

Race to Lead: Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector

By Ofronama Biu



An initiative of
Building Movement Project



About the Author

Ofronama Biu (obiu@buildingmovement.org) is the Senior Research Associate at Building Movement Project (BMP). She works on BMP's national projects focused on movement building, service and social change, and leadership, including the *Race to Lead* research, as well as place-based projects in Detroit and New Mexico.

Ofronama has more than 10 years of experience in higher education and nonprofit organizations. Her experience has included research, project management, program evaluation, partnership building, and direct service to participants and employers. She also co-founded a nonprofit organization that connects youth to media professionals for skills-building and mentoring opportunities.

Ofronama is a PhD candidate at the Milano School of Policy, Management, and the Environment at The New School. Her research interests include labor market and workforce development policies and racial and gender stratification. She obtained a BA in Psychology from the NYU College of Arts and Science and an MPA in Public and Nonprofit Management and Policy from the NYU Wagner School of Public Service.

Acknowledgements

It is not possible to list all the people and organizations who helped the Building Movement Project with the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey, its distribution, and the development of this latest report. Many partner organizations and colleagues helped promote and host focus groups, including the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation, Community Resource Exchange (CRE), New York Foundation, New York Community Trust, Center for Nonprofit Excellence at the United Way of Central New Mexico, Meyer Memorial Trust, Russ Finkelstein, and the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits. Sue Hyde and Vance Blackfox referred us to additional interviewees. Also, staff of the National Center for Transgender Equality provided valuable input on the section on transgender women of color.

BMP's staff team and national project team offered crucial support and feedback as this research developed. Noelia Mann, Communications and Operations Coordinator, provided critical operations support, and Tessa Constantine, Research and Data Intern, conducted data analysis and reviewed literature.

Danielle Jackson, PhD, facilitated a focus group in Tampa, FL, and analyzed data gathered across multiple focus groups. Alicia Lueras Maldonado facilitated a focus group in Albuquerque, NM. Marissa Graciosa, Storme Gray, and Kerrien Suarez reviewed an initial draft, and Julia DiLaura edited the report.



Contents



01 LETTER FROM BMP'S CO-DIRECTORS

03 INTRODUCTION

- › Key Findings
- › Methodology

05 KEY FINDINGS

- › Demographics of the Respondents
- › Key Finding 1: Racial and Gender Biases Create Barriers to Advancement for Women of Color
- › Key Finding 2: Education and Training Do Not Provide Equity
- › Key Finding 3: The Social Landscape of Organizations is Fraught for Women of Color

17 DISTINCTIVE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN OF COLOR IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

- › Asian/Pacific Islander Women
- › Black Women
- › Latinx Women
- › Native American/Indigenous Women
- › Transgender Women of Color

30 CALL TO ACTION

- › Systems Change
- › Organizational Change
- › Individual Support

33 ENDNOTES



FEBRUARY 2019

Since we began presenting the findings from our Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey through the *Race to Lead* report series in the summer of 2017, we have received numerous requests for more analysis of what the data revealed about the experiences of women of color working in the nonprofit sector. This report presents findings on obstacles to leadership facing women of color through both racism and sexism. As BMP continues to better understand how to dismantle barriers to more equitable and inclusive leadership, centering the concerns and experiences of women of color is critical to defining strategies for change that will have the greatest impact for the most people.

We wrote the first *Race to Lead* report to explore the racial leadership gap in the nonprofit sector and were overwhelmed with the depth and richness of data we gathered in 2016. When we conducted the survey, “Me Too”—the phrase activist Tarana Burke¹ coined more than a decade ago as part of her organizing on behalf of women and girls of color who had survived sexual violence—had not yet been reignited as a hashtag and rallying cry in the movement against sexual assault and harassment. Thousands of women of all races offered write-in survey responses about how their gender had negatively impacted their career advancement, but only six volunteered instances of sexual harassment in nonprofit organizations. But we know from hushed conversations with colleagues, cryptic posts on social media, and sudden departures of longtime male leaders that the stories of harassment and abuse that have dominated the news since the fall of 2017 are not limited to Hollywood and the halls of Congress. This is a time of reckoning for the nonprofit sector too.

As we began digging into the data disaggregated by both race and gender we also grappled with the limitations of “people of color” as an umbrella category. Initially, we chose to report on the differences between the 4,000-plus respondents based on whether they self-identified either as a “person of color” or as “white,” in order to focus attention on the outsize power and influence held by white people in the nonprofit sector. But at briefings and workshops, women of color often raised concerns that the “white vs. POC” framing obscured the nuanced experiences of particular racial/ethnic groups. The first half of this report primarily compares the data from women of color, men of color, white women and white men. In response to the feedback we received about distinct experiences of particular women of color, this section also

examines data reported by Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Latinx, Native American, and transgender women of color. In addition, the report includes a section that describes qualitative research conducted by BMP's Senior Research Associate using write-in responses, focus groups across the country, and interviews with women of color from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds and gender identities.

BMP is looking ahead to re-surveying in the summer of 2019. We will update the questions to better reflect the current moment in the United States, especially at a time when every nonprofit conference seems to include a discussion on “diversity, equity, and inclusion.” In response to the Movement for Black Lives and the struggles for the rights of indigenous peoples and immigrants, nonprofit leaders have become more adept at *talking* about concepts such as intersectionality, anti-Black racism, and de-colonization, but the *Race to Lead* data shows that nonprofit organizations need to dramatically change more than the words we use on our websites and in our grant reports. Real change means re-shaping the hierarchies and power structures in the nonprofit sector, the ways organizations behave, and how staff—particularly women of color—are treated.

This report reflects some of the intractable challenges that far too many women of color encounter as they work to make a difference in their communities and the world. If the reflections and voices of the women quoted in this report feel harsh or trigger feelings of discomfort, we invite readers to consider the scale of discomfort women of color endure as they combat bias based on race, gender, and gender identity in their careers.



Sean Thomas-Breitfeld and Frances Kunreuther
Co-Directors



Building Movement Project

Introduction



The Building Movement Project's *Race to Lead* series seeks to understand why there are still so few leaders of color in the nonprofit sector. Studies show the percentage of people of color in the executive director/CEO role has remained under 20% for the past 15 years², even as the country becomes more diverse.

Findings from the Building Movement Project's national survey of more than 4,000 nonprofit staff showed that people of color have similar qualifications as white respondents and are more likely to aspire to nonprofit leadership positions.³ The findings stood in contrast to the widespread assumptions that there are not enough people of color willing and able to lead. In addition, respondents across race agreed that people of color seeking leadership roles face a range of systemic barriers to advancement. The first report in the *Race to Lead* series concluded that to increase the number of leaders of color in nonprofits, the sector should challenge the assumption that people of color must overcome personal deficits. Instead, a new approach is needed that places the emphasis not on changing people of color, but on addressing deeply embedded biases and systematic barriers that make it harder for people of color to advance into leadership positions, despite being just as qualified as their white peers.

This report, *Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector*, applies an intersectional analysis to the *Race to Lead* data by going beyond racial differences alone to also examine the impact of both race and gender on the aspirations, experiences, and career advancement of women of color working in the nonprofit sector. Intersectionality emphasizes how people with multiple marginalized social identities (e.g. race/ethnicity, gender and gender identity) experience overlapping forms of oppression at the same time (e.g. racism, sexism, and anti-trans bias), and how the impacts of these simultaneous "isms" are compounded. Legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the term "intersectionality" in the late 1980s when she described the ways in which feminist theory and "antiracist politics" regarded womanhood and race as two separate identities, thereby ignoring Black women and missing the intersections of both sexism and racism as systems of oppression impacting their lives.⁴

The survey data reveals that both white women and women of color in our sample face some similar barriers; they are less likely to be in executive positions in the nonprofit sector and are paid less than men of color and white men. However, the picture that emerges reveals that the sector places particular burdens on women of color.



Survey data reveals that the nonprofit sector places particular burdens on women of color.

Key Findings

- 1.** Racial and gender biases create barriers to advancement for women of color. Women of color report being passed over for new jobs or promotions in favor of others—including men of color, white women, and white men—with comparable or even lower credentials.
- 2.** Education and training are not enough to help women of color advance. Among survey respondents with advanced education, women of color were more likely than men of color, white men, or white women to work in administrative roles and the least likely to hold senior leadership positions. Women of color also are paid less compared to men of color and white men and more frequently report frustrations with inadequate salaries.
- 3.** The social landscape within nonprofit organizations can create conditions that undermine the leadership of women of color. Women of color who reported that their race and/or gender have been a barrier to their advancement indicated that they were sometimes left out or ignored and sometimes hyper-visible under intense scrutiny,⁵ with both conditions creating burdens.

Methodology

The Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey was designed after reviewing 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 career advancement. 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, survey-takers had several "write-in" opportunities to elaborate on their responses. The online survey distribution—a convenience sample—was conducted throughout the United States in 2016. After three months in the field, the sample was closed with a total of 4,385 respondents.⁶

In the summer of 2018, the Building Movement Project team conducted focus groups in five cities to explore the race and gender dimensions of the quantitative findings and ask additional questions. More than 100 individuals participated in sessions in Albuquerque, NM; New York, NY; Portland, OR; Raleigh, NC; and Tampa, FL. BMP promoted focus groups through partner organizations in the respective cities. Sessions were conducted for the following demographic groups: women of color, white women, men of color (New York, NY only), CEOs of color, and white CEOs. BMP also conducted supplemental interviews with ten individuals: two men of color, two Asian women, three Native American women, and three transgender women of color.



In 2018, focus groups were conducted in five cities to explore the race and gender dimensions of the quantitative findings and ask additional questions.

Key Findings



Demographics of the Respondents

Demographically, the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey sample primarily consists of women (*Figure 1*). The largest percentage of respondents were white women (46%), followed by women of color (32%). Men of color and white men were 9% and 10% of the sample, respectively. Transgender and gender non-conforming people of color (1%) and whites (2%) were the smallest share of participants.⁷ Black women comprised the largest portion of women of color respondents, followed by Latinx women.⁸

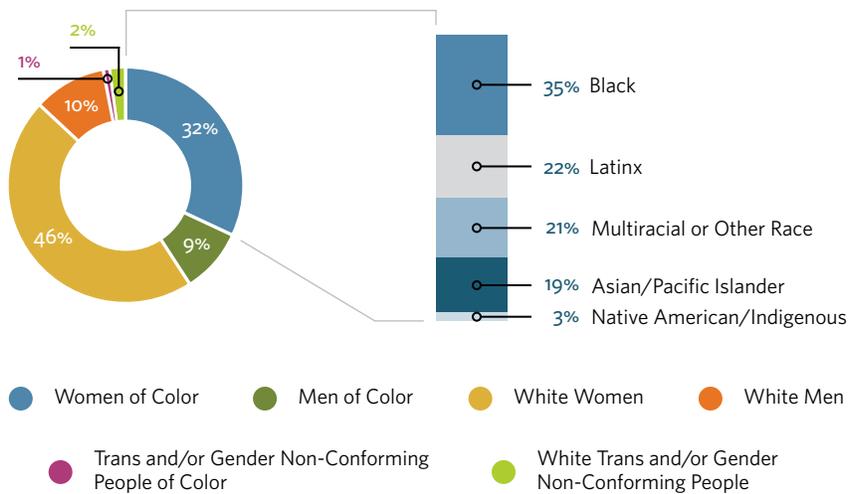


Figure 1: Race and Gender of Respondents

Respondents who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer accounted for 15% of women of color, 24% of men of color, 19% of white women, and 27% of white men. The age of the overall sample was divided evenly between generation X (39%) and millennials (38%), and less than a quarter (24%) were baby boomers or older leaders. *Figure 2* on the following page shows how women of color, men of color, white women, and white men were distributed throughout the generations. Both women and men of color were more likely than white people to be children of immigrants (32% and 31% respectively) or immigrants themselves (17%

and 16%). While nearly 90% of white respondents indicated that they were children of parents born in the United States (89% of white women and 88% of white men), more than half of people of color indicated the same (51% of women of color and 53% of men of color).

