

# Race to Lead: Confronting the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap

By Sean Thomas-Breitfeld and Frances Kunreuther



**RACE  
TO LEAD**



An initiative of  
Building Movement Project



## About the Authors

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The Building Movement Project works at the national level to support and advance the potential of nonprofit organizations as sites for progressive social change. We conduct research and develop tools and training materials that help nonprofit organizations support the voice and power of the people they serve.

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# Introduction



The nonprofit sector is experiencing a racial leadership gap. Studies show the percentage of people of color in the executive director/CEO role has remained under 20% for the last 15 years<sup>1</sup> even as the country becomes more diverse.

To understand the causes of this disparity, the Building Movement Project conducted the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race survey with over 4,000 respondents. The study found few differences between white and people of color (POC) respondents in their aspirations or preparation for leadership roles—in fact people of color are more likely to be interested in becoming a nonprofit leader than whites. Survey respondents identified Boards of Directors and executive recruiters as key barriers to the hiring of more people of color executive directors/CEOs.

The results call into question the common assumption that to increase the diversity of nonprofit leaders, people of color need more training. The findings point to a new narrative. To increase the number of people of color leaders, the nonprofit sector needs to address the practices and biases of those governing nonprofit organizations. Rather than focus on the perceived deficits of potential leaders of color, the sector should concentrate on educating nonprofit decision-makers on the issues of race equity and implicit bias accompanied by changes in action leading to measurable results. This transfers the responsibility for the racial leadership gap from those who are targeted (people of color) to those who oversee organizations as well as the sector overall, which needs to embrace systems change work to ensure that its policies, practices, and culture are aligned with the values of diversity, inclusion, and equity.



To increase the number of people of color leaders, those who oversee organizations need to recognize and take responsibility for addressing the racial leadership gap.

## Background

Over a decade ago, concern over generational shifts in nonprofit leadership began to surface.<sup>2</sup> Studies warned of a looming crisis, anticipating too few new leaders with the experience and interest to take on these roles.<sup>3</sup> Reports on younger leaders—both current and aspiring—began to surface issues related to race and executive leadership,<sup>4</sup> part of a growing awareness of the need to address issues of race and race equity in nonprofit staffing and leadership.<sup>5</sup> New programs were developed that focused on leadership training especially targeting a diverse pool as the sector's future leaders.<sup>6</sup>

Yet the rhetoric on diversity in leadership has not matched the numbers. Programs and education on leadership and race have not resulted in more leaders of color in the

executive director/CEO role. The *Daring to Lead* reports from 2006 and 2011 focus on nonprofit leadership; both reports found 82% of the executives who answered the survey identified as white.<sup>7</sup> BoardSource's 2015 *Leading with Intent* reported that 89% of the CEOs identified as white.<sup>8</sup> In other words, survey results consistently indicate less than 20% of executive directors/CEOs of nonprofits are people of color. And this number has not budged for over a decade.

## Changing the Focus

To find out more about this racial leadership gap, we conducted the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race survey. Over 4,000 respondents answered questions about their current nonprofit job, interest in leading a nonprofit, training/supports, views of leadership, and personal background.<sup>9</sup> They were also asked about their views on race and the nonprofit sector. Demographic information included a question asking if the respondent identified as white or a person of color.<sup>10</sup> This report, the first in a series to be released over the next two years, will compare people of color and white respondents' background, aspirations to be leaders, training, and attitudes towards leadership.

The findings from the survey challenge the way the nonprofit sector has been approaching the racial leadership gap. The prevailing theory of change has been that there needs to be more attention on finding or convincing people of color to consider leadership positions, keeping those who are qualified from leaving the sector, and offering training to the others to prepare them for taking on the top job. Underlying this logic are the assumptions that people of color are less interested in nonprofit leadership than their white counterparts, that qualified leaders of color will leave the nonprofit sector, and that those who stay do not have the skills to be competitive (without help) for top leadership jobs.

The results tell a different story. They show more similarities than differences in the background and preparation between white and POC respondents. In addition, people of color are more likely to aspire to be leaders than white respondents. Many of the investments to improve the chances that people of color will be hired into leadership have focused on helping to prepare these individuals for leadership roles. Survey respondents believe that they need more skills to take on the top role in nonprofits. But they also identify structural barriers such as nonprofit boards looking for someone who is the "right fit" or recruiters who do not present viable candidates of color.<sup>11</sup>

The findings indicate that people of color are as ready as whites to take on leadership roles, but they face unspoken and unconscious biases that prevent those with the hiring power from fairly assessing, recognizing, and valuing their potential. In other words, people of color with leadership aspirations are finding that their leadership interests are not matched with opportunities to take on these roles. Offering people of color supports to advance their leadership is important, especially given the racial bias they are likely to encounter. However, as many people of color already know, training



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People of color with leadership aspirations are finding that their leadership interests are not matched with opportunities to take on these roles.

will not succeed in moving the dial without a simultaneous and widespread effort to target those governing organizations, challenging the norms and assumptions about race that are deeply embedded in the nonprofit sector and in our society at large.

More specifically:

› **It's NOT about Differences in Background or Qualifications**

People of color and white respondents have similar backgrounds in education, position, salary, and years working in the nonprofit sector.

› **It's NOT about a Lack of Aspirations**

People of color aspire to be leaders more than white respondents. For those who do not aspire to leadership, most—across race—are looking to maintain work/personal life balance. But people of color who are not aspiring leaders are more likely to be looking for jobs outside of the nonprofit sector.

› **It's NOT about Skills and Preparation**

Most aspiring leaders thought they had the qualities needed to be a good leader. When asked about the training they received, people of color and whites had few differences in the areas of financial skills, goal setting, articulating a vision, advocacy, and collaboration. People of color were more likely to see themselves as visionary and able to relate to their target population, but less ready to fundraise than whites.

› **It IS an Uneven Playing Field**

The majority of aspiring leaders feel prepared to take on an executive role. However, over a third reported they want more technical and management skills, with POC respondents identifying this need more often than whites. People of color were more likely than white respondents to see race/ethnicity as a barrier to their advancement.

› **It IS the Frustration of "Representing"**

All respondents have challenges, but people of color are significantly more frustrated by the stress of being called upon to represent a community. They are also more challenged by inadequate salaries, the need for role models, lack of social capital/networks, and the need for relationships with funding sources.

› **It's NOT Personal, It IS the System**

Respondents across race squarely identify the lack of people of color in top leadership roles as a structural problem for the nonprofit sector. They believe that executive recruiters and boards could do more to diversify leadership. Whether due to bias or other factors, respondents of color were more likely than whites to agree it is harder for people of color to fundraise. They also were more likely than whites to see barriers to people of color advancing either because of smaller professional networks and/or the need for more training.



Investments made in developing leaders of color may offer needed support, but they must be accompanied by work that addresses assumptions and implicit biases deeply embedded in nonprofit policies, practices, and structures.

The problems facing people of color who are interested in becoming leaders are not issues that can be addressed by helping aspiring leaders of color to engage in continuous self-improvement and development. The barriers are based on structures within organizations and the sector as a whole. Investments made in developing leaders of color may offer needed support, but they must be accompanied by work that addresses assumptions and implicit biases deeply embedded in nonprofit policies, practices, and structures. In other words, training and preparation should be required for people in positions of power in order to raise awareness of the barriers facing aspiring leaders of color. This consciousness would need to continue once leaders of color land the job so they are not marginalized by boards and funders. Finally, none of this can be done alone. The sector itself must change its culture and norms, facing its own biases about who is qualified to lead and why.

