such as *"I don't want us to feel guilty for not being diverse"* or *"We are fairly diverse, but we don't have other areas of ethnic origin."*

"I think the expectation of boards doesn't open up the door for those who may be marginalized."
- Community Voices participant

"Diverse boards are powerful boards."
- Community Voices participant

"What steps are being taken to mitigate structural barriers for participation?"
- Community Voices participant

What are
BARRIERS & CHALLENGES?

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

- **Ethnocentric organizational culture.** Certain practices of boards were viewed as following the dominant (White) culture. Communication practices are a good example of one such custom. As one participant said, *"Everyone is waiting to stop talking before you start, but in some cultures, you just jump in, so you alienate yourself quickly."* Other examples mentioned included the cultural practice of volunteering, logistical differences such as when meetings are scheduled and whether childcare is provided, and ideas around values such as efficiency, assimilation, effectiveness and altruism. The literature also suggests that "the logic of diversity as intent sustains a system of structural inequity by centring white feelings, intentions, and self-identification rather than the material conditions of marginalized peoples" (Mayorga-Gallo, 2019, p. 8).

- **Gatekeeping.** This barrier was summarized well by one participant who said, *"[It's] that informal power of people who have been on the board for 25 years who are the gatekeepers to the old ways—that is a power dynamic that prevents people from bringing diverse ideas and perspectives to the board."* This is also related to power imbalances, which we will explore further.

"We are trying to fit into a system that was not built for us."
- *Community Voices participant*

"We're asking people to give their expertise, a different perspective, but not actually offering something for that. And I think that is a mindset that needs to change. If we want that, we need to start compensating people because it's exhausting work."
- *Community Voices participant*

"I just see the same individuals and I'm one of the guilty ones, right? I am one of them. I just can't imagine not serving!"
- *Community Voices participant*