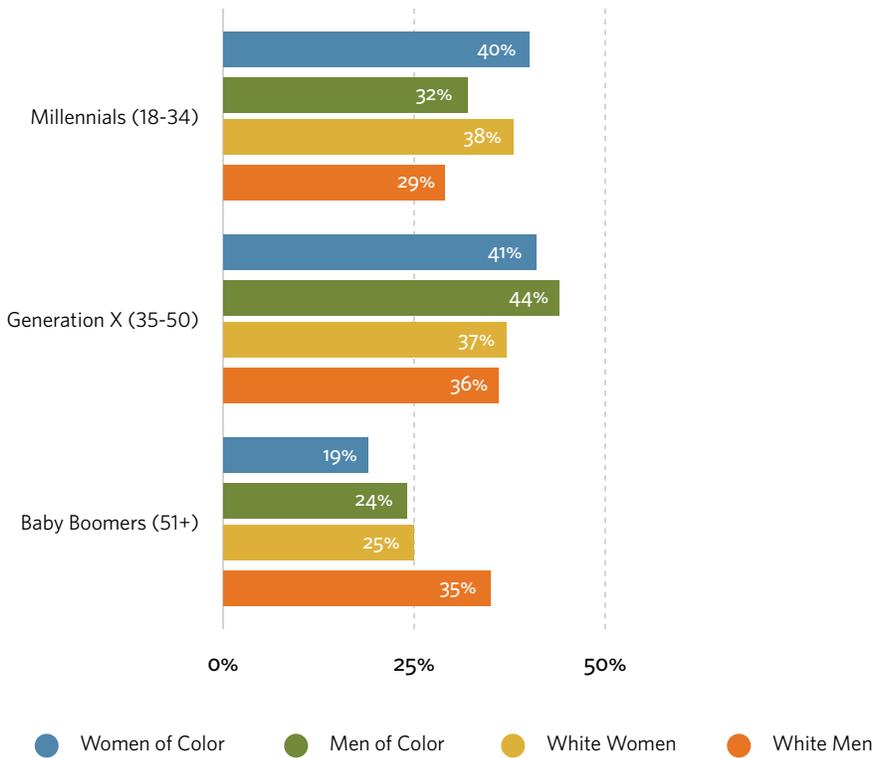


Figure 2: Age Groups by Generation

The data shows that men (54%) and women (49%) of color were more likely than white people to work for identity-based organizations, especially those focused on people of color—e.g., focused on issues related to racial/ethnic communities and/or immigrants—as shown on the following page in *Figure 3*. Among women of color, Latinx women (41%) were more likely than Asian women (30%) or Black women (20%) to work for a POC- or immigrant-identity-based organization; Asian women (21%) were somewhat more likely than Black women (19%) or Latinx women (19%) to work for other identity-based organizations such as women’s organizations or LGBTQ organizations; and Black women (61%) were more likely than Asian women (48%) or Latinx women (40%) to work for non-identity-based organizations.

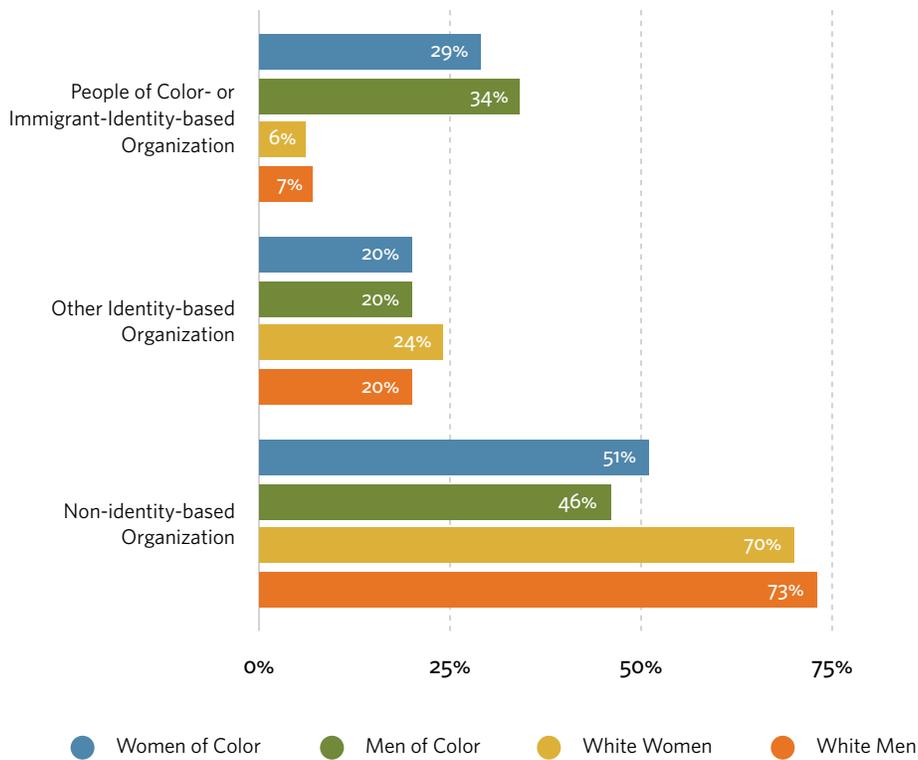


Figure 3: Organization Types by Race and Gender



ORGANIZATION TYPES

People of Color- (POC) or Immigrant-Identity-based: Organizations associated with a racial, ethnic, or immigrant group (e.g., immigrant rights, Asian cultural organizations)

Other Identity-based: Organizations associated with an identity group that is not related to race, ethnicity, or immigration (e.g., general LGBTQ or women’s organizations)

Non-identity-based: Organizations not associated with an identity group (e.g., human services or health services organizations)

Key Finding 1:

Racial and Gender Biases Create Barriers to Advancement for Women of Color

In general, the nonprofit sector espouses a meritocratic ideal. Just as is suggested by ubiquitous myths about opportunity in the U.S. workforce overall, the widespread assumption is that anyone can advance with sufficient effort. However, the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey results paint a very different picture. Women of color who responded to the survey indicated high leadership aspirations (Figure 4) but were also most likely to report that both race and gender have been a barrier to their career advancement (Figures 5 and 6).⁹

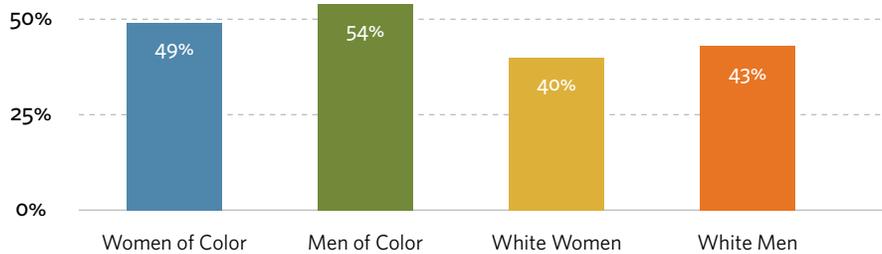


Figure 4: Interested in Taking a Top Leadership Role Among Non-CEOs (Definitely/Probably Yes)



Figure 5: *Impact of Race/Ethnicity on Career Advancement*

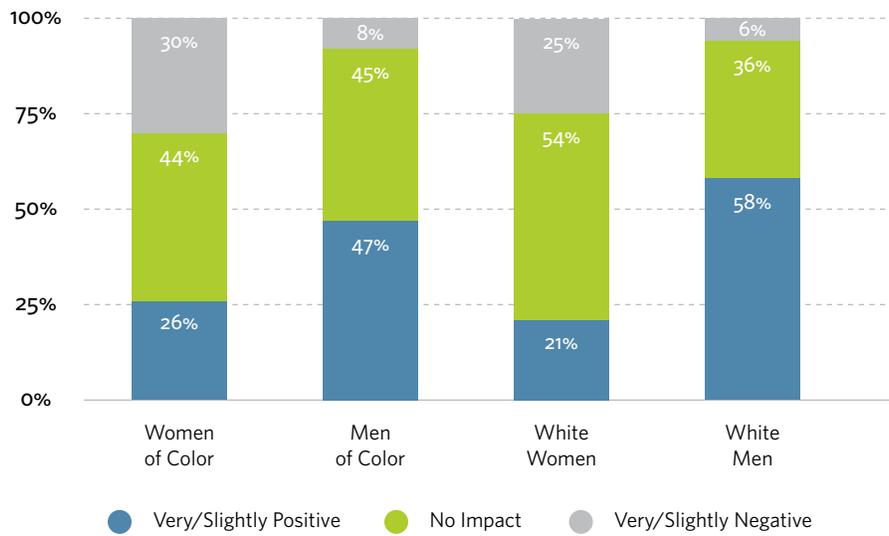


Figure 6: *Impact of Gender/Gender Identity on Career Advancement*

Thousands of survey respondents entered write-in explanations of how race and/or gender have been a barrier. Women of color described being passed over for opportunities for new jobs or promotions, often in favor of white and/or male candidates with fewer qualifications. They observed that men, particularly white men, tended to advance faster—even if they were underqualified—and were given more professional development opportunities. They wrote that directors did not see women of color as leaders and withheld projects and advancement opportunities.

Respondents also wrote that motherhood—or the possibility of it—was a barrier to their careers. They described managers who assumed they would start or expand families, and that this perception affected consideration for jobs and promotions. Some participants described the challenges of balancing caretaker responsibilities—of which they bore the majority in their households—with work; other women who were mothers said they were not given challenging assignments that would offer opportunities for growth and advancement.

Women of color who worked in either POC- or immigrant-identity-based organizations or other identity-based organizations (e.g. women’s organizations or LGBTQ organizations) were more likely to indicate that their race or ethnicity had positively impacted their advancement (41% for both groups compared to 29% of women of color working in non-identity-based organizations). The results of the focus groups were similar to the survey findings in that women of color who reported their race and ethnicity had been helpful to their career advancement also worked in cultural or ethnic organizations. Many said that their race and ethnicity helped them relate to—and better serve—their communities. However, some focus group participants reported concerns about their ability to move up the ladder if they left for non-identity-based organizations.