## Methodology

The Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race survey was designed after reviewing the literature on race and leadership in the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, and conducting three dozen interviews with nonprofit leaders, capacity builders, and funders on the barriers people of color faced in becoming leaders. The survey asked questions about respondents' personal and organizational background, their future career plans, the development and support of their leadership, and their perceptions on leadership and race in the nonprofit sector. In addition, those taking the survey were offered several "write-in" opportunities to elaborate on their responses.

The online survey distribution—a convenience sample—was conducted throughout the U.S. In addition to the Building Movement Project, the survey was distributed through 15 partner organizations and almost 100 nonprofit "influencers",<sup>12</sup> many of whom were selected because of their reach among people of color working in nonprofits. The survey link was sent out through newsletters and emails, and social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Almost half of the respondents reported receiving the survey through social media (24%) or a colleague/friend (18%). After three months in the field, the sample was closed with a total of 4,385 respondents.<sup>13</sup>



4,385

Number of survey respondents



3 MO.

Number of months survey was in the field



15 / 100

Survey distribution: partner organizations/ nonprofit "influencers"



24% / 18%

Respondents receiving survey via social media/ colleague or friend

# Key Findings



## Demographics of the Respondents

This report specifically compares people of color as a group to whites in order to understand the racial leadership gap.<sup>14</sup> The composition of the sample can be seen below. There were 4,385 surveys filled out from people in all 50 U.S. states. However, this report only includes the 4,055 who currently work in the nonprofit sector, leaving out board members. Respondents were asked whether they identified as white or as a person of color; everyone was also asked their race/ethnicity. As seen in *Figure 1*, 42% of the respondents identified as people of color and 58% white. The breakdown by race among people of color closely matches those of the overall sector as reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>15</sup> In our sample, 15% identified as African American/Black (BLS for similar organizations is 15%), 8% Asian American/Pacific Islander (BLS 6%), 11% Latino/a or Hispanic (BLS 10%) and 1% Native American. In addition, 8% of the people of color in our sample were multiracial.<sup>16</sup>



50

Number of U.S. states participating in the survey



4,055

Number of respondents who currently work in the nonprofit sector

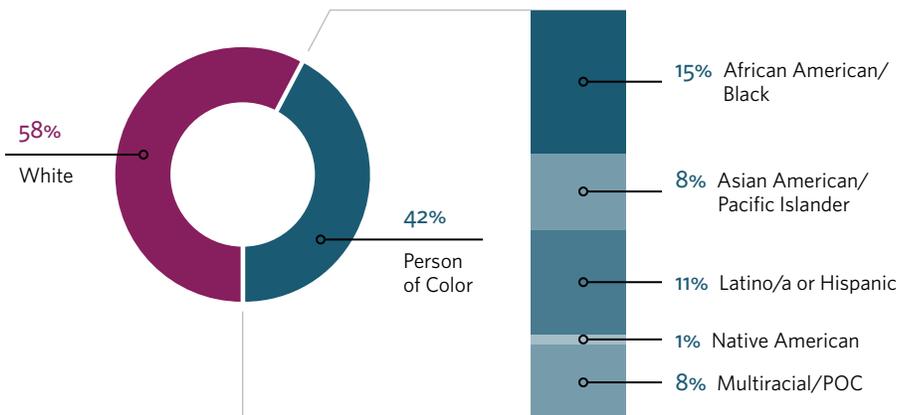


Figure 1: Race/Ethnicity

Figure 2 shows the geographic distribution, with most (60%) respondents coming from the northeast or west. The age of this sample was divided evenly between generation X (39%) and millennials (38%), with less than a quarter (22%) baby boomers as seen in Figure 3. This reflects the overall workforces of both the United States at large and U.S. charitable organizations.<sup>17</sup> People of color and whites were evenly represented among millennials; there were 5% more white respondents in the boomer generation, and 5% more people of color in generation X. Figure 4 reports on the respondents' gender and Figure 5 shows whether respondents identified as born in the U.S., as the children of immigrants, or as immigrants themselves.

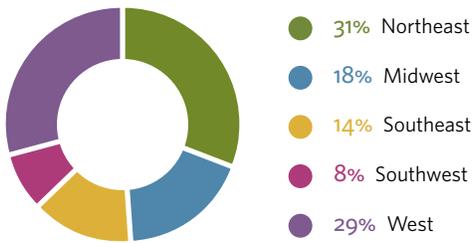


Figure 2: Geographic Distribution of Respondents' Organization

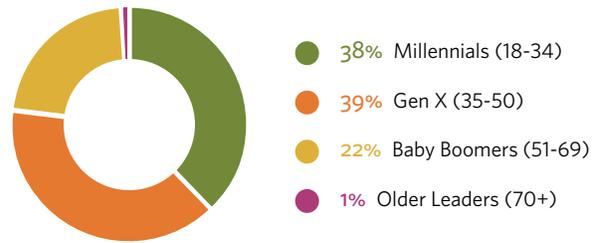


Figure 3: Age Groups by Generation

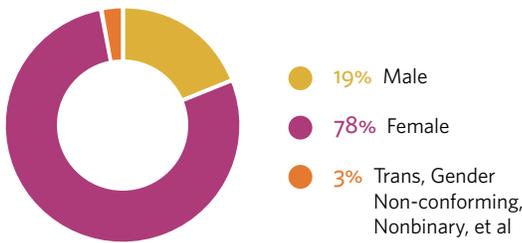


Figure 4: Gender

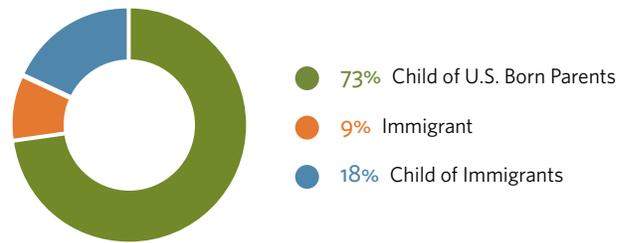


Figure 5: Immigration Experience

## KEY FINDING 1:

### It's NOT about Differences in Background or Qualifications

Respondents showed few differences in their education background, roles in organizations, salaries, or length of years in the nonprofit sector.

What is most striking about the data is the lack of differences between whites and people of color respondents on a variety of issues related to their background or qualifications. For example, there was very little difference between whites and people of color in terms of their level of education or current positions. As seen in *Figure 6*, whites were slightly more likely to report having a Bachelor's Degree (42% whites vs 39% POC) and Master's Degree (44% whites vs 41% POC). However, there were slightly more people of color than whites that had "terminal" degrees, that is PhD, JD, MD (9% POC vs 7% whites).

*Figure 7* indicates responses about salaries, which shows virtually no differences. Respondents of color and whites also worked in the sector for the same number of years—an average of 12-13 years. There are some small discrepancies, as shown in *Figure 8* (on the following page), between people of color and whites in their responses about the position they currently hold; people of color are slightly more likely to be line/administrative staff (32% POC vs 28% whites) and whites senior managers/CEOs (53% whites vs 48% POC).