What are
BARRIERS & CHALLENGES?
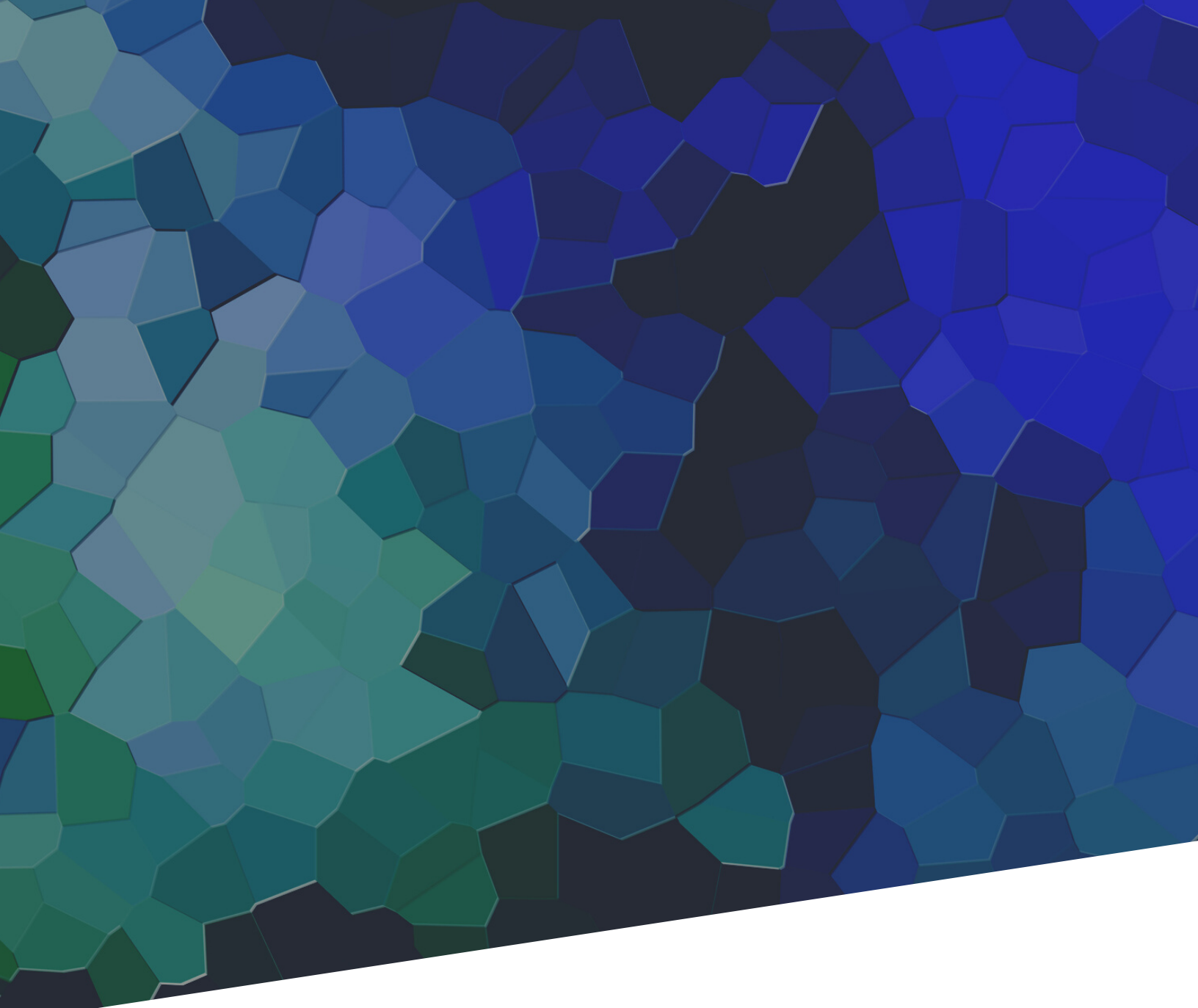
POWER

DYNAMICS

LANGUAGE & POWER

The physical presence of diverse board members does not automatically make the boardroom a place they feel that they belong. Within the focus group discussions, power was a continuous theme that emerged within each question. Power issues were addressed directly in conversation and were also visible within the focus group dynamics, particularly through **language**.

- Participants expressed hesitation around their views by softening their statements. For example, participants would often use word choices that included many discourse markers such as "kind of" or "might be" and used speaking patterns to soften their statements, particularly when they were disagreeing with others. This may be related to the levels of power held by many of the participants in the room and the perceived impact of disagreeing with such powerful people.
- Throughout the talks, many participants would separate themselves from their boards or their boards from the community by using us-versus-them language. For example, conversations surrounding how do "we" get "them" into "our" board and referring to "diverse" people as "other" or "them." This was noted by a participant in one of the groups who stated, "*And so when we think about the 'us' versus 'them,' how do 'they' even become the 'us'*?"
- Some participants used language that demonstrated social privilege. This was apparent through ambivalent or bare minimum attitudes to diversity. For example, many participants thought their board was already diverse enough in terms of having diverse ideas or it was enough to have someone present who was visibly diverse. One quotation that clearly demonstrates this is when a participant explains how their board "*has been successful in a lot of ways except in this diversity thing.... So it seems impossible to find that ... board representative that's whatever.*"

TOKENISM VS. EQUITY

Aside from the language itself, other prominent concepts associated with power also arose in conversation. One of these prominent concepts was **tokenism**. Tokenism was apparent through conversations involving symbolic representations on boards, using minimal representation as a collective voice and through surface-level diversity. For example, some participants shared that the diverse members on their board were "showcased" by their board to the public and that often the diverse members of their boards were expected to be experts on all things related to diversity and that their opinions were not considered meaningfully aside from this. Often solutions or strategies for facilitating equity tended towards a tokenistic approach. For example, suggestions included shifting programming towards "cultural" activities or diversifying menu options. These easily visible, surface levels of diversity were emphasized, rather than grappling with systemic ways of knowing and governing. From the literature, these approaches are commonly taken but ultimately serve to assuage guilty feelings without attending to justice in meaningful ways (Abebe & Dadanlar, 2021; Lawal & Nuhu, 2021; Friedman et al.. 2016; Wilkinson et al., 2022). Furthermore, tokenism can result in tick-box engagement, where boards fulfill a have-to-dos in a checklist approach (Wilkinson et al., 2022). This type of tokenistic engagement can result in roadblocks for recognized leadership (Friedman et al., 2016; Torchia et al., 2011; Wilkinson et al., 2022), a lack of support within the board to support systemic change (Lawal & Nuhu, 2011) and sustained ignorance of socio-economic, political, racial, cultural, and community context (Wilkinson et. al, 2022). The focus groups highlighted these issues as both currently practiced and challenged on their boards.