Regarding the role of gender in their careers, women of color (26%) were more likely than white women (21%) to say gender contributed in a positive way (*Figure 7*). In contrast to the findings on the positive impact of race and ethnicity on advancement, women working for identity-based organizations reported more nuanced impacts of gender on their careers. Women of color in other identity-based organizations were more likely to say gender helped their career progression (33%) than those in non-identity-based organizations (22%).¹⁰ However, women of color working in POC- or immigrant-identity-based organizations (36%) were more likely to report that their gender had *negatively* impacted their careers than those in non-identity-based organizations (28%).¹¹ Some of the women in POC- or immigrant-identity-based organizations commented that men were viewed as leaders in these sub-sectors and that men ascended faster to leadership roles. Women of color expressed disappointment that these organizations were progressive on race and fell short regarding gender.



When the senior leadership identifies and grooms a colleague they think would be an impactful “face” for this organization, that person is white, male and heterosexual. In one instance, I have far more experience and education, yet am not being groomed in this way.

~ BLACK WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

Working in a space where immigration and labor rights intersect, the leadership has been traditionally male and have not taken kindly to my stepping in.

~ LATINX WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

Key Finding 2:

Education and Training Do Not Provide Equity

Education and training are typically considered to be key strategies to help men and women of color advance in the workplace. More than 80% of all survey participants said their education and training had a positive impact on their career advancement. Focus group participants—across all races and genders—frequently invoked education as a significant factor that contributed to their success. Several women of color who participated in focus groups said they pursued additional education to overcome the discrimination they faced. Nonetheless, the survey data shows that even with high levels of education, women of color are more likely to be relegated to lower-level roles relative to their white and/or male counterparts. This is common throughout other industries¹² and national data has demonstrated that Black and Latinx workers are underpaid compared to their white counterparts with the same level of education.¹³

In the *Race to Lead* sample, there were few differences in education between women of color, men of color, white women, and white men (Figure 7). Among women, Asian women were most likely to have a master's degree and above (60%), followed by Black women (56%), white women (52%), and Latinx women (46%). Unfortunately, the data also showed that education and training are often not sufficient to help women of color receive equal compensation and opportunities for advancement.



I'm an attorney and I lead with "esquire" even though I'm in nonprofit. ...It's very important that people understand that's who I am at the gate because... a lot of times they discount what I'm saying.

~ WOMAN OF COLOR
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT
NEW YORK, NY

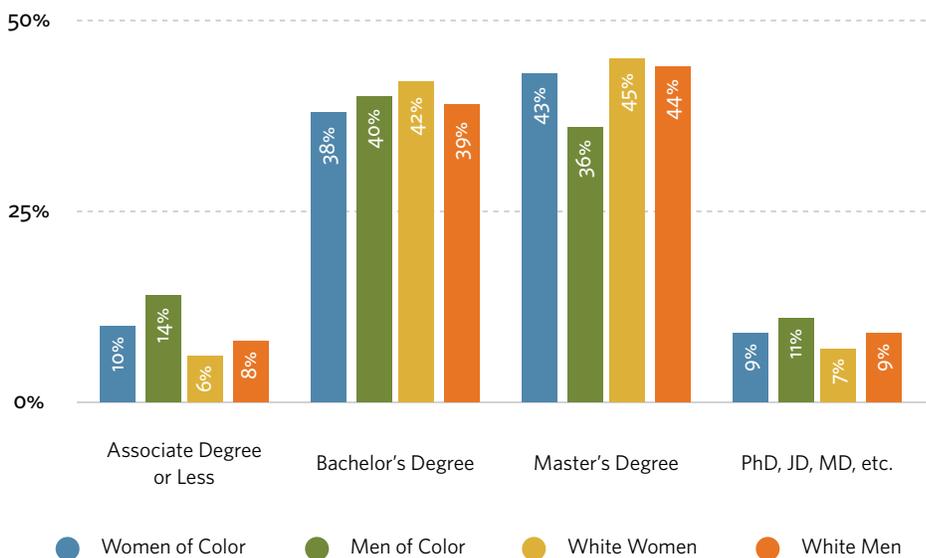


Figure 7: Educational Attainment by Race and Gender

Higher Education Does Not Automatically Mean Senior Roles for Women of Color

In theory, women of color, men of color, white women, and white men with similar education should have similar representation in various roles. A deeper look at the data revealed disparities in the levels of seniority held by individuals with the highest level of education. Among survey respondents with advanced degrees, women of color are the most likely to hold lower-level positions.

As shown in *Figure 8* below, among those with a master’s degree and above, women were significantly less likely to hold CEO/Senior Management positions (57% of women of color and 59% of white women) compared to men of color (71%) or white men (75%). One quarter (25%) of highly educated women of color and 21% of white women worked in line/administrative staff positions, compared to 15% of men of color and 12% of white men with the same level of education.

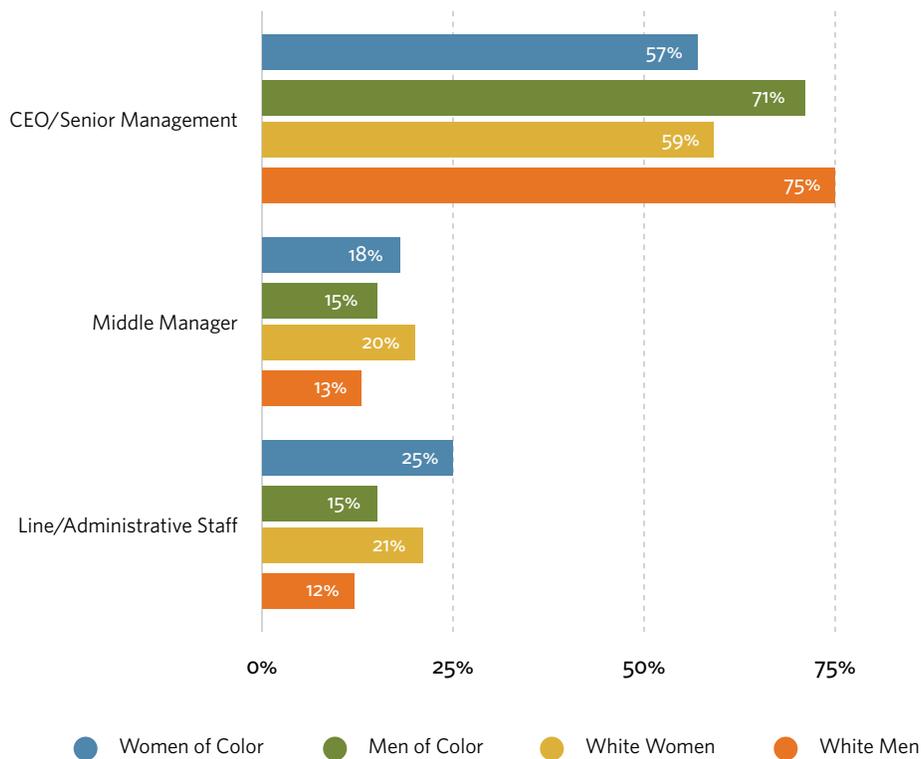


Figure 8: Current Role/Position in Organization (Master’s Degree and Above)

Some women of color in mid-level or senior roles submitted write-in responses that described being assigned tasks below their level of experience and education. They characterized these responsibilities as “implementation” or “worker bee” tasks, rather than “thought leadership” or strategy development. Some respondents recalled being assigned “assistant” or “secretarial” tasks despite their advanced qualifications.

“

[There is] often an assumption that a person of color is supposed to be working in an administrative role, and so I was automatically dissuaded from applying to managerial positions (despite having a master’s degree). This occurred at a previous organization [and] it impacted negatively on the types of positions I could seek out afterwards...

~ MULTIRACIAL WOMAN SURVEY RESPONDENT

Women of Color Report Low Salaries Despite High Levels of Education

Salary differences also emerged among survey respondents despite comparable levels of education. Women with a master’s degree and above were more likely than men to report frustrations regarding inadequate salaries (*Figure 9*).¹⁴ Women of color report these concerns (54%) more than white women (45%), men of color (38%), and white men (28%). In fact, in responding specifically to how race and gender have impacted their careers, the most common theme that emerged among the 500 write-in responses from women of color related to being paid less than their white and/or male counterparts.

In the survey, participants were asked to indicate their current pay by selecting from a list of salary ranges, and racial and gender differences appeared again for women holding a master’s degree and above.¹⁵ As *Figure 10* shows on the following page, white men with a master’s degree or above (38%) were most likely to report earning more than \$100,000. Men of color were nine percentage points less likely than white men to report that highest salary level. In contrast, white women with a master’s degree and above were the least likely to be in the highest salary range (15%), followed by women of color (19%). These differences persist even among survey participants in the highest-level roles. Among executive directors or CEOs with a master’s degree and above, women of color (23%) were most likely to report a salary in the lowest range (under \$50,000), followed by men of color (17%), white women (16%), and white men (8%). White women executive directors/CEOs were least likely to be in the more than \$100,000 range (30%), followed by women of color (35%), men of color (57%), and white men (58%).



As a woman, I know that I don’t make the same amount of money as my male counterparts. I’m also often put into the role of serving the men. Why do you look to me to get coffee for the CEO? This isn’t *Mad Men* and I’m [not] his assistant.

~ **LATINX WOMAN**
SURVEY RESPONDENT

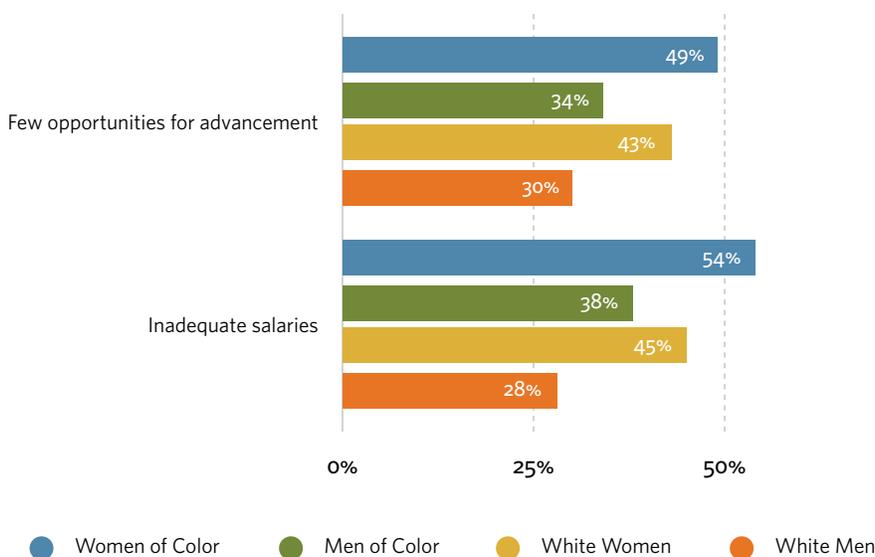


Figure 9: Frustrations for Those With Master’s Degrees and Above (Often or Always)