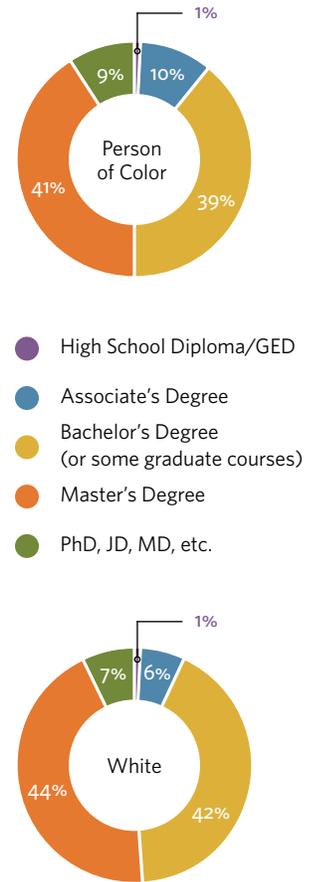


Figure 6: Educational Background



Figure 7: Current Annual Salary

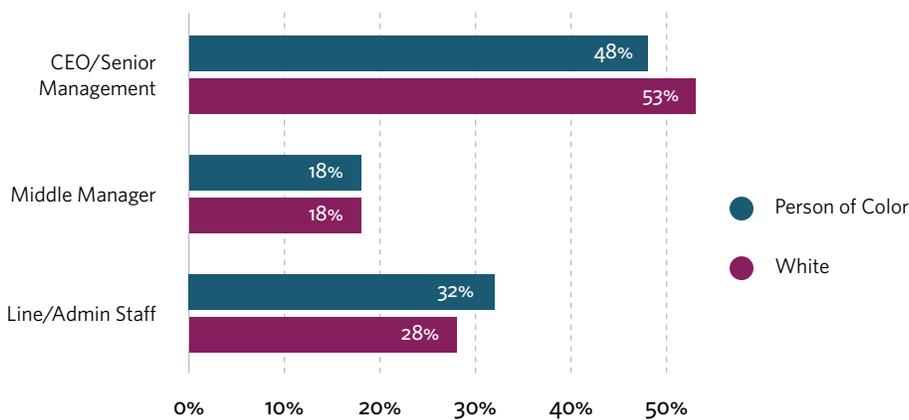


Figure 8: Current Role/Position in the Organization



**ASPIRATIONS TO BE A NONPROFIT LEADER**

Focus group participants were given the graphic shown in *Figure 9* without labels, and were asked which chart shows the white respondents and which shows people of color. Most people—across race—thought whites were more likely to aspire to leadership positions. One African-American focus group member who got it right commented,

“Working with young professionals of color, we see that there are great aspirations for them [to advance], but not great avenues in terms of organizations investing in them.”

**KEY FINDING 2:**

**It’s NOT about a Lack of Aspirations**

People of color aspire to be leaders more than white respondents. For those who do not aspire to leadership, most respondents—across race—are looking for work/life balance. But people of color are more likely to be looking for jobs outside of the nonprofit sector.

The survey asked about the respondents’ leadership aspirations. As seen in *Figure 9*, people of color (50%) were more likely than whites (40%) to answer definitely or probably yes to the question, “Are you interested in becoming an executive director/CEO (or another top leadership role) of a nonprofit someday?”<sup>18</sup> There was a small positive impact on aspirations when respondents report their organization pays attention to race/diversity.<sup>19</sup>

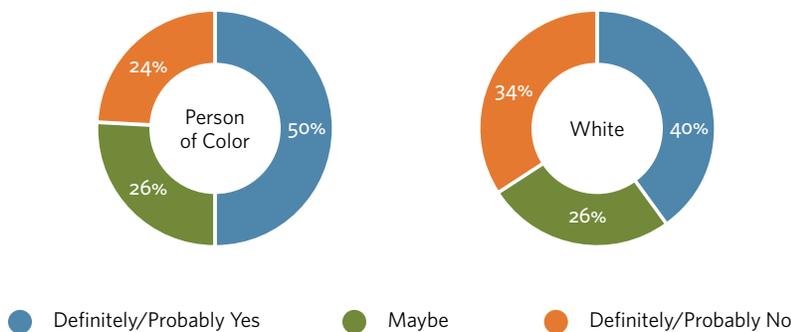


Figure 9: Level of Interest in Taking a Top Leadership Role (among Non-CEOs)

Figure 10 shows why respondents do not aspire to be leaders. Most respondents chose that they wanted to maintain the balance of work/personal life, with virtually no variation between people of color and whites. White respondents (28%) were more likely than people of color (19%) to answer that their skills/interests were not suited to an executive director position. People of color (21%) were more interested than whites (10%) in seeking opportunities outside the nonprofit sector.

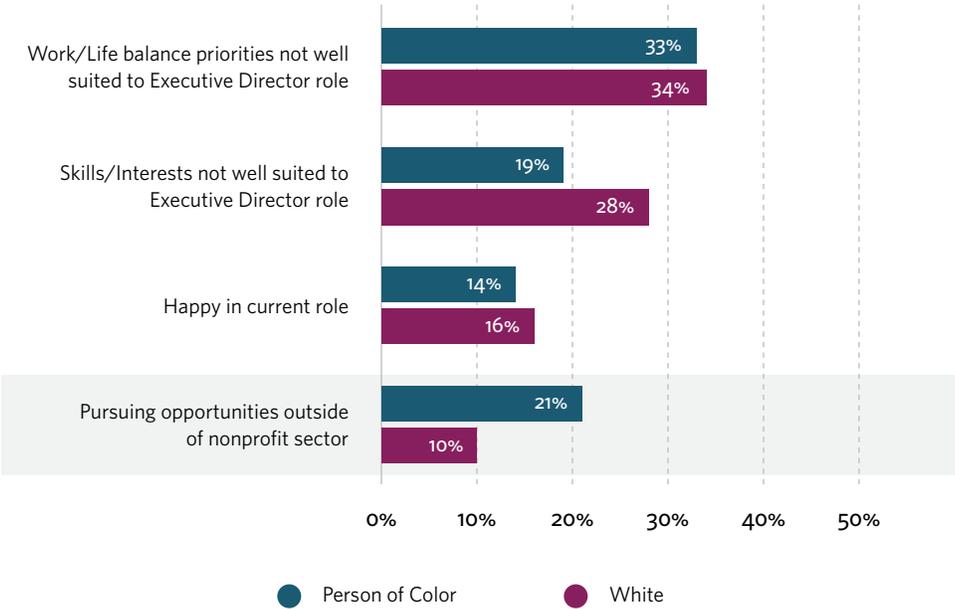


Figure 10: Reasons for Not Having Interest in Pursuing a Top Leadership Role

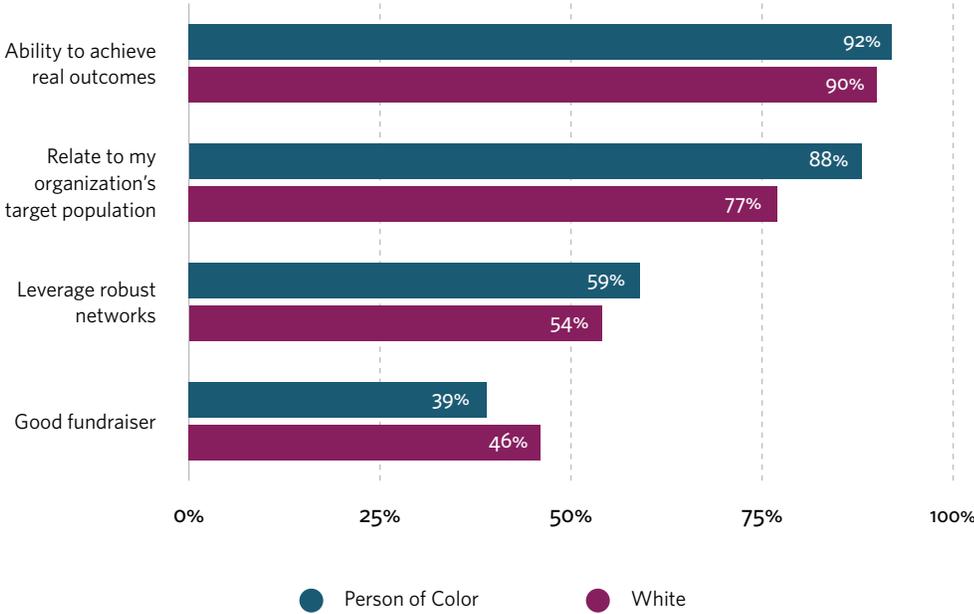
**KEY FINDING 3:**

**It's NOT about Skills and Preparation**

Most aspiring leaders thought they had the qualities needed to be a good leader. When asked about the training they received, people of color and whites had few differences in the areas of financial skills, goal setting, articulating a vision, advocacy, and how to collaborate. People of color were more likely to see themselves as visionary and able to relate to their target population, but less ready to fundraise than whites.