In contrast to the tokenism above, another prominent conversational theme was that of **equity**. In this theme, board diversity work included ensuring issues of power were addressed. For example, one participant shared that their board being diverse is *"not just about the people that are there. It's also about whether they're able to influence that group or whether their ideas are heard."* Other participants shared about the importance of equity in terms of privileged members needing to step down on boards so diverse members can become more involved. For example, one participant shared that equity *"means somebody has to step aside to create an opportunity for somebody to step into that role. And so maybe diversity means saying I should not be here— somebody else should."* Another asked in a similar sense, *"What are people willing to give up in order to empower others?"*
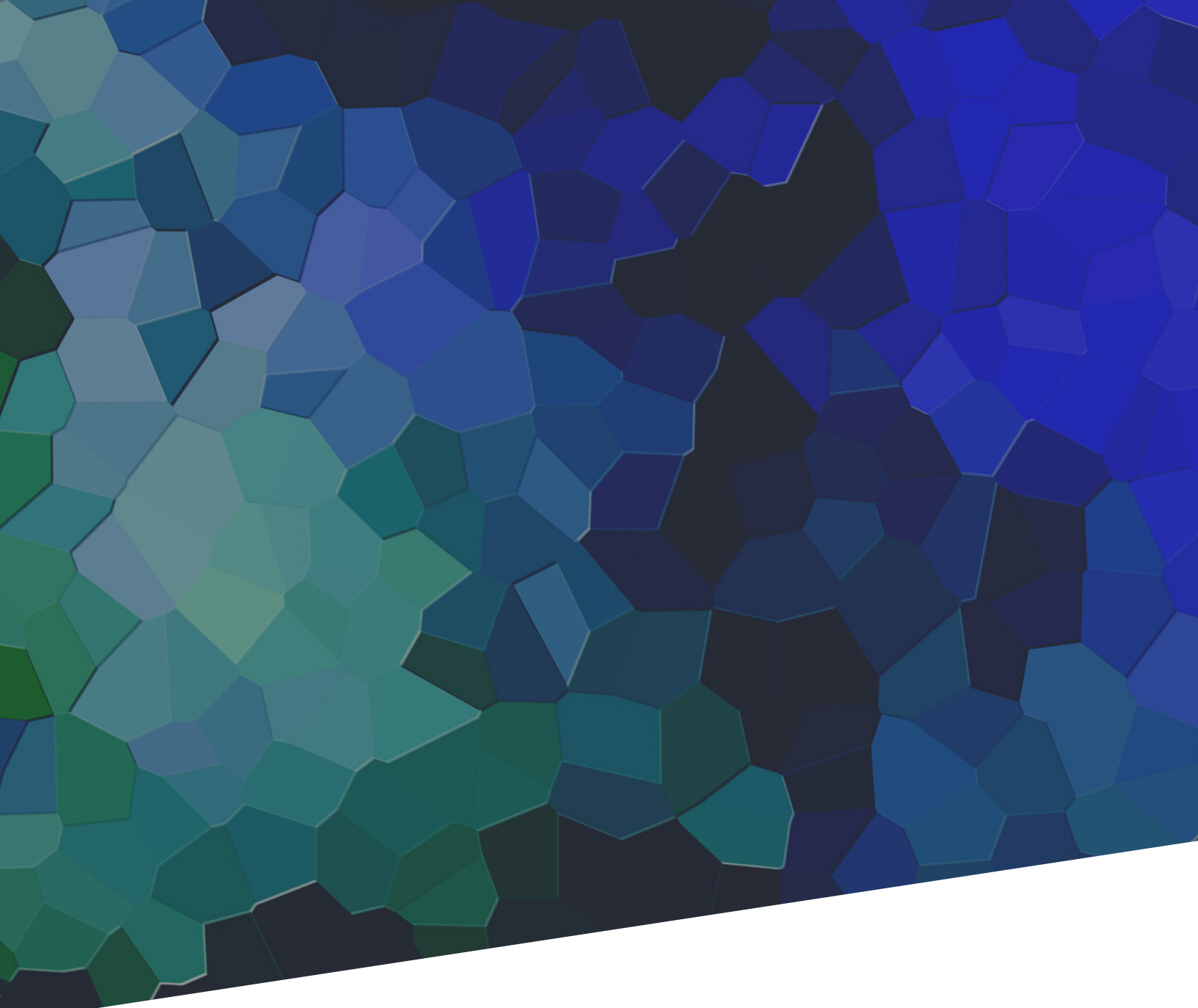
What are
POWER DYNAMICS?

POWER & ASSUMPTIONS

The need for equity to be addressed in conversations on diversity was apparent through the emergent theme of **incorrect assumptions** that systemically excluded racialized peoples from boards and organizations. This was sometimes the direct topic of discussion, and other times was seen through the later analysis. For example, some participants shared that they thought the need for diversity was a relatively new phenomenon. Others spoke of diversity in terms of issues they were removed from. Some participants also spoke to socio-economic barriers to participation on boards and the types of knowledge that are privileged on boards, assuming that diverse board members have less social advantages or are from lower economic classes. Other participants spoke about how they thought diverse individuals might not have the correct skills or credentials to participate on the board. For example, one participant shared that "*if we think about the community members that we serve, they don't actually know how the game works. They don't know how to participate in the game. Like how would they find themselves represented? Or how would they get to the board at all because there is a game required to even get there, right?*" This quote speaks to how White and dominant forms of knowledge are often privileged on boards and include or exclude others. It also demonstrates what certain board members may assume the knowledge of diverse individuals to be.

What are
POWER DYNAMICS?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR
WAYS FORWARD

SUMMARY OF KEY SUGGESTIONS

Based on common suggestions made by participants, the following sections describe opportunities for diversifying governance at the board level.