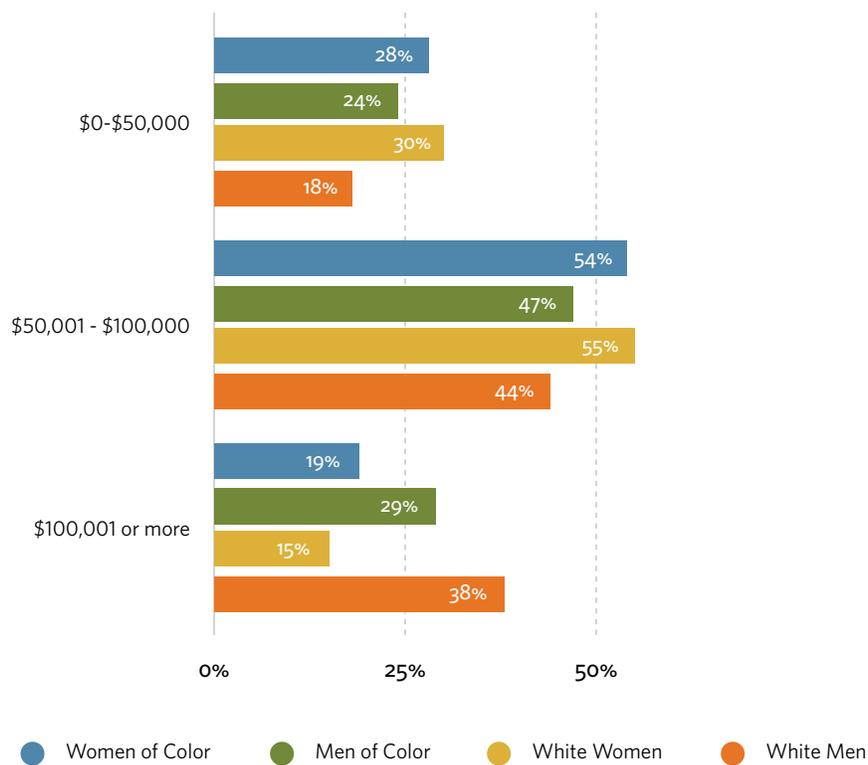


Figure 10: Salary for Those With Master's Degrees and Above by Race and Gender

In the focus groups, women of color repeatedly raised concerns about low and inequitable salaries. Some participants blamed the devaluing of the nonprofit sector overall. Others pointed to the feminization of the nonprofit workforce, theorizing that because women are paid less generally and make up the majority of the sector, salaries are low compared to other industries; although this may affect the pay scale of the sector at large, research shows that white men still tend to benefit in feminized roles compared to others.¹⁶ As was reflected in the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey data, women of color focus group participants mainly attributed low salaries to their race and gender. Women of color described being paid less than white and/or male counterparts in the same roles. This disparity was particularly noticeable when women of color reported being paid less than their white male predecessors.



I know what the salary was with the previous Executive Director... I'm still doing the job I did before. Not only do I make twenty thousand dollars less, I also do about three times more workload than he did.

~ WOMAN OF COLOR
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT
RALEIGH, NC

Key Finding 3:

The Social Landscape of Organizations is Fraught for Women of Color

Women of color who participated in the survey and focus groups often described a social landscape within nonprofit organizations that does not support or nurture their leadership. In some cases, women of color said they were ignored or invisible within organizations: they were less likely than others to receive internal mentors, feedback, and performance evaluations. In other situations they were hyper-visible: questioned about their decisions and confronted with negative stereotypes.¹⁷ For internal social dynamics to effectively support rather than undermine women of color, organizational cultures need to change, and those shifts must be formalized by operating structures as well as the senior staff and boards that set the culture from the top.

Women of Color Value Mentorship But Often Have to Look Outside Their Organizations to Find Mentors

The survey included questions about mentorship because research on the workplace has shown some benefits—albeit of a modest magnitude—to mentees, as measured by their salary, promotions, and job satisfaction.¹⁸ Survey participants were asked if they have ever had mentors either at their jobs or outside of the organizations where they worked. As *Figure 11* shows, women of color (41%) and men of color (46%) were less likely to have received on-the-job mentoring than white men (52%) and white women (49%). Among women of color, Black (32%) and Latinx (39%) women were less likely to report having had internal mentors than Asian women (51%). In contrast, nearly two-thirds of women of color (63%) and men of color (61%) reported receiving outside mentoring (compared to 59% for white women and 60% for white men). The survey results seem to indicate that people of color may compensate for a lack of internal support by cultivating relationships outside of their nonprofit workplaces.



Despite my overwhelmingly positive track record, I've never had a single senior staff person at any of the three nonprofits I've worked for take me under their wing as a mentee and try to groom me for a higher position. And I've never had a supervisor of color.

~ BLACK WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

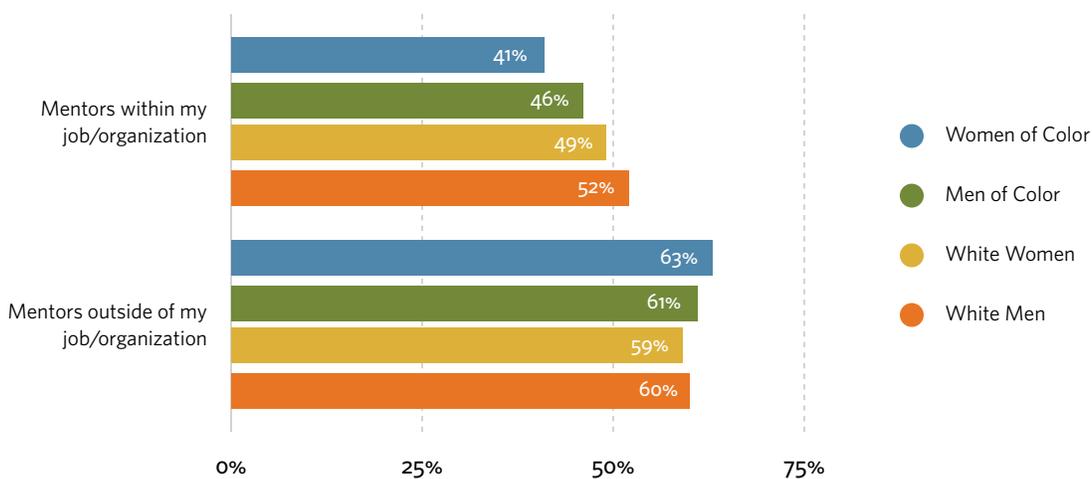


Figure 11: Mentoring Received by Race and Gender, and Type

“

These findings were echoed in the focus groups in nearly all cities.¹⁹ Most women of color focus group participants noted that they have never experienced internal mentoring. Some attributed the lack of mentorship to the absence of people of color and/or women of color in leadership positions in organizations. This speculation is supported by the survey data, in which internal mentoring was more common for women of color working in POC- or immigrant-identity-based organizations (48%) compared to those in other identity-based organizations (41%) and non-identity-based organizations (38%).

Given the potentially limited pool of available mentors in nonprofit organizations, focus group participants discussed how they found mentors in other places—school networking events, professional associations, or direct outreach to individuals of interest. Several women of color in the focus groups expressed concern that the few women of color leaders available to be mentors were sometimes overwhelmed by requests for guidance. They described strategies in which four or five women of color would find one collective meeting time to minimize the scheduling burden on their shared mentor.

In most cases women of color focus group participants were mentored by other women of color. This was usually by preference because other women of color could relate to their unique challenges. Some research suggests that people prefer mentoring relationships with those who share their demographic identity.²⁰ However, several women of color participating in the focus groups noted that their mentors were of another race and/or gender. In particular, focus group participants who were from Generation X or older indicated that when their careers began, men were even more predominant in leadership and therefore were far more likely than women to be available to provide mentorship. A few participants noted that white women and men who are more “conscious about equity in the ranks” have stepped forward to provide mentorship. Overall the experiences reported by those who were mentored by someone with different race or gender identities were positive, but a few survey participants and one trans woman of color interviewee said that white and/or cisgender mentors could not understand their unique positions and provide meaningful advice.

Feedback and Evaluations Lacking and Biased for Women of Color

Regular feedback and performance evaluations were some of the more common forms of career support reported by survey and focus group participants, likely because such evaluations are often imbedded in organizations’ human resources practices. Yet people of color were the least likely to receive regular feedback and performance evaluations in the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey—45% of women of color reported receiving this form of career support, followed closely by 48% of men of color, 50% of white women, and 52% of white men (see *Figure 12* on the following page).

When I think about one of the reasons why I don’t have further activation, some of it is the work-life balance and that kind of stuff. But I think one of the things I struggle with now is I don’t feel like I... get appropriate support now. So it makes it hard to think about the next phase or next steps without that kind of feedback here.

~ WOMAN OF COLOR
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT
NEW YORK, NY

[Organizations say], “We need our one person for diversity. There can’t be multiple women. There has to be one woman. There can’t be multiple minorities, there has to be one minority.” So of course you have a lack of role models.

~ WOMAN OF COLOR
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT
ALBUQUERQUE, NM

At my nonprofit, we actually had a system set up for people to have a buddy. My mentor when I came in was actually a white woman. She’s no longer at the organization, but to this day, she still reaches out to me and talks to me about certain things... just trying to set me up if I do decide to leave...

~ WOMAN OF COLOR
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT
RALEIGH, NC

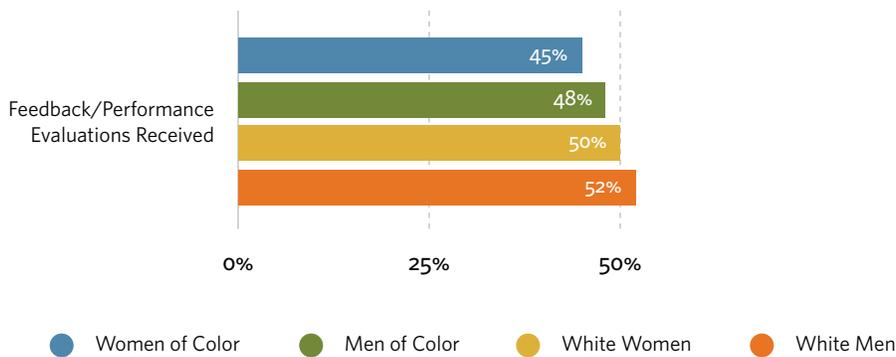


Figure 12: Regular Feedback/Performance Evaluations from a Supervisor at Any Job

Survey and focus group participants often noted a downside to feedback and evaluation processes: women of color are often evaluated through a lens that is fraught with bias. Research has shown that performance evaluations generally lack objectivity and fail to guard against negative stereotypes.²¹ Some survey respondents noted that their performance evaluations were gendered—for example, they were asked to exhibit more “feminine” leadership styles or critiqued for appearing aggressive or assertive. This finding aligns with research that women are expected to demonstrate both “sensitive” and “strong” leadership styles while men only need to show strength.²² From a race and gender perspective, some women of color—such as Black women—are stereotyped as “aggressive” and punished for any displays of emotion while white women and white men have—to varying degrees—more freedom to demonstrate a natural range of human emotions.²³ Many survey respondents and focus group participants also felt that what is presented as “feedback” actually conveys distrust in their abilities. Women of color felt they were questioned more often than white peers.