Respondents in leadership roles were asked about how they would rank their own leadership qualities. Both people of color and whites had confidence in their abilities, rating themselves highly on their ability to achieve real outcomes (overall 91%),

as *Figure 11* shows. People of color respondents were significantly more likely to feel they are able to relate to the organization’s target population (88% POC vs 77% whites) and leverage robust networks (59% POC vs 54% whites). However, people of color are less likely than whites to identify as a good fundraiser (39% POC vs 46% whites).



*Figure 11: Self-Reported Leadership Qualities and Skills of Management Level Staff (“Consistently” or “Often”)*

The survey also asked respondents about the training they have received either within or outside of their organizations. The findings in *Figure 12* (on the following page) show there is very little difference between whites and people of color respondents in their training on setting project goals. They were also similar in their training on articulating vision and purpose, and collaboration. There were some minor differences on financial management, with whites (75%) slightly more likely to receive training than people of color (71%). In addition, whites (64%) are less likely to have been trained on self-care/wellness than respondents of color (71%) with people of color primarily seeking this training outside of their organization.

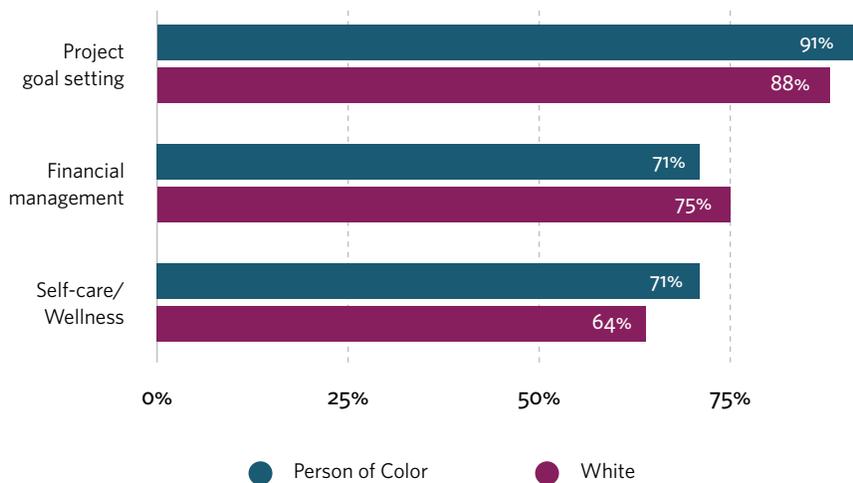


Figure 12: Leadership Development and Skills Training Received

## KEY FINDING 4:

### It IS an Uneven Playing Field

The majority of aspiring leaders feel prepared to take on an executive role. However, over a third reported they want more technical and management skills, with people of color respondents identifying this need more often than whites. People of color were more likely than white respondents to see race/ethnicity as a barrier to their advancement.

Aspiring leaders were asked what skills they should acquire to be ready to take on an executive nonprofit job. Respondents were most likely to express concern over their need to “develop certain technical or management skills,” which was noted by a third of whites and almost 40% of respondents of color (see *Figure 13*). To explore this finding—especially in light of the similarities in types of training respondents received—the data was presented to focus group participants. In the focus groups with people of color, participants consistently explained that they expected—or experienced—extra scrutiny of their skills based on their race/ethnicity. During a discussion with capacity builders working with nonprofits, one white male consultant explained that often “there is a difference between what you need to get the job and what you need to do the job.” In other words, aspiring leaders of color with the same skill level as whites are seeking extra credentials just to prove that they should be seriously considered for top-level jobs.



#### DO PEOPLE OF COLOR NEED MORE TECHNICAL SKILLS?

When presented with data on the need for more technical skills, people of color focus group participants noted the extra scrutiny they felt they would be under when they took an executive position.

Two comments (both from African Americans) noted, “People of color need more skills building and opportunities to be considered...for nonprofit executive jobs.” And, “They (POC) feel that they need twice the degrees for the same position as compared to their white colleagues.”

In addition, a survey respondent wrote, “I feel that if you are Latina... you are seen as less accomplished, less intelligent, and often discounted as being a full contributing member of the organization.”

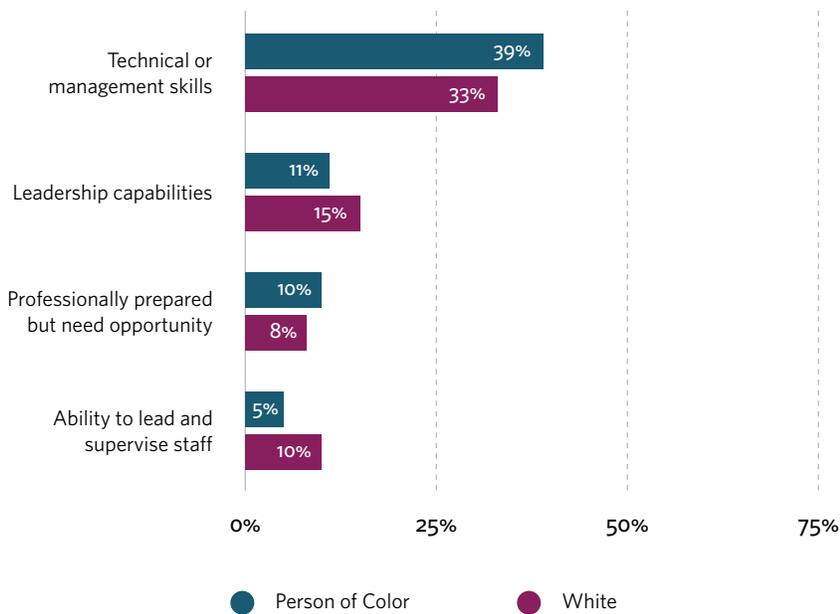


Figure 13: What Aspiring Leaders Need to Adequately Prepare for a Top Leadership Role

Across race, respondents noted that their track record at work, schooling, networks, and career plans had a positive impact on their career advancement. Not surprisingly, people of color—over a third—ranked their race/ethnicity as negatively impacting their career advancement as compared to whites (6%) as seen in *Figure 14*<sup>20</sup> (on the following page). Of the people of color who reported that their career advancement was negatively impacted by their race, over 380 (70%) provided write-in explanations. A textual analysis of these write-ins shows that 40% talked about a perceived inability to lead, a lack of human resources support, and/or an exclusion from important social networks. Thirty percent (30%) of the people of color respondents who commented noted negative experiences with others ranging from microaggressions<sup>21</sup> to tokenizing to managing white colleagues’ guilt/emotions about race. The small number of whites who wrote about how race negatively impacted their career advancement noted they had less opportunity because of their organization’s commitment to diversity or racial justice. Some of these respondents expressed frustration; they believed their careers were negatively affected because there was a preference for people of color. Other white respondents commenting in this section thought a commitment to diversity might affect their career advancement, but they were still supportive of these efforts.