Informal Relationship Building

Participants mentioned a need for opportunities to form informal relationships. There was a sense of agreement that board members did not know each other. Others felt that the connections that did exist were homogenous. As one participant expressed, *"I wonder if the best way to diversify boards would be to look at our own relationships and our own personal relationships and wonder, who do we know? Do they look different from me?"* Participants in many of the groups felt that for individuals to be involved and engaged on a board, there needed to be initiatives that facilitate informal relationship building. Suggestions involved activities that were "*fun*" such as "*going to the bar*" or as one participant indicated, "*maybe you start meetings off with coffee and donuts.*" One participant suggested that board members need to be "*out, being seen as having fun.*" Another participant expressed that board members needed to *"spend time meeting people."*

The literature provides limited information regarding opportunities for connection and diversification of boards. However, community connections have been shown to be successful (Brown, 2002). This will be discussed more under recruitment strategies. It has also been argued that while recruitment is a means to get people to the table, inclusive relational practices are how we maintain new board members and as such, should be prioritized (Brown, 2002; Buse et al., 2016).

"When we're talking about diversity, we're really talking about relationships."

- *Community Voices participant*

Opportunities for
WAYS FORWARD

Recruitment Strategies

There was an acknowledgment that current recruitment strategies did not reach diverse communities. The following sections describe suggestions for inclusive recruitment practices.

- **Accessibility** - Participants commented on the need for recruitment strategies that were accessible. For example, one participant said, *"Like it's advertised on the website that they would never access in English, which maybe they can't, you know? Like, there are all these kinds of layers just to get to the table."* Participants provided suggestions such as providing applications for board membership in different languages and advertising in various places beyond the organization's website. Another idea that came forward is a centralized space or *"hub"* where calls for board members can be accessed by organizations or prospective board members. It was emphasized that these initiatives should be multilingual.

- **Connecting with the community** - There was an acknowledgment that organizations needed to reach out to the community rather than expecting the community to make the connection. By facilitating connections, communities would be able to *"get to know each other, get more comfortable with each other."* For some, connections could be made through sports such as a golf tournament or through cricket. As part of this conversation, a participant suggested, *"Why not go out and pay for lunch ... and sit in the cafeteria at Maple Leaf?"* While the idea of going the extra mile to make the connection is a good one, we would also like to acknowledge the dangers of stereotyping. Brandon's immigrant population is diverse and varied in terms of skills, background, and employment. As one participant pointed out, *"These are all great strategies, [but] we should be cautious about pigeonholing people into that space."* This stereotyping was explored on page 18 in the discussion about tokenism.

"It's not only a thing for us to realize we need more representation, it's also providing that representation a chance."
- Community Voices participant

Opportunities for
WAYS FORWARD

Recruitment Strategies

- **Exposure** – Participants spoke about providing more opportunities to expose individuals to boards. There was also a notation that strategies should be creative. As one participant shared, *"We need to come up with some ways, some creative ways."* Ideas included having an open house that allows individuals to witness a board meeting. Others suggested educational opportunities to teach members about board procedures. As one participant said, *"We're not doing anything to train anyone, not getting them to be ready to participate ... no one is born knowing Robert's rules. If you don't have access to that, then how do you pick up those structures?"* From the literature, mini-orientations to the role of board members along with outlined responsibilities should be considered during the recruitment process (Brown, 2002; Daley, 2002). It is also important to consider whether diverse ways of knowing are used in the ways that boards are structured. This is discussed earlier under ethnocentrism.

According to Brown (2002), recruitment for non-profit organizations is an important consideration in diversifying board governances. However, most boards recruit through the work, school, or personal connections of current board members. The corporate governance board also mobilizes new board members in the same manner (Balachandran et al., 2019). This approach decreases recruitment efforts that target diverse groups especially when the board composition is homogenous. Daley (2002) recommends that connections are formed with existing organizations such as volunteer associations or local faith communities. This is consistent with the theme of connecting with the community raised by participants. While adjusting recruitment procedures is a start, it is not enough. Power dynamics must also be addressed. This will be discussed more under addressing issues of power.

"There isn't a format that creates an opportunity for individuals who don't have that experience to even join a board or join a committee."
- Community Voices participant

"I think everybody else was friends with somebody on the board and that's just how it happened."
- Community Voices participant

Opportunities for
WAYS FORWARD

Collaborative Work

Participants spoke about silos as a barrier to collaboration in working toward diversity and identify a need for collaborative work. As one participant stated, "*Now more than ever we probably have to do more teamwork based.*" The notion of teamwork looked different for various participants. For some participants, this meant supporting initiatives already in operation. As one participant pointed out, *"Support those individuals that are doing things as opposed to trying to go to the community and say[ing], 'hey, we're the first people that are thinking of doing diversity for the first time ever.'"*

Challenges with limited funding were also raised with the suggestion of delegating which organization applied for which funding. As one participant explained, *"A lot of not-for-profits are … fighting for their funding…. There are only this many dollars and there are so many groups going for it that they get very defensive about collaborating."*