Many of my supervisors have commented to me and also put in performance evaluations recommendations about my performance that are associated with acting more “like a woman”, i.e., smile more, tell others why you’re passionate about doing this work, share your story, be nicer, etc.

~ BLACK WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

I have experience being not given that ongoing feedback but instead policed as a woman of color in a way that other staff members be it white women or men in general aren’t policed. Being questioned about certain aspects of my job that other folks are not questioned.... It can be a little bit disheartening.

~ WOMAN OF COLOR
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT
RALEIGH, NC

Distinctive Experiences of Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector



The following sections explore key themes observed among women of color working in the nonprofit sector, with focus on the experiences of Asian/Pacific Islander (API), Black, Latinx, Native American, and trans women of color. These observations primarily emerged from the 2016 Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey write-in responses to the question of how race and gender have negatively impacted career advancement. Additional accounts of the experiences of Native American women and transgender women of color were gathered primarily through individual interviews.

Significant percentages of each group of women of color noted that race or gender had a negative impact on their career advancement (*Figures 13 and 14* on the following page). The percentages of each group of women of color who reported negative impact of race and gender were higher than the percentages of white women, men of color, and white men who reported the same. Although the survey did not specifically ask respondents about the combination of race and gender, several women brought up intersectionality in their write-in responses. “As an African-American female, both my race and gender have... negatively impacted my career,” one Black woman respondent wrote. “[I] have learned to rise above it.”

A large percentage of each group of survey respondents—50% of API women, 46% of Black women, 47% of Latinx women, 51% of white women, 59% of men of color, and 68% of white men—were in CEO or senior management roles. As noted in Key Finding 2, the data revealed racial and gender disparities in the levels of seniority held by respondents with advanced degrees. API and Black women respondents with a master’s degree or above were significantly more likely to be in line/administrative staff positions and less likely to be CEOs compared to white men with the same level of education. Latinx women with a master’s degree and above were also more likely to hold line/administrative staff positions than white men, and less likely to be CEOs than people of color overall, women overall, and white women and men.

Across all five groups of women of color whose experiences are featured in this report—API, Black, Latinx, Native American and trans women—one of the most common themes was **concern about inequitable salaries**. As noted earlier, women of color survey participants and interviewees said they were paid less than male and/or white colleagues in similar roles.



In another position, as the Director of HR, and with over 20 years of experience, I was earning \$20K-\$30K less than white staff members that had only undergraduate degrees and seven years of work experience. Needless to say, I did not remain with that organization for very long.

~ BLACK WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

Women of color also described instances of both subtle and blatant gendered racism and stereotypes that affected their nonprofit careers. These stereotypes were distinct for each group and further illustrate the need for the nonprofit sector to make a stronger commitment to understand the varied experiences of women of color and make organizational and systemic changes in response.

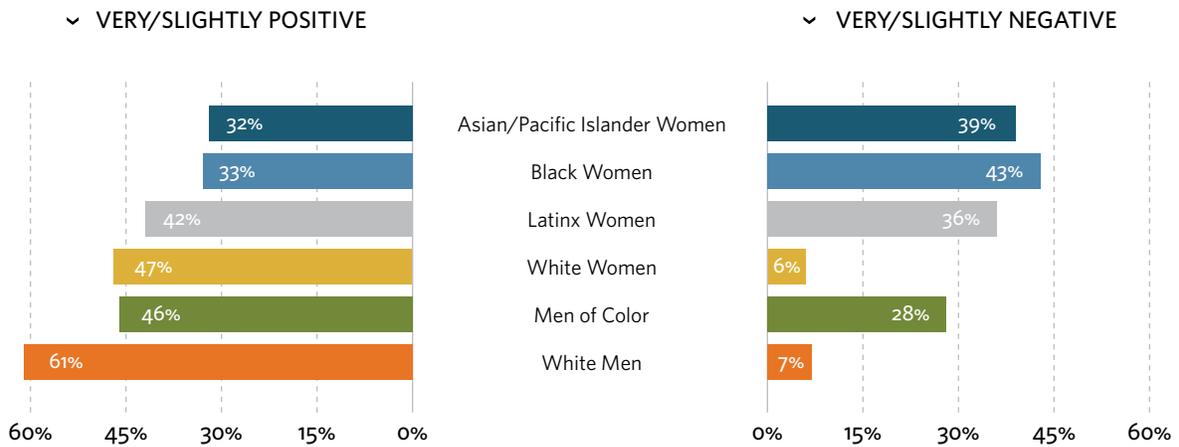


Figure 13: Impact of Race on Career Advancement by Ethnicity and Gender*

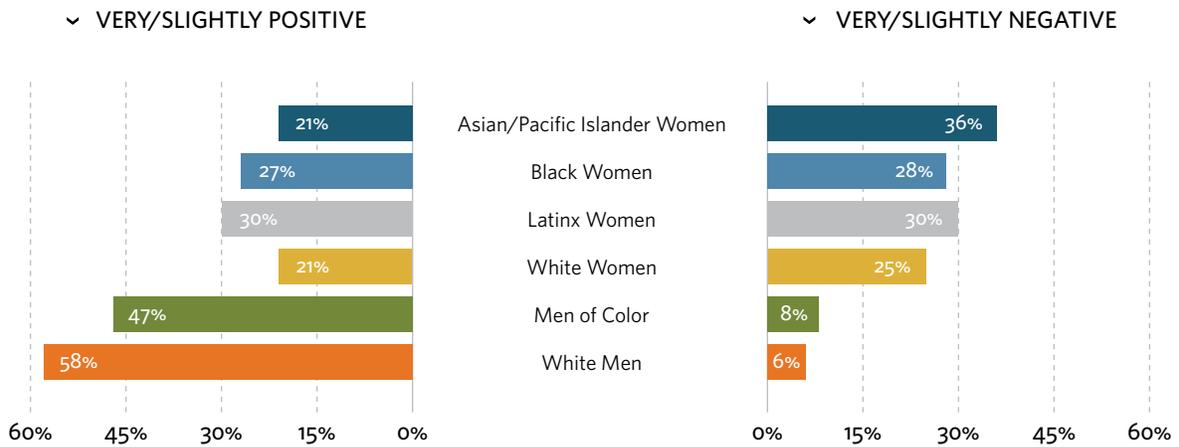


Figure 14: Impact of Gender on Career Advancement by Ethnicity and Gender*

* Insufficient sample size to report findings for Native American women or transgender women of color.

Asian/Pacific Islander Women

Asian/Pacific Islander (API) women were the third largest group (19%) of women of color filling out the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey. Of the 46% of API women (112 respondents) who said race and/or gender had a negative impact on their career advancement, 67 offered further explanations in write-in responses.

Many respondents mentioned the “model minority” myth, which research describes as the perception that Asian-Americans “work hard, value education greatly, and rise rapidly in American society.”²⁴ Extensive research on this stereotype indicates that it masks the racial discrimination faced by Asian and Pacific Islander people in the United States. It also denigrates other people of color, particularly Black people, by suggesting that success of Asian people in academics or the workplace indicates that sufficient effort can overcome any obstacle to achievement for people of color—and that failure to succeed reflects a lack of commitment or ambition rather than structural obstacles and racism. Respondents also noted concerns about salary inequality, as described above, and described negative messages about their leadership style: some expressed frustration that their leadership style was not perceived to match the assertive “ideal,” while others reported facing judgement when they were more assertive than their colleagues expected. These themes have been observed in literature on Asian-American women in the workplace,²⁵ such as a 2017 finding that school administrators were criticized as not being “real” Asian-American women if they were “too direct or too loud,” and were labeled as “manipulative” or “overly driven” if they were outspoken.

Model Minority

API survey respondents who reported that the model minority stereotype affected their career said managers expected them to do a disproportionate share of work. Those efforts didn’t always translate into promotions or raises, however. Among two participants who noted that managers expected them to be particularly conscientious and hard-working because of stereotypes regarding their API identity, one nonetheless had to advocate to get recognition for her work, while the other said her dedication was interpreted as “subservience” rather than leadership. A third respondent perceived that the model minority myth made supervisors think she was complacent with her existing position and uninterested in a promotion. Finally, an API woman in a majority-woman organization noted that “within a female-dominant culture there are racial disparit[ies] in salary which create questions around discrimination and favoritism. I, as a woman of color, have to continuously advocate [for] what I deserve while I am perceived as ‘model minority’ to produce more.”

“

As an Asian-American woman, I am perceived as not being assertive, and managers have questioned my leadership abilities because they perceive me being too quiet or asking too many questions. When I do assert myself and try to bring my worldviews and ways of working into my nonprofit work, I’m punished—as if the white leaders are threatened by me, especially when I challenge the status quo and advocate that progressive organizations actually live the justice values that they espouse.

~ API WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

Contradictory Perceptions of Leadership Styles

Several API women shared that their career advancement had been hindered by biased perceptions of their leadership styles. In many cases, these participants said that because they were quiet, humble, or deliberative—rather than exhibiting the behaviors of white and/or male peers in their organizations that they described as “loud,” “talkative,” and “assertive”—they were not seen as leaders. Management assumed they were uninterested in advancement and did not offer promotional opportunities. Some women said they felt a “cultural divide” with white colleagues and didn’t fit in with their peers or their organizations because of those differences.

While some API participants reported being punished for displaying more humble leadership styles, others were critiqued for being assertive. As one survey respondent wrote: “As an executive director, there are assumptions put onto me about how Asian women are *supposed* to act as leaders. And if we don’t follow those stereotypes, some of my board members think I’m going rogue or acting out of character.” Another leader echoed the experience of receiving biased leadership critiques. “I have had comments levied at me with stereotypical influences,” she wrote, “including that I am too ambitious, power-hungry or strong-willed and should assume a more subservient role.”

One executive director described a gender divide in terms of whose leadership is validated within the Pan-Asian nonprofit community. She wrote that the collaborative leadership of women often goes unrecognized because its power is demonstrated in ways that diverge from the leadership styles of men who are more likely to already be in senior management roles. When organizational settings equate assertiveness or aggressiveness with leadership and stakeholders are more likely to perceive those qualities in men than women, she said, the result is that male leaders get more access to important meetings and working groups, opportunities to connect with funders, and other chances to display leadership and advance their careers.



As a strong female who is also Asian, people react differently when I say things in a way similar to my white male colleagues.

~ API WOMAN
SURVEY PARTICIPANT

Black Women

Black women were the largest group of women of color (35%) filling out the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey. Of the 48% of Black women (191 respondents) who said race or gender negatively impacted their career advancement, 140 offered further explanation in write-in responses.

Themes that emerged in the write-in responses were inequitable salaries; being overlooked or excluded from new jobs, promotions, or professional development opportunities; dealing with assumptions that they were underqualified and inexperienced; and being perceived through the “angry Black woman” stereotype.²⁶ These themes have been explored in literature on Black women in leadership, such as a 2010 study of interviews with Black women and men professionals that documented how white employees could express annoyance or anger—even to supervisors—without significant consequences, whereas similar displays would result in “punishment” for Black workers.²⁷ For Black women, research indicates that the emotional labor required to regulate responses based on the perceptions of others causes significant stress that can ultimately impact job performance.²⁸

Passed Over

Black women survey respondents said they were passed over for new jobs or overlooked for promotions and professional development opportunities, particularly in favor of white men. Some participants noted that “ethnic” names may have hurt their chances for an interview, a phenomenon that has been documented in social science experiments.²⁹ Others felt that hiring processes were biased or represented a mere formality to show that an organization attempted to hire “diverse candidates.”