**NEGATIVE IMPACT OF RACE**

Below are two write-in responses that explain how race negatively impacted respondents’ careers:

“As a Latino woman and an immigrant, I am stereotyped all the time...[I am] sometimes the only woman of color in the room.”

~ LATINA RESPONDENT

“Instead of asking questions/being curious, [white colleagues] got defensive and started in on the personal attacks (‘no plan can end racial injustice’, ‘you can’t lecture people’, and on and on) which just reminded me of all the racist things I’ve been hearing ALL my life. Instead of behaving professionally, all of the defensiveness got directed toward me as the only Black person in the room.”

~ BLACK RESPONDENT

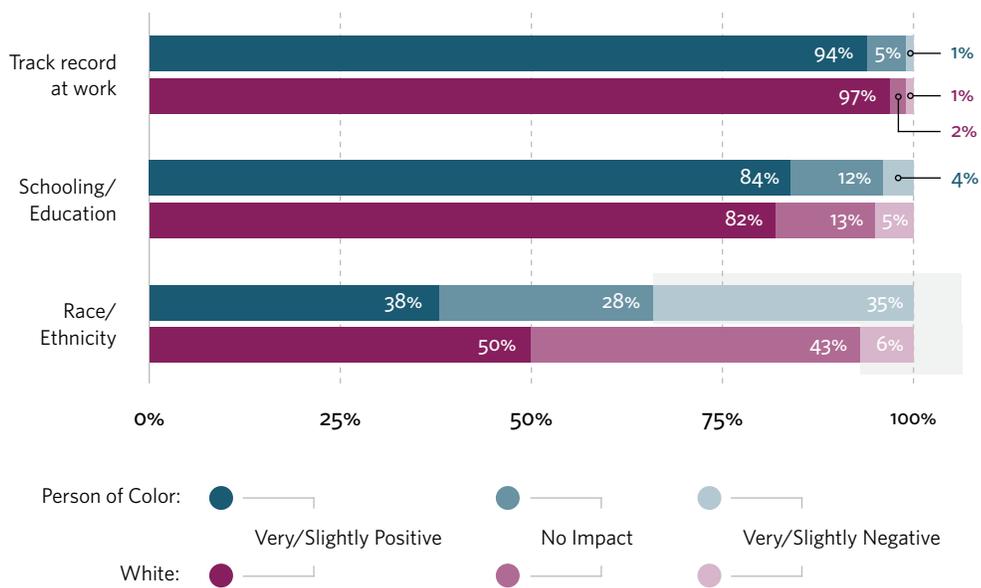


Figure 14: Factors that Have Played a Role in Respondents' Career Advancement

In addition to more respondents of color reporting that their race/ethnicity negatively impacted their career advancement, social/economic class more negatively impacted career advancement for POC compared to whites (22% POC vs 8% whites). This may be because there were differences between whites and people of color in class identification, despite similarities in current salaries. As seen in Figure 15, for example, whites (31%) were more likely to identify as upper/upper-middle class than people of color (18%). The breakdown for those answering working/lower class was 31% people of color and 15% whites.<sup>22</sup>

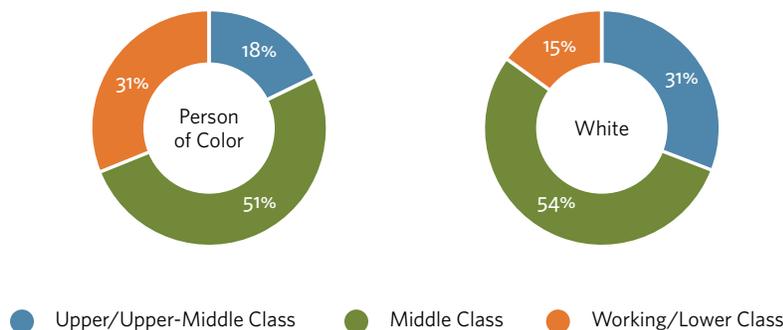


Figure 15: Self-Reported Social/Economic Class



**NEGATIVE IMPACT OF CLASS**

Below are three write-in responses that explain how social/economic class negatively impacted respondents' careers:

"I don't have connections to the people, training, and resources that people with access to wealth have. I have had to make decisions based on pay rather than based on interest or opportunity for advancement."

- WHITE RESPONDENT

"My white upper class directors often bond over experiences, about places, and relationships from their personal and family histories. Staff conversations are very exclusive."

- LATINA RESPONDENT

"I feel as though I've been 'tracked' as good with low-income clients and communities and left there... Like whiteness, upper-middle/upper-class values and norms shape organizational culture but goes unnamed."

- BLACK RESPONDENT

## KEY FINDING 5:

### It IS the Frustration of “Representing”

Both whites and people of color are frustrated by high workloads, but people of color are significantly more frustrated by the stress of being called upon to represent a community. They are also more challenged by inadequate salaries, the need for role models, lack of social capital/networks, and the need for relationships with funding sources.

The survey asked about the frustrations/challenges that people faced in their work. Not surprisingly, the demanding workload was noted by over 70% of all respondents as shown in *Figure 16*. People of color are somewhat more likely than whites to list inadequate salaries (51% POC vs 46% whites), lack of relationships with funding sources (41% POC vs 33% whites), and the lack of role models (39% POC vs 27% whites) and social capital/networks (31% POC vs 21% whites). However, it is the stress of being called on to represent a community where the biggest gap occurs, with 36% of people of color listing this as a frustration versus 14% of whites. As noted in focus groups, people of color often feel they have a second, unpaid job—internally and externally—to represent the interests of people of color, which is often an unrecognized part of their work.

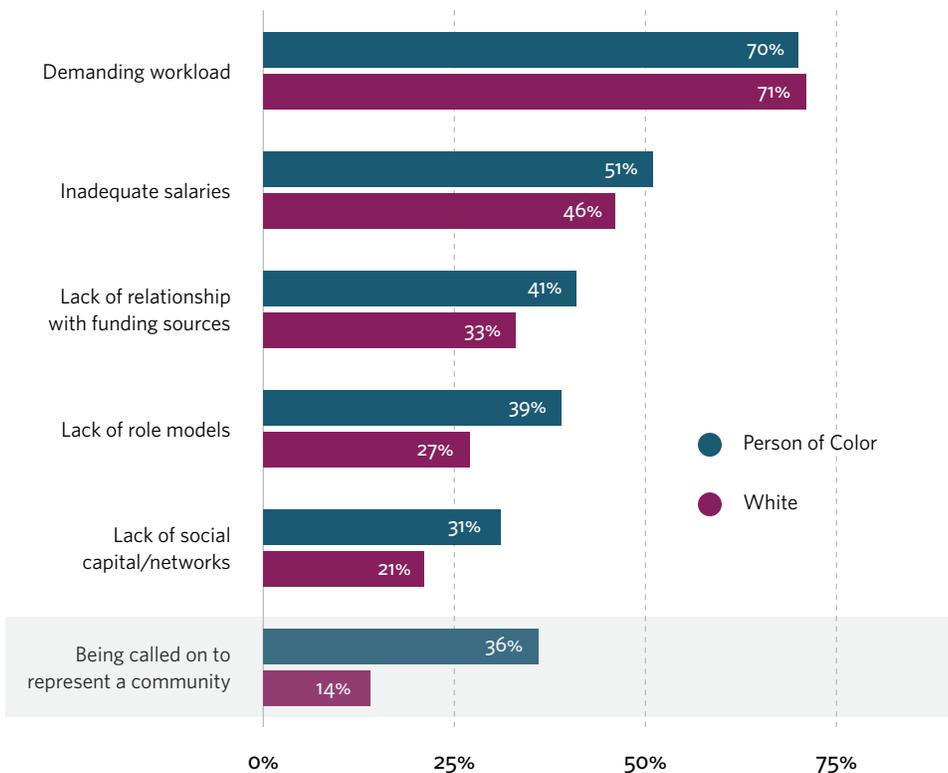


Figure 16: Challenges and Frustrations Faced on the Job (“Often” or “Always”)



#### REPRESENTING PEOPLE OF COLOR

As one survey respondent wrote, “[The organization] looked to me to solve all the problems of racism within the organization. By default, POC often become the face of accountability or point of feedback in such situations. It put a huge responsibility on me; over time, I spent at least 50% of my time doing that work...rather than my job description of national organizing. A lot of my work was invisible...”