As mentioned earlier, another recommendation involved the creation of a centralized space in which organizational boards can be connected to diverse prospective board members. One participant shared, *"I like the idea of having a hub where it calls for board members or calls for volunteers or whatever can be centralized so that people could access that. The ideal would be that it would be multilingual."*

"I think there could be more collaboration you know, because then you get benefits greater than what one board can get."
- Community Voices participant

"This is kind of like the idea of just boards not operating in silos, but operating with other boards."
- Community Voices participant

Opportunities for
WAYS FORWARD

Addressing Issues of Power

Power imbalances were seen as a barrier to achieving inclusion and diversity. Issues of influence, access, lack of safe space, and the adaptation of White models were discussed by participants. For minorities who belong to BIPOC communities, sexual and gender minority groups, and those with disabilities, the board environment is not always a positive space to voice opinions. As one participant indicated, *"We need to focus on how to bring more of these voices to the table because they are intimidated or don't feel welcome. It's not easy coming in and talking to people who have oppressed you."* Participants pointed out that with power imbalances, not everyone's voice is heard and some board members may vote along with the majority. Recommendations to mitigate included blind votes and anonymous question periods. Participants also pointed out the need to embrace different structural models.

The idea of addressing power is consistent with the literature, which recognizes that simply having diverse members on the board is not enough (Brown, 2002). When issues of power are not addressed, heterogenous boards cannot fully benefit from diverse voices (Fitzsimmons, 2012). There are two conditions recommended by authors that allow boards to fully utilize the benefits of diversifications. The first is a culture of diversity, which refers to a board that welcomes diverse perspectives and ideas rather than training people to operate the same way (Fitzsimmons, 2012). Second, the authors show that having board diversity policies and procedures has been found to positively inform the inclusive behaviour of board members (Buse et al., 2016).

"You're changing policies and procedures into both views. Nobody is saying that it can't be the Western way. It needs to be all of these things being viewed as knowledge and ways forward."
- *Community Voices participant*

"When individuals can't fully utilize their skills or experiences, they lose their voices."
- *Community Voices participant*

"We don't have to adopt White models just because that's what's always been done."
- *Community Voices participant*

Opportunities for
WAYS FORWARD

Leadership Considerations

For many participants, the board chair was viewed as a key role on the board. The chair can observe the power dynamics and ensure that individuals have the opportunity to speak. As one participant explained, *"I think it falls upon the chair of the board to temper the different views and make sure that everybody's heard."* The role of the chair was described as an individual who can moderate board discussions while making sure certain voices were not silent. While some participants were able to identify specific roles and their responsibility in the diversification of boards, others made more general statements. As one participant stated, *"We're going to probably have to get someone in. And I don't know who, and I don't know how."* Consistent with the literature, leadership is imperative for a diverse board. It is often easier to govern a homogeneous board than a heterogeneous board as diverse ideas, perspectives, and approaches are evident (Ferreira, 2010). A leader who is committed to ensuring that diverse members are not only present but their ideas are acted upon is crucial for diversification (Kilian et al., 2005; Fitzsimmons., 2012).

On the other hand, it is important to note that diversity should not be the sole responsibility of one individual (Hoffman et al., 2016; Sanyal et al., 2015). And with the diversity as process definition in mind, bringing in a short-term consultant may be helpful to begin the process, but it is not the sum total of the work.