While most focus group participants described being passed over in favor of white men or women, some speculated that Black men benefit from the notion of Black male “exceptionalism,” which “presents African-American men as an endangered species.”³⁰ As a result, academic and workforce programs such as the Our Brother’s Keeper initiative launched by the Obama administration focus on Black men to the exclusion of Black women. As one focus group participant in Raleigh, NC described it: “I think that Black, educated men are like tokens in organizations because there aren’t a lot.” A New York-based focus group participant said the past few decades have ushered in “this ascension of Black males” while “Black women may be at the front-line level or middle management.” One Black male interviewee acknowledged the possibility that he and other Black men can benefit from exceptionalism, at least in terms of hiring and promotions. However, the potential benefits of that advantage may be hampered by its psychological costs—evidence suggests that tokenism in hiring may not always lead to promotions or recognition and is associated with depression and anxiety.³¹

“

I know for a fact that some jobs that I interviewed for and that I was qualified for were given to white counterparts who weren’t as experienced. I had comments made by interviewers like “you’re dressed” well or “you speak well.” I think those comments were very inappropriate and clearly showed how out of touch the interviewers were.

~ BLACK WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

As an African-American woman, there have been numerous experiences throughout my... career... where I have been asked to train a junior white staff person because of their potential and the leaders’ desire to invest in them. In one instance, I was laid off from a project that I helped to create.... At the time, I had a MA and five years of experience.... The organization decided that the 23-year-old white woman that had just graduated from college would be a better fit to lead the initiative and required me to train her before I left.

~ BLACK WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

Some Black women described being passed over for promotions and then training or advising the person who ultimately got the job. Others were relied on to develop strategy or create plans, but did not receive recognition for their thought leadership. “Repeatedly I get my brain picked for consulting around plans and strategies,” one Black woman focus group participant said, “but when it’s time to actually make the ask, they don’t take me in the room.”

Assumptions About Lack of Qualifications and Experience

Several Black women survey respondents reported that they constantly face assumptions that they are underqualified and inexperienced in comparison to white and/or male colleagues. One Black woman respondent said that her CEO, a white woman, had made ineffective financial and programmatic decisions but received a raise from the board nonetheless. In contrast, the board assumed the Black woman respondent was ill-prepared for her job and gave her patronizing advice, in spite of her track record and expertise.

Numerous Black women noted that they must prove themselves in the face of negative assumptions about their skills, often by taking on a disproportionate share of work. This dynamic reflects research that many Black women feel they have to take on a “superhero” role in which they accomplish everything to prove they are qualified and skilled and shoulder additional stress and burden as a result.³² Black women also have to modulate how they prove themselves within the constraints of how others perceive them. As one survey respondent described, “I know that when I walk in the room I have to be the smartest colored woman in there but I can’t be forthcoming as there is a fine line between domineering because I am Black and then because I am a woman.”

The “Angry Black Woman” Stereotype

The “angry Black woman” stereotype was a common theme in the write-in responses and in focus groups. Black women described that their emotions were disproportionately seen as aggressive or angry while white colleagues who expressed passion or anger did not receive the same reaction. “Our passion is ‘being aggressive,’” one focus group participant described, “whereas their passion is ‘truly genuine passion’ and they ‘truly mean well.’”

As a result of these stereotypes, the Black women in our survey and focus groups—and in other documented research in this area—engage in a great deal of emotional labor to regulate their responses to others and manage how others perceive them.³³ One Black woman executive director in New York said she has to “spend a lot of time trying to make people comfortable. That wastes my time, because I am credible.”



I’ve learned that as a Black woman I don’t get to show anger of any kind or people will react to me as if I were violent. Many times when there are things I should be standing up for I have to wait and depend on my white colleagues to take that on so I can protect myself. While there are many white colleagues that understand and support me in this way it means that I have to delay responses... and also my expertise in certain areas isn’t highlighted.

~ BLACK WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

Latinx Women

Latinx women (22%) were the second largest group of women of color responding to the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey. Of the 38% of Latinx women (98 respondents) who said race and/or gender had a negative impact on their career advancement, 72 offered further explanations in write-in responses.

The most common themes Latinx women shared in write-in responses were inequitable salaries; being passed over or overlooked for job opportunities, promotions or other recognition; stereotypes regarding ethnic and gender identity, language, and/or accent; and being tokenized and burdened with representing their communities. Research on Latinx women in the workplace documents that the pressure of coping with discrimination of this kind creates emotional stress for those who experience it and contributes to career stagnation.³⁴

Passed Over or Overlooked

Several Latinx women said they were passed over for promotions in favor of those with comparable or less experience, including white men, men of color, and white women. Some described negative interview experiences. For example, one survey respondent was being considered for a position and perceived immediate discomfort from the interviewer. "At first sight the woman interviewing me was turned off," she wrote. "I know I interview well and dress appropriately. I also noticed there were not any other employees of color at this organization."

In a Portland, OR, focus group, one woman shared that her organization didn't have any Latinx women or men in the senior executive team. Instead, Latinx women and men in the organization were in "entry-level positions, administrative positions, receptionists...." She described this phenomenon as "reinforcing the narrative that all my community is good for is clean up."

Stereotypes About Ethnicity, Gender, Language, and Accent

Latinx women survey respondents faced stereotypes within their organizations regarding a variety of aspects of their identities. Latinx women found that colleagues and superiors assumed they were underqualified and unskilled. One woman said that "People tend to downplay my accomplishments... or not take me seriously... I know I am more than capable of doing something, but [I] am seen as less than because of my gender and ethnic background." Some women also shared that, despite their professional dress, they were "mistaken" for "the maid" or for clients being served by the organization.



I began work three months prior to a male colleague in a similar role. Both exceeded expectations in our positions. I had shown significant ROI in my performance and received similar marks on our performance reviews. When a senior position opened up, he was recommended for a promotion and encouraged to apply. I was neither encouraged nor recommended for the position, though I was equally, if not more so, qualified for the role.

*~ LATINX WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT*

I feel that people asked me to be in the room with funders because I was the program manager of color. ...I was frustrated about it because I knew why they wanted me to be there but at the same time I'm not shy... and since you're in the room they cannot say "be quiet," right? You make your point. Maybe being a little courageous in saying what you think and not what they hope... you say. I felt used as a token. But I was in the room at the same time.

*~ LATINX WOMAN
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT
PORTLAND, OR*

Survey respondents who spoke Spanish or had “an accent” described being stereotyped as unintelligent. One wrote that some colleagues “refused to engage in conversations because I have an accent when I speak.”

A survey respondent noted that to overcome these stereotypes, she must go above and beyond expectations. She must “be extra prepared, extra articulate and... substantiate and explain my logic more so than white and/or male counterparts.” Respondents also had to restrain their emotional reactions to these stereotypes to avoid repercussions. In comparison, one respondent wrote that her white counterparts expressed negative feelings openly without consequences.

Tokenized and Burdened with Representing Community

Latinx women survey respondents described being “tokenized” in their organizations. As noted earlier, tokenism can create opportunities for advancement, but many Latinx women respondents expressed frustration about being hired to illustrate that the organization was diverse, only to find that colleagues and superiors did not actually value their opinions and contributions. More than a third (35%) of Latinx women survey respondents indicated that they “often” or “always” faced the challenge and frustration of “being called on to represent a community,” a frustration that was raised by several women in focus groups as well. This echoes a key finding from the first *Race to Lead* report, which noted that respondents of color often experienced the burden of “representing” as an additional unpaid and unrecognized expectation of their work.



I was hired to represent all Latino/as, was given diversity awards, and was asked to speak for the whole community, but was given... no support, was paid significantly less than my peers even though I was supposedly an asset as one of the only Latinas in a position of power.

~ LATINX WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

Native American/Indigenous Women

Native American women were 3% of the women of color participating in the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey. Most of these respondents (68%) worked in POC-identity-based organizations. The majority (63%) were in senior management/CEO positions, which suggests alignment with research indicating that almost two thirds of Native American nonprofits are led by women.³⁵

To supplement the limited survey data, Building Movement Project conducted three interviews with Native American women working in the nonprofit sector. Two women worked for organizations serving local and indigenous communities; one was an executive director and the other a middle manager. The third interviewee was a middle manager in a large non-identity-based nonprofit organization.

Ability to Advance in Identity-Based and Non-Identity-Based Organizations

All three interviewees said their race, gender, and understanding of Native American communities have helped their career advancement. One described how her identity made her a trusted figure for the community-based organization where she worked. Her organization identifies potential for leadership “because you are a community member,” she said. “Because you are a strong woman of color. Because you have connection to a culture and tradition.” Another interviewee was hired full-time at her non-identity-based organization in part because of her success at connecting the organization to Native communities during a leadership program placement.

Although identity-based organizations seem to provide opportunities for advancement and leadership of Native American women, one interviewee worried about her future prospects for employment in the rest of the nonprofit sector. She expressed concern that non-identity-based organizations or those serving other communities of color might think the Native community is “too small” for her identity and experience to be of value.

All three interviewees said the sector could do more to recruit, retain, and promote Native American women—and that the sector has a responsibility to do so. People “hold the nonprofit sector at a higher level” because of the nature of its work, one respondent said, and “they need to be doing better than the general public anyway, and they’re not yet.”

“

[I have experienced] very stereotypical comments where I’m like, “Wait a minute guys, I thought we were all on the same team in terms of not doing that stuff.” Granted it’s in an area where there are not a lot of Native people... I know that they don’t know what I know, but at the same time, when you’re at an event to promote diversity and I’m being singled out for a lot of stereotypical comments.... It hurt my feelings, it scared me, it was weird. But it also made me know that, okay, our work is not anywhere close to done.

- NATIVE AMERICAN WOMAN
INTERVIEWEE

Lack of Cultural Understanding in the Nonprofit Sector

The two interviewees who work for Native-focused organizations noted that they encounter a lack of cultural understanding when they engage with other nonprofit organizations and staff. One described colleagues at other organizations asking uncomfortable questions, and noted a pattern of insensitive comments, particularly from men of color. “Oh wow, you’re Native,” she recalled hearing at a diversity event for her field. “Where are you from? Do you live on a reservation?”

The interviewee working for a non-identity-based organization noted that her colleagues—more than 85% of whom are white—are generally open-minded but still “have work to do on [racial] issues.” She said it was particularly daunting to ask for time off for ceremonial duties, an experience that other interviewees said they’d heard echoed by other Native people in non-identity-based organizations.