The survey also asked questions about how respondents viewed the experience of people of color in nonprofit organizations (Figure 17). In their answers, people of color were more likely to agree that POC-led organizations have a hard time fundraising (61% POC vs 31% whites) and that it is harder for people of color to advance because of their smaller networks (56% POC vs 30% whites). Respondents of color agree more than whites that POC need more skills and training to be considered for top-level positions (47% POC vs 29% whites) and that POC are less likely to want to work in white dominant organizations (42% POC vs 29% whites). Interestingly, white respondents were more neutral (neither agree nor disagree) in response to these questions than people of color respondents.

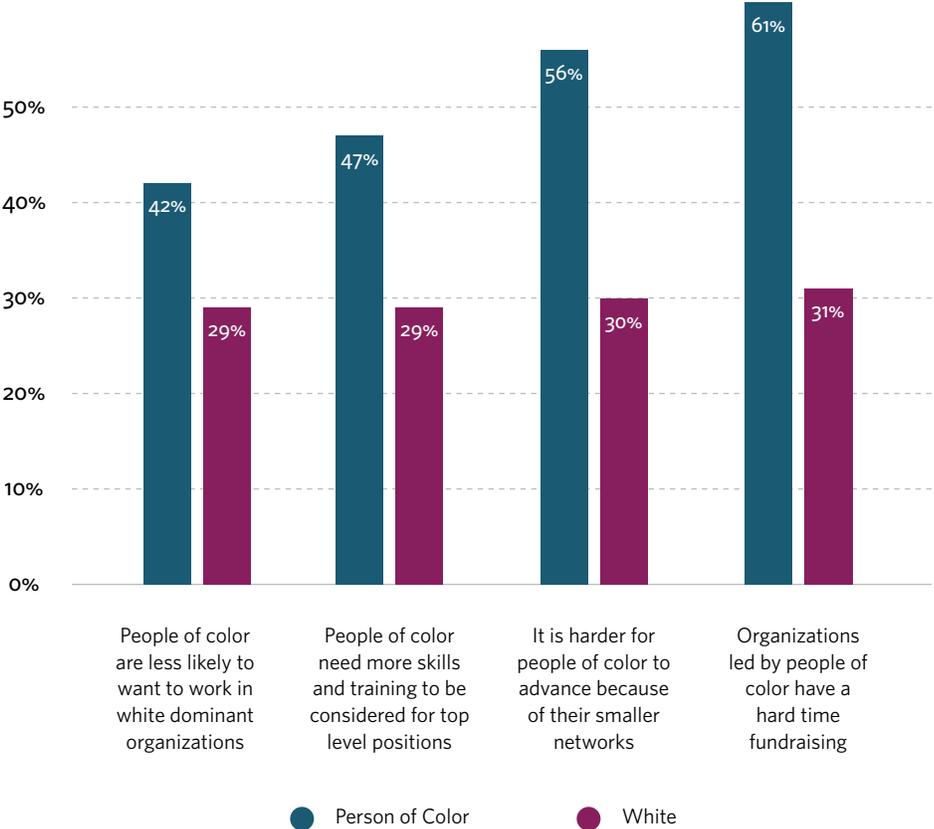


Figure 17: Why So Few POC Nonprofit Executives?: Individual Reasons (“Somewhat” or “Strong” Level of Agreement)

## KEY FINDING 6:

### It's NOT Personal, It IS the System

Respondents squarely identify the lack of people of color in top leadership roles as a structural problem for the nonprofit sector. They believe that executive recruiters and boards could do more to diversify leadership. When asked about their organizations' efforts to recruit diverse board and staff members, they generally gave them high marks even though they indicated there was room for improvement.

When respondents were asked about their perceptions about race/diversity in the nonprofit sector, they gave a resounding endorsement for the statement, "One of the big problems in the nonprofit sector is that the leadership of nonprofit organizations doesn't represent the racial/ethnic diversity of the country." As shown in *Figure 18*, respondents rejected the idea that nonprofits do not know how to address issues of race (29% POC and 26% whites somewhat agree/strongly agree); but people of color respondents were more likely than whites to answer that groups were not equipped to resolve tensions about race that might arise (48% POC and 39% whites somewhat agree/strongly agree). Overall—as shown in *Figure 19* (on the following page)—respondents, especially people of color, agreed/strongly agreed that executive recruiters don't do enough to find a diverse pool of qualified candidates for top-level nonprofit positions (80% POC vs 67% whites), predominately white boards often don't support the leadership potential of staff of color (71% POC vs 62% whites), and organizations often rule out candidates of color based on the perceived "fit" with the organization (66% POC vs 48% whites). This last question often reflects implicit bias.<sup>23</sup>

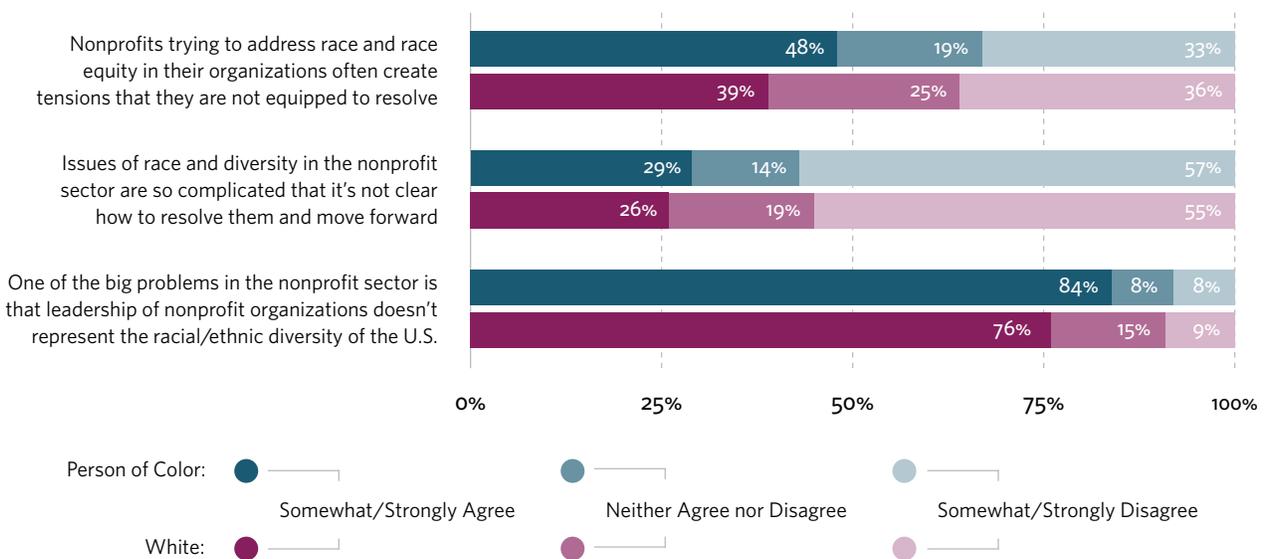


Figure 18: Race and Diversity Issues in the Nonprofit Sector (Level of Agreement)