It is also important to consider issues of unpaid additional labour on those often marginalized. For example, creating a diversity committee populated with marginalized members may end up requiring additional (often uncompensated) labour.
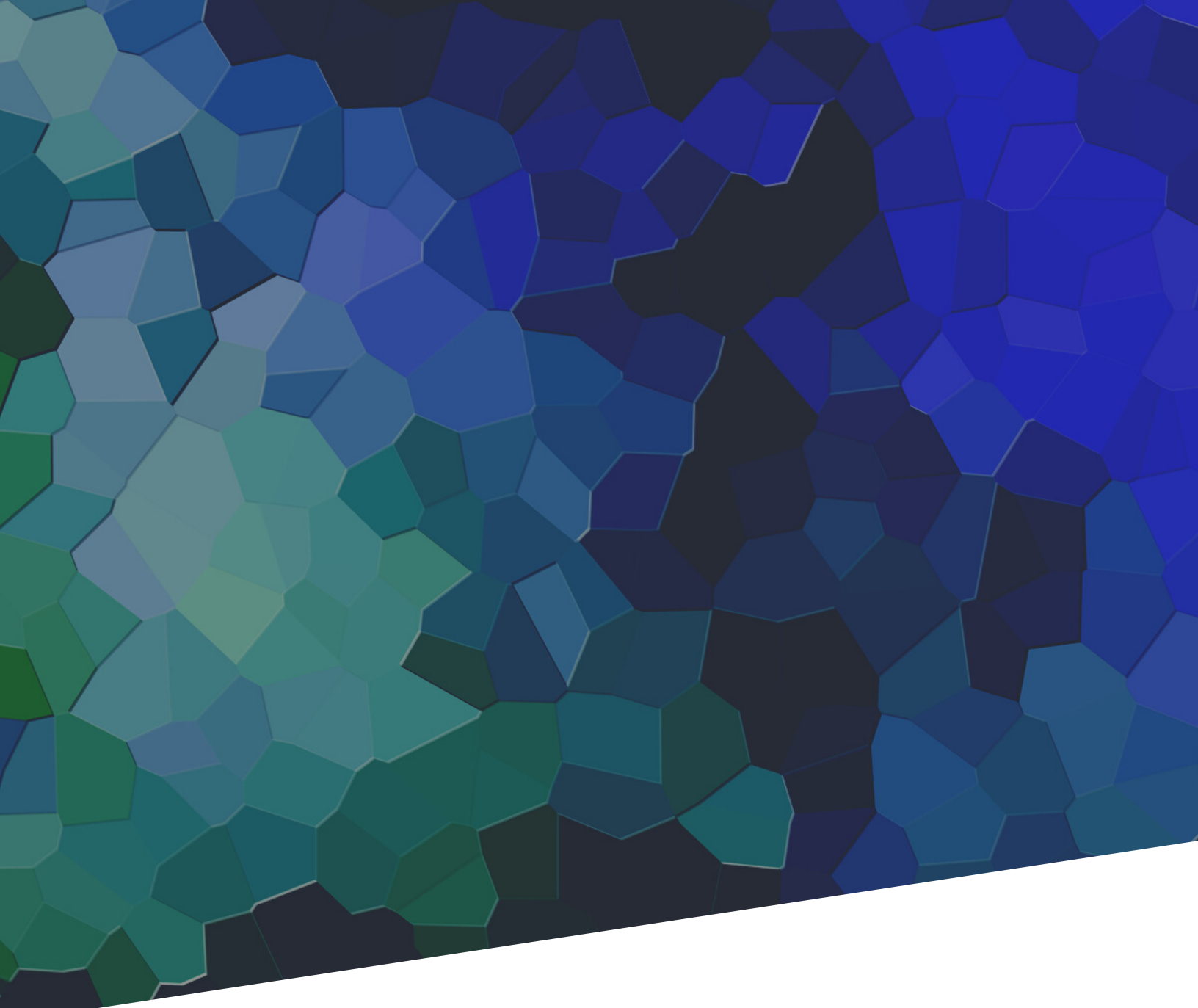
"I think having the right chair for the right board is very important."
- Community Voices participant

"So we're asking people to contribute to diversity on our boards and we're not compensating them."
- Community Voices participant

Opportunities for
WAYS FORWARD

SUGGESTIONS
FOR ACTION

Suggestions for Action

Participants in the board diversification discussion had many ideas for concrete action:

Diversity, equity, and inclusion
Participants suggested policies around diversity and procedures. They also suggested mandates that speak to the importance of inclusion and equity on the board level, fostering inclusive behaviours and diverse ways of knowing. They also suggested a diversity committee while recognizing a need for overall leadership that valued diversity and worked toward the implementation of these policies.