Native American Women “Representing” in Partnership Work

Both interviewees who worked for identity-based organizations described problematic partnerships in which large, well-resourced organizations—such as hospitals and universities—tend to dominate over Native community groups and reinforce power imbalances. One interviewee said her organization participates in collaborative work to learn from peers but is frustrated that those efforts aren’t reciprocated by larger and non-Native-focused groups. “There is a lot of privilege,” she said, “and there is still a lot of [feeling that] they’re here to educate us.” The other interviewee described being excluded from events with partners or, when included, being tasked with doing “all the Native stuff” including stereotypical or ceremonial tasks—like finding a drum group—that are not related to the actual work the organization does in the Native community.



[Women in non-identity-based organizations] have a hard time explaining or taking off [for ceremonial duties and celebrations]. [They are] too scared to ask because they haven’t had necessarily good experiences with their organizations.... There’s definitely a huge difference if you’re working outside of an identity-based organization.

~ NATIVE AMERICAN WOMAN
INTERVIEWEE

Transgender Women of Color

Three individuals identified as transgender women of color in the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey. To supplement this limited data, Building Movement Project conducted three interviews with trans women of color working in the nonprofit sector.

Two of the three interviewees held middle management positions involving outreach to the trans community. A third interviewee was a senior director of programs for the transgender community in an LGBTQ-focused organization. All three interviewees were the only trans woman of color at their organization at the time of the interviews.

Factors that Supported and Hurt Career Advancement

All three interviewees had been mentored throughout their career. One participated in a leadership program for transgender women of color and appreciated having access to mentors with racial- and gender-specific advice, particularly because previous white cisgender mentors had not been able to understand her unique challenges and offer meaningful advice. A second interviewee engaged in leadership training that was focused on trans women but was race-neutral. A third primarily was mentored outside the job and was reluctant to pursue internal mentors because of apprehension that candid comments about challenges or problems would get back to supervisors. For that interviewee, the process of sharing her experiences with mentors, usually white cisgender lesbian or gay individuals, seemed to have helped them develop a shared understanding of the need for more inclusiveness in the LGBTQ movement. "These are people that care for me, and that are very close friends," she said. "And there's often the realization among most of us of - we need to diversify this movement, basically. This is a problem. Even my mentors do acknowledge that... it is something we need to work on."

All three interviewees drew on their track record of success at work to advocate for their advancement, and one described being "hungry" and pushing herself to apply for positions she might not appear to be qualified for, describing this strategy as modeled on "the approach that these white men take when it comes to job applications."

Two participants indicated that past interactions with the criminal justice system have been a barrier to advancement. The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey found that 20% of survey respondents had some type of experience with the "underground economy" in order to earn a living.³⁶ Those in the "underground economy" were more likely to have previously been "fired or forced to resign from a job, not hired for a job that they applied for, and/or denied a promotion."



How about creating an environment where we don't have to conform to your expectations... [At my organization] they're looking for [degrees] and those who are... "professionals." But what defines professionalism?

- TRANS WOMAN OF COLOR
INTERVIEWEE

Two of the three participants also felt that—at least early in their careers—lower educational attainment may have held them back. One was promoted after she earned her undergraduate degree.

The third interviewee attributed her success to having a well-respected advanced degree. “This is a space that values... degrees more than it necessarily should, since that is not necessarily representative of your ability to run a nonprofit,” she said. “I would say that snowballs into the lack of mentorship, into lack of access, and so forth, so that by the time you’re getting to the more rarefied circles, it is that: it is rarefied, it is whiter, it is more cisgender, and so on.”

Tokenization and Unwelcoming Organizational Climates

The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey revealed that 15% of respondents were verbally, physically, or sexually attacked or assaulted in the workplace and 23% experienced some other type of abuse “such as being told by their employer to present as the wrong gender in order to keep their job or having employers or coworkers share private information about their transgender status with others without permission.”³⁷ BMP’s interviews with trans women of color revealed some similar negative experiences in the nonprofit sector.

One interviewee described blatant workplace aggressions. “I have been misgendered, I have [been] verbally assaulted, and the person who has done this is another person of color but is someone who is male... and someone who has a promotion after they misgendered me and verbally assaulted me,” she said. Another interviewee convinced her LGBTQ organization to add protections for “gender identity” to the employee handbook. But she felt her supervisor generally ignored her ideas and listened to white cisgender men instead. “Because I was a trans woman, or because of the color of my skin,” she described, “he was very intolerant.”

One interviewee felt tokenized by being called on to speak for the organization on issues related to race and trans issues. “I feel like they’re using me as a marketing strategy, or any time something comes up [related to my race] or any time something comes up transgender, they push me to the media and be like, ‘Go. Go for it, girl,’” she said. She felt anxious about being pushed into the spotlight in this way and feared she might “say the wrong thing and they’ll disagree with it or something.”

Interviewees had come to the conclusion or heard others note that it is easier for trans men and white transgender women to find employment and advance in the nonprofit sector. One observed that transgender women of color are “more visible and probably actually doing more of the work” while “trans men might be invisible and hidden behind the scenes only because they’re... running the group.” Two interviewees observed that trans women of color are perceived as “angry” and suggested this stereotype may



I feel like a lot of times, I have to be the token. I have to be the mascot. I feel like I have to be the one to tell them how to do, what to do, where to do it. And although I do have a staff of other trans women, and other trans people who can step up to the role, they don’t want to do it. They’re not getting paid to do it. There’s no commission off of it or anything, so why would they wanna do it? Yet I feel like if I don’t do it, nobody’s gonna do it correctly.

~ TRANS WOMAN OF COLOR
INTERVIEWEE

Employers are willing to hire trans masculine folk before a trans feminine person and it’s all about appearance.

~ TRANS WOMAN OF COLOR
INTERVIEWEE

contribute to organizations' apparent preferences for white transgender women. "She's bitter, she's angry," one interviewee said, describing the perception of trans women of color that hurts their chances for jobs or promotions. "She's going to come in here and she's going to like stir the pot the wrong way."

The third interviewee expressed concern that the challenges trans women of color face in the nonprofit sector are magnified by the likelihood that they also have less of a safety net. "You're more likely to not have supportive family, you're a lot less likely to have a nest egg or parents that will send you money if things go wrong for a few months," she said. "So there are bigger consequences to losing your job without having another one lined up. That makes it harder for people to rock the boat by asking for a higher salary, or speaking their mind, or basically being honest and advocating for themselves. You're more pressured to keep your head down."



[As] a trans person of color ... you will do whatever is needed because you need this job, you know? So it's like the climate is more hostile than it is for someone who is not of color, who is white.

~ TRANS WOMAN OF COLOR
INTERVIEWEE

Call to Action



Many women of color in the nonprofit sector are highly skilled and want to lead, but the survey findings and focus group reflections shared in this report identify significant obstacles and patterns of everyday discrimination that women of color encounter in the nonprofit workplace.

The stories shared in survey responses and focus groups reflected deep frustrations among many women of color with navigating how others perceive them. Some women of color reported that their ideas or comments were ignored only for men to receive credit for the very same contributions, or recalled training newer white colleagues who then advanced quickly in their careers while leadership potential of women of color was overlooked or ignored. On the other end of the spectrum of negative attention, several women of color described the discomfort of intense and constant scrutiny about their presence and their capabilities, and being persistently stereotyped as unqualified, inexperienced, or unskilled. Many women of color described working harder to overcome these barriers; not only is this an unfair burden, no amount of individual effort can be expected to translate into positive outcomes when an organization's social landscape is fraught with bias. The nonprofit sector must make systemic changes to ensure a fair and supportive workplace environment for all nonprofit workers, particularly for women of color.

The Building Movement Project offers the following recommendations to address the challenges women of color face in the nonprofit sector.



SYSTEMS CHANGE

Leverage the power of philanthropy. The philanthropic sector has a critical role to play in pushing the nonprofit sector to treat women of color more equitably. It can start by examining its own funding practices. Organizations focused on women and girls of color receive only 2% of foundation funding.³⁸ Foundations like the NoVo Foundation and Ms. Foundation for Women have shifted strategies to support more organizations led by women of color.³⁹ Other funders should increase investments in organizations focused on and/or led by women of color which will help elevate the leadership, perspective, and influence of women of color across the nonprofit sector at large. Funders should also encourage their grantees to embark on a race and gender equity



I perceive that I am often not taken seriously in community spaces, especially in public policy situations. My delivery is often seen as being aggressive, and my ideas aren't seen as being credible. People, especially men, talk down to me and only hear my ideas when they're repeated by other people. I think it limits my ability to advance my goals and get the work done.

~ ARAB-AMERICAN WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT

journey. One important way foundations have signaled that diversity is important is by collecting data on the racial composition of staff and boards through the grant application process, but too often diversity questions either fail to consider gender and gender identity or separate the reporting and analysis of race and gender. Requesting diversity information in a format that integrates race, gender, and gender identity of board and staff would provide more meaningful insight into the critical role that women of color play in many organizations. Once funders collect this data, they should also demonstrate to organizations that the diversity information informs their strategy and funding decisions.

Advocate for enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. The nonprofit sector needs to be held accountable when it is falling short, just like any other employer. While the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is tasked with “enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person’s race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age,”⁴⁰ the Commission has been continually underfunded, resulting in the loss of critical frontline staff and a delay for claims that has stretched to almost one year. In Spring 2018 the EEOC received a \$16M budget increase, the first in eight years.⁴¹ The nonprofit sector should advocate for the EEOC to receive more appropriations to investigate charges of discrimination—even if this means uncomfortably turning the lens on itself.



ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Address internal biases. The nonprofit sector’s professed values of equity and inclusion do not inevitably lead to organizations that are free from discrimination and harassment. A number of women of color reported dealing with gendered racism in their nonprofit workplaces.

Organizations should address both conscious and so-called “unconscious” biases that affect the mentoring, feedback, evaluations, and overall treatment of women of color. These steps toward equity cannot be limited to anti-bias training, which is necessary but insufficient. Nonprofit organizations also need robust and equitable human resources policies and systems that will set an expectation that racism, sexism, anti-trans bias, etc. will not be tolerated, and also enforce real consequences for staff who violate those expectations.

Pay women of color fairly and create transparency around pay scales to expose inequality. Women are paid less than men generally and women of color are especially impacted by pay inequities. Organizations should establish transparency regarding pay scales to ensure that individuals with similar credentials and experiences are similarly compensated.⁴²



I had a white supervisor who said some explicitly racist things to me, which I attempted to report. My report was diverted several times, but I persisted. When an investigation was finally undertaken—over a year later—the investigation centered on discrediting me. I received a negative evaluation and lost my raise that year because I was “not a team player.”

~ BLACK WOMAN
SURVEY RESPONDENT



INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

Create peer support affinity groups for women of color. In the *Race to Lead* data, women of color were the least likely (33%) to report that they had received support through “peer support group meetings,” compared to 37% of white women, 42% of men of color, and 47% of white men. The focus groups BMP conducted demonstrated eagerness among women of color in the nonprofit sector to connect and support each other. Focus group participants often discussed how peers can be effective mentors, and many committed to staying in contact with each other to do just that.

Peer support does not take place by happenstance: it must be intentionally structured and supported. A few focus group participants and interviewees suggested that funders sponsor women of color peer support groups. Several industries have race- or gender-based affinity groups to encourage, support, and advocate for the inclusion and advancement of the constituency they represent, and those groups could serve as a model for similar associations for women of color in the nonprofit sector. Peer support should be understood as a supplement to—not a substitute for—in-organization mentoring opportunities provided by supervisors and other senior staff, and increased grant investments in women of color-led organizations.