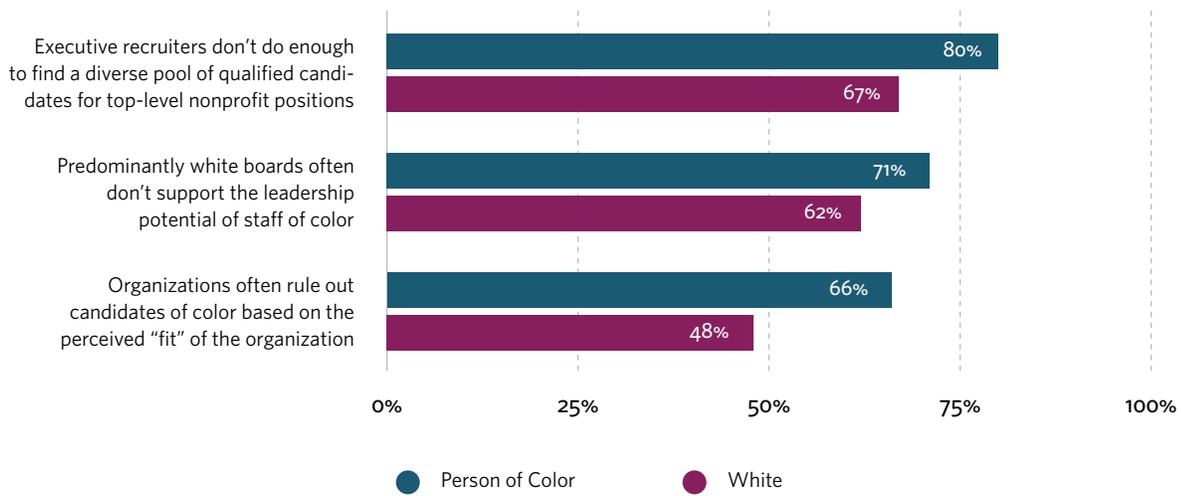


Figure 19: Why So Few POC Nonprofit Executives?: Structural Reasons (“Somewhat” or “Strong” Level of Agreement)

When it comes to rating their own organizations’ work on diversity, respondents were more generous. Roughly half of survey respondents thought that their organizations paid enough attention to racial and ethnic diversity when recruiting new board (48% POC, 54% white) and staff members (66% POC, 65% white), and in developing and promoting current staff (49% POC, 51% white) as shown in Figure 20.

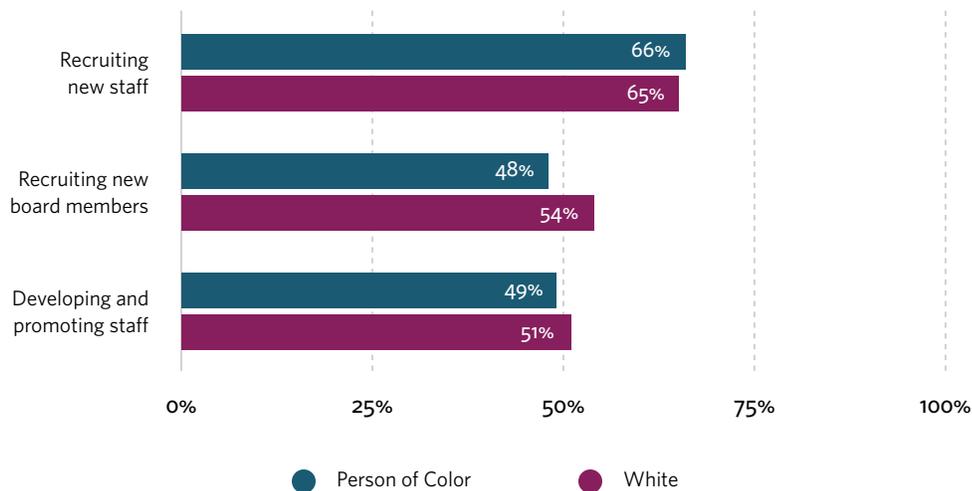


Figure 20: Does your Organization Pay Adequate Attention to Issues of Race/Ethnic Diversity? (“Somewhat” or “Strong” Level of Agreement)

# Call to Action



Overwhelmingly, survey respondents agree that the low percentage of nonprofit leaders of color in top organizational roles is a problem for the nonprofit sector. Based on the results of this study, the sector can seize the opportunity to align its values based on equity and inclusion with its practices, and stay relevant in a changing world. There needs to be a swift and deep commitment—from funders to trade associations, from large organizations to grassroots groups—to address and correct the racialized organizational and systemic barriers facing people of color as leaders and in the sector overall. Together, organizations and individuals can change the current culture by adopting a new narrative about the problem; creating a campaign that exposes deeply embedded racialized organizational structures, policies, and practices; and constructing strong and measurable indicators of progress.

## Rewrite the Story

### › **Change the Narrative**

A new narrative that explains why there are not more leaders of color should stress how organizations and the sector overall need to address how potential leaders of color are “weeded out” at all levels of advancement based on deeply held and sometimes unconscious assumptions about race. This narrative account moves away from the presumption that there are not enough qualified people of color candidates who are willing and able to lead and places responsibility on the assumptions and structures that guide decision-makers.

### › **Start with Bold Leadership**

Nonprofit leaders, especially those in influential positions, should make addressing race and race equity a top priority in their work, including speaking out on how the sector should and can change its track record on race. Starting with their own organizations, these influencers can help create the culture change needed to advance people of color leadership in the sector.

### › **Support from Funders and Associations**

The groups that push new norms in the sector are often those that either provide incentives (funders) and groups that set standards (associations). These institutions can provide forward-looking leadership, discussing why sector organizations should be on the forefront on race and race equity as well as offering support for organizations to adopt new practices.



Based on the results of this study, the sector can seize the opportunity to align its values based on equity and inclusion with its practices, and stay relevant in a changing world.

## Address Systems Barriers

### › **Implement Race Conscious Organizational Practices**

All nonprofits should implement hiring and promotion policies/practices that address issues of implicit bias.<sup>24</sup> Organizations should also regularly inventory their own success in hiring and advancing staff of color. In addition, job responsibilities should be reviewed to acknowledge the work by people of color who are asked to address/represent issues of race for the organization.

### › **Institute Trainings and Hiring Standards for Boards of Directors**

Targeting the people who hire executive leadership on racialized attitudes before a search is in progress helps to lay the groundwork needed to make decisions that address racial bias. These trainings should include measurable changes in practice.

### › **Integrate Race and Race Equity into Leadership Development**

All leadership programs should address the issue of race/race equity for current and potential leaders. Information about implicit and structural bias can help set the context; more practical skills for addressing issues of race are also needed.

### › **Create Systems of Support**

Aspiring leaders of color should continue to receive the same training and support as their white counterparts to help prepare them for nonprofit executive positions. People of color should also have their own cohorts where they can openly express the ways they experience racialized barriers and find support and advice from their peers including access to networks that can help them advance.

### › **Change Philanthropic Practices to Increase Access for People of Color**

Foundations and other funding sources should examine—internally and externally—their practices with a race-based lens including who they meet with and why, and who receives funding and how much.