Facilitating recruitment efforts
As described earlier, many participants expressed a desire for a centralized space or hub for recruitment efforts. This centralized space would be multilingual and accessible to both organizations and prospective board members to connect. Participants also pointed out that the application process should be accessible beyond an organization's website and provided in multiple languages. Participants also noted that not everyone is aware of what being a board member entitles. They recommended hosting an open house that allows people to observe what a board meeting might look like along with educational initiatives. Nevertheless, structures should aim to move beyond the western models often utilized.
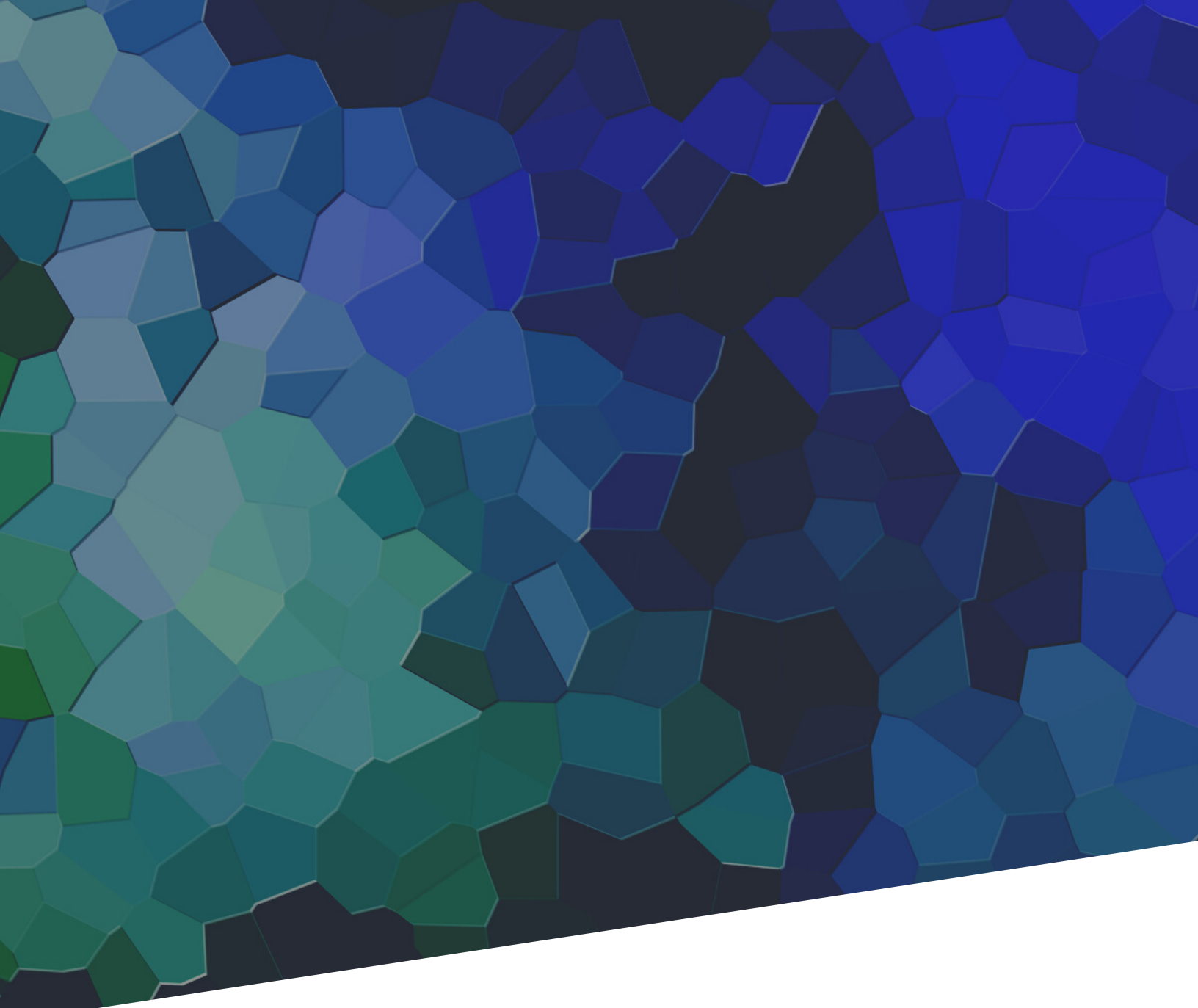
Facilitating informal connections
Participants discussed creating more relationships with community members and within the board organization. Suggestions for ways forward included intentional time getting to know board members by starting meetings with coffee along with time spent in the larger community.

Addressing barriers
Participants recognized that people have diverse responsibilities and availability. For example, those with middle class jobs have more flexibility, allowing them to attend meetings during lunch hours. This is not the case for many and as such, scheduled board times should take into consideration diverse availability. Participants also identified that some people may only desire to join a board for a specific project while others are able to commit for 1–2 years time. The current board structure does not accommodate these considerations, which participants felt were needed changes.

Suggestions for
ACTION

ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS

Further Analysis

WORD FREQUENCY

Using NVivo qualitative research software, we ran a word frequency analysis to determine the most commonly used words in the transcripts. After filtering out non-content words (filler words like "and," "or," "then," etc.) the following words appeared over 50 times:

WORD	COUNT	WEIGHTED PERCENTAGE
Diversity	241	2.14%
People	221	1.96%
Community	176	1.56%
Needs	135	1.20%
Different	127	1.13%
Organizations	126	1.12%
Talk	101	0.90%
Ideas	90	0.80%
Works	88	0.78%
Trying	74	0.66%
Members	71	0.63%
Power	68	0.60%
Conversations	67	0.59%
Group	66	0.58%
Voices	62	0.55%
Question	61	0.54%
Now	60	0.53%
Change	58	0.52%
Participation	51	0.45%

FROM THE LITERATURE

"Human diversity can be defined along various dimensions including gender, age, ability levels, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, ethnicity, culture, ideology, location of residence, status as agency client, former client, potential client, or person to be affected by policy decisions, expertise, special talents, length of time a person has lived in a community or served on a board, and so on" (Daley, 2002, p. 35).