Endnotes



- 1 Garcia, Sandra. (2017, October 20). The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html>
- 2 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).
- 3 The survey was conducted between March and May 2016, and a total of 4,385 respondents were included in the overall national analysis. Due to rounding some percentages that appear in the figures throughout this report may not precisely reflect the absolute numbers or total 100%.
- 4 For example, Kimberlé Crenshaw cites an employment discrimination lawsuit with Black women as plaintiffs. The defendant used the employment of women generally as evidence that discrimination had not occurred. The plaintiffs countered that Black women were not hired. Similarly, another lawsuit was dismissed based on the argument that Black and white men had similar employment outcomes. Here again, outcomes for Black women were invisible. Both arguments left out the racial and gender dimensions of Black women's identities. See Crenshaw, Kimberlé, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics* [1989] <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf>
- 5 See Michelle Jay (2009) on Black women school administrators. One of the themes that emerged was "hypervisibility/invisibility." Hypervisibility came with intense "scrutiny." Jay, M. (November 01, 2009). *Race-ing through the school day: African-American educators' experiences with race and racism in schools*. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22, 6, 671-685.
- 6 See the *Race to Lead* report for more on how the survey was distributed. <http://racetolead.org/race-to-lead/>
- 7 Note: Individuals were asked to choose a gender from the following categories: female, male, transgender (woman to man), transgender (man to woman), or "other." There were 106 individuals who selected transgender or "other." Of this group, about two-thirds were gender non-conforming or another identity. Just five individuals selected the "transgender (man to woman)" category. There may be other transgender women who filled out the survey and selected "female" as their gender identity. This report includes additional interviews with trans women of color to supplement the limited data.
- 8 The demographics for women of color were as follows: 35% Black, 22% Latinx, 21% Multiracial or other race, 19% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% Native American. The demographics for men of color were as follows: 36% Black, 3% Latinx, 13% Asian, 16% Multiracial or other race, 3% Native American.
- 9 Differences in this report are statistically significant unless otherwise indicated.
- 10 The differences between women of color reporting positive career impacts of gender in POC- or immigrant-identity-based organizations versus other identity-based organizations was not statistically significant.

- 11 The differences between women of color reporting negative career impact of gender in POC- or immigrant-identity-based organizations versus other identity-based organizations was not statistically significant. Among Black women in POC- or immigrant-identity-based organizations, 40% said that gender had a negative impact on career advancement, compared to 35% in other identity-based organizations (e.g. women's or LGBTQ organizations) and 24% in non-identity-based organizations. This finding was statistically significant.
- 12 Gibson, K. J., Darity, W. A., & Myers, S. L. (January 01, 1998). Revisiting occupational crowding in the United States: A preliminary study. *Feminist Economics* (print), 73-95.
- 13 Institute for Women's Policy Research (nd). Pay Equity and Discrimination. <https://iwpr.org/issue/employment-education-economic-change/pay-equity-discrimination/>
- 14 Participants' household arrangements were not explored in the survey or focus groups but may have an impact on frustrations regarding salary.
- 15 Survey participants selected from broad salary ranges in \$20,000 increments.
- 16 Wingfield, A. H (February 01, 2009). Racializing the Glass Escalator: Reconsidering Men's Experiences with Women's Work. *Gender & Society*, 23, 1, 5-26.
- 17 Jay, M. (November 01, 2009). Race-ing through the school day: African-American educators' experiences with race and racism in schools. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 22, 6, 671-685.
- 18 While pecuniary benefits may be narrow, mentors also help employees adapt to the workplace culture. Johnson (1998) found that Black women mentors help mentees learn the "unspoken rules" of the workplace. Giscombe and Mattis' (2002) study of Black, Latinx, and Asian women in corporate America found that "supportive relationships" with supervisors were positively associated with retention. In that study, women of color counted mentoring as one of the top three factors that might help them move up (along with high-profile assignments and exceptional work efforts). Similarly, they counted lack of networks, mentors, and same-race role models as major obstacles to advancement. For more information, see:
- Allen, T. D. (January 01, 2004). Career benefits associated with mentoring for protégés: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89, 1, 127-136. APA (6th ed.).
 - Eby, L. T., Allen, T. D., Evans, S. C., Ng, T., & DuBois, D. L. (April 01, 2008). Does mentoring matter? A multidisciplinary meta-analysis comparing mentored and non-mentored individuals. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72, 2, 254-267.
 - Johnson (1998) as cited in Hansman, C.A. (Edi.) (2002). *Critical perspectives on mentoring: trends and issues*. Columbus, OH: ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, College of Education, the Ohio State University.
 - Giscombe, K., & Mattis, M. C. (April 01, 2002). Leveling the Playing Field for Women of Color in Corporate Management: Is the Business Case Enough? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 37, 1, 103-119.
- 19 Only in Portland, OR, did the majority of women of color focus group participants describe receiving internal mentoring.
- 20 See Endnote 18.
- 21 Researchers have also demonstrated bias in experimental settings for women in general and people of color. For example, employers tend to evaluate Black workers in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes. For more information, see:
- Prendergast, C., & Topel, R. (April 01, 1993). Discretion and bias in performance evaluation. *European Economic Review*, 37, 355-365.
 - Greenhaus, J. H., Parasuraman, S., & University of Western Ontario. (1990). *Job performance attributions, career advancement prospects, and performance-contingent rewards: An examination of gender and race effects*. London, Ont.: National Centre for Management Research and Development, University of Western Ontario.
 - Wilson, G. (January 01, 2006). The rise of at-will employment and racial inequality in the public sector. *Sage Public Administration Abstracts*, 33, 3, 178.

- 22 Johnson, S. K., Murphy, S. E., Zewdie, S., & Reichard, R. J. (January 01, 2008). The strong, sensitive type: Effects of gender stereotypes and leadership prototypes on the evaluation of male and female leaders. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 106, 1, 39-60.
- 23 See also Durr, M., & Harvey, W. A. (January 01, 2011). Keep Your 'N' in Check: African-American Women and the Interactive Effects of Etiquette and Emotional Labor. *Critical Sociology*, 37, 5, 557-571 and Nixon, M. L., & Nixon, M. L. (December 01, 2017). Experiences of women of color university chief diversity officers. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 10, 4, 301-317.
- 24 Liang, J., & Peters-Hawkins, A. L. (February 01, 2017). "I Am More than What I Look Alike": Asian American Women in Public School Administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 53, 1, 40-69.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Many women of color who were executive directors wrote about issues with funders, including receiving less funding than others despite the success of their organizations. The upcoming *Race to Lead* report on the experience of CEOs and executive directors will explore these issues in more detail. To find out more, visit racetolead.org.
- 27 Walley-Jean (2009) empirically tested the "angry Black woman" stereotype and found that "contrary to the widespread image, African-American women in both age groups reported significantly less frequent angry feelings in situations where they may receive criticism, perceived disrespect, and negative evaluations (i.e., angry reaction). Furthermore, younger women reported a greater tendency to experience and suppress intense angry feelings rather than expressing them either physically or verbally." Walley-Jean, J. C. (October 29, 2009). Debunking the Myth of the "Angry Black Woman": An Exploration of Anger in Young African-American Women. *Black Women, Gender & Families*, 3, 2, 68-86.
- 28 Cottingham, M. D., Johnson, A. H., & Erickson, R. J. (October 10, 2017). "I Can Never Be Too Comfortable": Race, Gender, and Emotion at the Hospital Bedside. *Qualitative Health Research*, 28, 1, 145-158.
- 29 See Bertrand, M. and Mullainathan, S. (2004). Are Emily and Greg More Employable Than Lakisha and Jamal?: A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination. *American Economic Review*, 94(4):991-1013. Pager, D. (2003). The Mark of a Criminal Record. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 108(5):937-975.
- 30 Butler, P. (January 01, 2013). Black Male Exceptionalism? The Problems and Potential of Black Male-Focused Interventions. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 10, 2, 485-511. See: <https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2323&context=facpub>
- 31 There are many downsides to tokenization. Jackson et al. (1995) interviewed more than 160 Black leaders across the United States, including executives, members of Congress, high-ranking military officers, and HBCU presidents. They found people in tokenizing positions experienced higher levels of depression and anxiety. Leaders in workplaces with high representations of Black people had lower depression and anxiety. Jackson, P.B., Thoits, P.A., Taylor, H.F. (1995). Composition of the Workplace and Psychological Well-Being: The Effects of Tokenism on America's Black Elite. *Social Forces*, 74, 2, 543.
- 32 Lewis, J. A., Mendenhall, R., Harwood, S. A., & Browne, H. M. (March 01, 2013). Coping with Gendered Racial Microaggressions among Black Women College Students. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17, 1, 51-73. Also see Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007b). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62, 271-286.
- 33 See also Durr, M., & Harvey, W. A. (January 01, 2011). Keep Your 'N' in Check: African American Women and the Interactive Effects of Etiquette and Emotional Labor. *Critical Sociology* 37, 5, 557-571 and Nixon, M. L., & Nixon, M. L. (December 01, 2017). Experiences of women of color university chief diversity officers. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 10, 4, 301-317.
- 34 Amaro et al. (1987) found that Latinx professionals experiencing discrimination were more likely than those who had not to experience psychological distress. Amaro, H., Johnson, J., & Russo, N. F. (1987). Family and work predictors of psychological well-being among Hispanic women professionals. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- 35 Foxworth, R. (2016). Native American Women, Leadership and the Native Nonprofit Sector. First Nations Leadership Institute. https://www.firstnations.org/knowledge_center/download/native-american-women-leadership-and-native-american-nonprofit-sector
- 36 National Center for Transgender Equality. (2016). The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (USTS). <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Travers, J. (2018). Inside Philanthropy. Ripple Effect: A Foundation Looks to Women and Girls of Color to Take the Lead. <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2018/8/13/ripple-effect-a-foundation-looks-to-women-and-girls-of-color-to-take-the-lead>
- 39 See NoVo Foundation (2017, April 13). NoVo Foundation Launches Strategy to Support and Deepen the Movement for Girls of Color in the United States and Travers, J. (2018). Inside Philanthropy. Ripple Effect: A Foundation Looks to Women and Girls of Color to Take the Lead. <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2018/8/13/ripple-effect-a-foundation-looks-to-women-and-girls-of-color-to-take-the-lead>
- 40 U.S. EEOC (nd). About Us. <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/>
- 41 Clafas, J. (2018). Time.com. A \$16 Million Win for #MeToo and Time's Up Was Slipped into Trump's Budget. <http://time.com/money/5221146/metoo-eeoc-funding-increase/>
- 42 See Herrera, T. (2018). *The New York Times*. Why You Should Tell Your Co-Workers How Much Money You Make. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/31/smarter-living/pay-secrecy-national-labor-rights-act.html>



Building Movement Project

For more information, please visit
Building Movement Project at
www.buildingmovement.org
www.racetolead.org

or contact us at
info@buildingmovement.org



2019