There needs to be a swift and deep commitment—from funders to trade associations, from large organizations to grassroots groups—to address and correct the racialized organizational and systemic barriers facing people of color as leaders and in the sector overall.

## Indicators of Progress

### › **Measure Results**

Funders and associations can begin collecting information on whether and how organizations are moving the dial in hiring high-level people of color. These should be reviewed and made public to learn what more needs to be done.

### › **Identify Track Record of Recruiters**

Recruiters and others conducting executive-level searches or involved in executive transition management should be able to present viable candidates across race as well as educate boards and executive-level staff on race conscious hiring. Recruiters should be asked about their success in finding and placing candidates of color.

## Indicators of Progress (cont.)

### › **Increase the Race Conscious Consultant Pool**

Coaches, strategic planners, and trainers are all hired by nonprofit groups to help them reach their internal and external goals. Those helping nonprofit groups should be expected to have information and expertise in addressing issues of race and race equity.

### › **Track the Investments**

The type of change that is needed—to truly move the dial—takes resources and time. Annually reporting on the investments made by funding sources in the area of race and race equity would be an important additional indicator of whether the sector is serious about making a difference.



Together, organizations and individuals can change the current culture by adopting a new narrative about the problem; creating a campaign that exposes deeply embedded racialized organizational structures, policies, and practices; and constructing strong and measurable indicators of progress.

# Conclusion



The Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race survey was designed to explore why the percentage of people of color in nonprofit leadership has not moved in over a decade. Responses to the lack of diversity at the top of nonprofit organizations have focused on how to better prepare younger people of color to take on these roles.

Our data tells a different story. We found there were few differences in the background or qualifications between people of color and white respondents. And people of color were more interested in becoming a nonprofit leader than their white counterparts. This indicates that the problem is not whether people of color are willing and able to be leaders, but that those governing nonprofit organizations are not finding or hiring leaders of color. As a result, the sector should focus on systems change work to ensure its policies, practices, and culture are aligned with the values of diversity, inclusion, and equity with measurable results.



The sector should focus on systems change work to ensure its policies, practices, and culture are aligned with the values of diversity, inclusion, and equity with measurable results.



# Endnotes



- 1 Bell, Jeanne, Rick Moyers, and Tim Wolfred, *Daring to Lead 2006: A National Study of Nonprofit Executive Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: CompassPoint and the Meyer Foundation, 2006); Cornelius, Marla, Rick Moyers, and Jeanne Bell, *Daring to Lead 2011: A National Study of Executive Director Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: CompassPoint Nonprofit Services and the Meyer Foundation, 2011). BoardSource, *Leading with Intent: A National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices* (Washington, D.C.: BoardSource, 2015).
- 2 Kunreuther, Frances, Helen Kim, and Robby Rodriguez, *Working Across Generations, The Future of Nonprofit Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2008).
- 3 Tierney, Thomas J., *The Leadership Deficit* (SSIR Summer 2006).
- 4 Fernandopulle, Anuska, Jan Masaoka, Parsa Pardis, *On the Rise: A Profile of Women of Color in Leadership*, (San Francisco, CA: CompassPoint, 2003); Cornelius, Marla, Patrick Corvington, and Albert Ruesga, *Ready to Lead: Next Generation Leaders Speak Out* (San Francisco, CA: CompassPoint, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Meyer Foundation, 2008); Solomon, Josh and Yarrow Sandahl, *Stepping Up or Stepping Out* (New York, NY: Young Nonprofit Professionals Network, 2008); Schwartz, Robert, James Weinberg, Dana Hagenbuch and Allison Scott. *The Voice of Nonprofit Talent: Perceptions of Diversity in the Workplace* (Boston, MA and San Francisco, CA: Common Good Careers and Level Playing Field Institute, 2011).
- 5 Keleher, Terry, Sally Leiderman, Deborah Meehan, Elissa Perry, Maggie Potapchuk, John A. Powell, and Hanh Cao Yu, *Leadership and Race* (Oakland, CA: Leadership Learning Community, 2010). LM Strategies, *The Exit Interview: Perceptions on Why Black Professionals Leave Grantmaking Institutions*, (New York, NY: Association of Black Foundation Executives, 2014). Groups such as D5 (<http://www.d5coalition.org/work/leaders/>) and the Philanthropy Initiative for Racial Equity (<http://www.racialequity.org/>) have targeted foundations.
- 6 Dym, Barry and Alan Solomont, "The crisis in nonprofit leadership" (Boston Globe, November 20, 2015), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2015/11/20/the-crisis-nonprofit-leadership/gzEU6DeheoCyxGOSo5S4IN/story.html>.
- 7 Bell, Jeanne, et al. *Daring to Lead 2006*; Cornelius, Marla, et al. *Daring to Lead 2011*.
- 8 BoardSource, *Leading with Intent*.
- 9 There were also 330 nonprofit board members who responded; they did not hold jobs in the nonprofit sector.
- 10 All respondents were also asked their race/ethnicity.
- 11 Implicit biases are attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner without awareness or intentional control; they can be either positive or negative and everyone is susceptible. (Correspondence Meredith Reitman). To learn more about implicit bias go to <https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/>.
- 12 Influencers are people who are known within segments of the nonprofit sector either personally or through their social media presence.

- 13 The online survey was in the field from March 1 – May 31, 2016.
- 14 Though there are differences among people of color groups, the focus here will respond to the studies that have found that people of color consist of between 11-18% of the sector's executive leadership. In future reports, we will analyze the data by specific racial/ethnic group.
- 15 See the subcategory of "Civic, social, advocacy organizations, and grantmaking and giving services" in the table titled "Employed persons by detailed industry, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity" from the Current Population Survey's labor force statistics, available at <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18.htm> (last modified date: February 8, 2017).
- 16 Due to rounding, some percentages that appear in the figures throughout this report may not precisely reflect the absolute numbers or add to 100%.
- 17 BLS workforce statistics: 36% Millennials, 43% Generation X, 22% Boomers or older. BLS charitable organizations: 30% Millennials, 41% Generation X, and 29% Boomers or older. See the "total employed" and "Civic, social, advocacy organizations, and grantmaking and giving services" categories in the table titled "Employed persons by detailed industry and age" from the Current Population Survey's labor force statistics, available at <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat18b.htm> (last modified date: February 8, 2017).
- 18 This question was not asked of current executive directors/CEOs. Results echo those found in the *Ready to Lead* report noted above.
- 19 A regression analysis was conducted to examine the associations between respondents' organization paying attention to race/diversity and their leadership aspirations. Since people of color and white respondents differ on leadership aspirations, we controlled for race in the regression model.
- 20 Gender/gender identity also was perceived to negatively impact career advancement; this will be explored in more depth in a future report.
- 21 A microaggression is a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority) <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/microaggression>.
- 22 This question is modeled on a survey question from the Public Religion Research Institute (<http://www.prrri.org>). Overall, our sample identified their class higher than the PRRI sample. For example, just over half of the respondents identify as middle class with little variation by race; in the PRRI sample only 38% used this category in a survey conducted in September 2016.
- 23 Katherine Reynolds Lewis, "How 'Culture Fit' Can Be a Shield for Hiring Discrimination" (Fortune: December 7, 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/12/07/culture-fit-hiring-discrimination/>).
- 24 There are many helpful tools on race-conscious human resources practices, including "Managing Unconscious Bias; Strategies to Address Bias & Build More Diverse, Inclusive Organizations," available for download at <http://www.paradigmIQ.com>.



Building Movement Project

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