In our first Community Voices consultation, we found the need for diversity at all levels, particularly within leadership and governance structures. Diversity in boards is important (Daley, 2002) as it increases the range of perspectives and ideas brought to the table, may lead to programs and services more accurately reflecting the interests of a diverse community, contributes to dismantling traditional power structures (Buse et al., 2016), prepares boards to navigate modern and increasingly complex environments, and improves decision making and reputation (Lawal & Nuhu, 2021). It is also important as perspectives on diversity influence how a work group functions, impacting the way people feel valued and understand their identity (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Diversity can be best supported by moving from a focus on *fairness* in policies and procedures towards an approach of *integration and learning*, which is associated with higher rates of feelings of inclusion from minority group members (Bernstein & Bilimoria, 2013).

However, there are also barriers and challenges to diversifying board governance. Cognitive- and demographic-based conflict, stereotyping, split-factions, silo mentalities (Lawal & Nuhu, 2021), and confrontation from new ideas challenging old ways (Daley, 2002) are examples. As further discussed in this report, tokenism is a significant barrier, where people are chosen based on a diversity checklist (Wilkinson et al., 2022). There are also issues with forcing the involvement of diverse people on boards without making internal changes that lead to their success, as this can lead to the erasure of the benefits that diversity can provide to board governance (Lawal & Nuhu, 2021).

Different strategies to create a more inclusive environment lead to different levels of stakeholder involvement (Brown, 2002). Some of these strategies can include implementing systematic board recruitment practices, a task force or committee for diversity, and diversity awareness and sensitivity programs (Brown, 2002). Overall, developing an equitable workforce needs a cycle of assessment, planning for desired outcomes, leadership and implementation, and reviewing/adjusting actions (Daley, 2002).

Moving Forward

IN SUMMARY

The *Community Voices: Board Talks* project was a spin-off of our previous consultation on belonging and anti-racism. These topics are deeply connected and have to do with issues of power. Having diversity around the board table is not the same as creating board policies and practices that honour equity. The participants in these focus groups mentioned many of the complexities surrounding these issues, including differing definitions of what diversity means, barriers and challenges, and ways to move forward.

The *Community Voices* initiative will be moving forward for an additional two years, thanks to generous community partners who have seen value in pulling together across different sectors to work towards anti-racism and belonging in our community. This longer-term initiative will continue this community-based research with the goal of creating social change for equity and anti-racism.

Each of these conversations can become a small step in a good way. And just as the effects of subtle acts of exclusion can accumulate over time to have significant detrimental effects, so also can small steps of hope, courage, vulnerability, strength, and love become cumulative. We must work together towards a community where everyone has a place to belong.
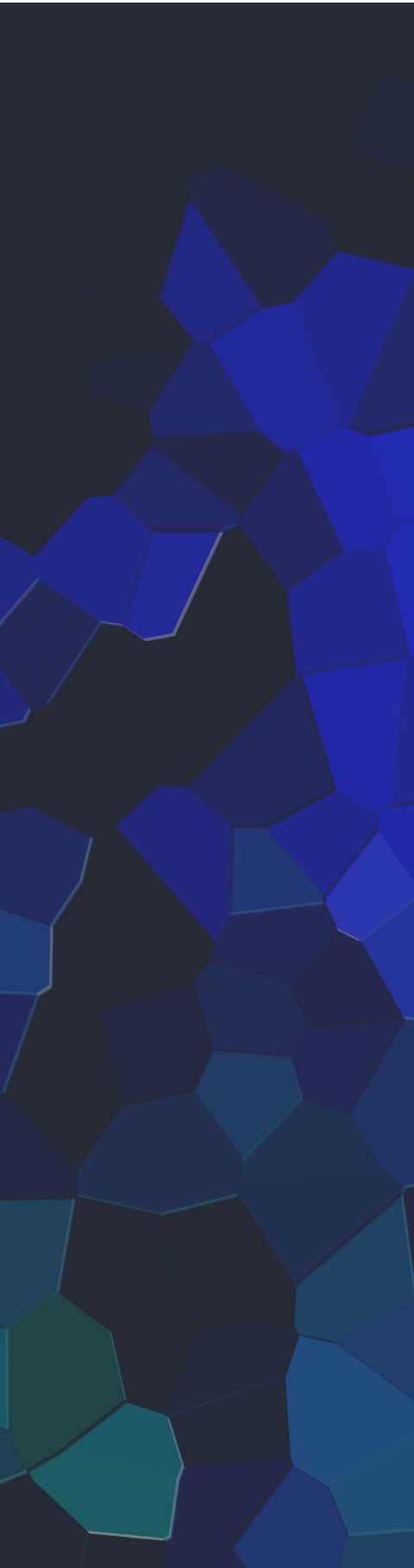
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ABOUT US:

WIS

WIS is a not-for-profit, registered charity organization providing programs and services to newcomers in the western Manitoba region. In addition to being a service provider, they liaise with community groups and organizations to work towards building capacity in our community for improving services to immigrants and refugees.

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