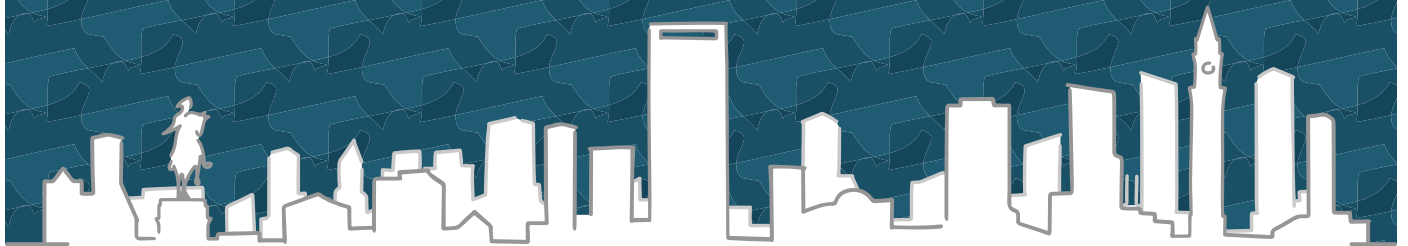


# ***The Burden of Bias in the Bay State:***

## The Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap in Massachusetts



**RACE  
TO LEAD**



An initiative of  
Building Movement Project

# Acknowledgements

Jen Douglas, an independent researcher, authored this report for the Building Movement Project (BMP). Tessa Constantine, Research Analyst, analyzed the data and provided editorial support along with BMP's Co-Directors, Frances Kunreuther and Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, who also facilitated the focus groups. In addition, Ofronama Biu, former Senior Research Associate, and Catherine Foley, Communications and Operations Associate, provided critical support to this research effort. Julia DiLaura edited this report.

BMP thanks everyone who completed the survey and participated in focus groups. Thanks also go to the teams at TSNE MissionWorks, the Barr Foundation, and the Boston Foundation, who provided meeting space and recruitment support for the focus groups.



Building Movement Project

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# A Letter from the Barr and Boston Foundations

COVID-19 and the brutal murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery have made abundantly clear what happens when those in power do not represent and are not authentically connected to communities and the people living in them. The need to dismantle structural racism and center racial equity in everything we do continues with renewed urgency.

As two of the largest grantmakers in Greater Boston, the Barr Foundation and the Boston Foundation share a longstanding commitment to the vibrant nonprofit sector in our region, and we invest in leadership that is effective, representative and deeply connected. Both foundations also share the goal of increasing the number and influence of people of color leaders with firsthand experience and relationships of mutual trust and respect with the communities where they work. We know that such leaders can bring the clearest insights, the most relevant solutions, and the most effective and lasting impact.

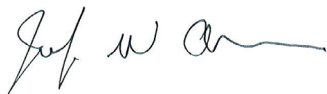
We commissioned the Building Movement Project to assess how our region is doing relative to that goal, what the barriers have been, and what progress requires of each of us. This report builds on and updates findings from earlier research efforts. Among its principal findings is that Greater Boston's nonprofit sector continues to face a substantial racial leadership gap. Furthermore, it asserts that, if we are not intentional about disrupting the biases, practices and policies that reinforce this gap, we can only expect more of the same.

Our region is rapidly becoming more diverse. The 2019 *Changing Faces of Greater Boston*\* report documents that people of color represent 32% of Greater Boston's population, and 56% of the City of Boston. Yet, according to the 2017 *Opportunity in Change*\*\* report, 85% of Greater Boston leaders identify as white. As you will see in the pages that follow, this discrepancy persists despite the finding that nonprofit professionals of color are every bit as qualified, in terms of experience and education, and are more likely to express interest in becoming organizational leaders than their white counterparts.

We are so grateful for the Building Movement Project's leadership, and for the dedication and generosity of the nonprofit organizations and leaders who participated in the survey and focus groups to inform our collective learning. The work before us is daunting but not unsurmountable and, as you will see in the report, by working together, real change is absolutely possible.

We hope you find this report helpful in working to advance racial equity.

In solidarity,



Jennifer Aronson, the Boston Foundation



Kimberly Haskins, the Barr Foundation



The Boston  
Foundation **tBf**



**Barr**  
Foundation

\* Boston Indicators, The Boston Foundation, UMass Boston, and the UMass Donahue Institute. *Changing Faces of Greater Boston*, 2019.

\*\* Third Sector New England, Boston Foundation. *Opportunity in Change: Preparing Boston for Leader Transitions and New Models of Nonprofit Leadership*, 2017.

# Introduction

The Building Movement Project's *Race to Lead* series investigates why there are so few leaders of color in the nonprofit sector and documents the challenges people of color face as they reach for and attain senior leadership roles in nonprofit organizations. In 2019, the Building Movement Project conducted an updated nationwide survey to assess the experiences of nonprofit staff compared to initial 2016 survey responses. This report, *The Burden of Bias in the Bay State: The Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap in Massachusetts*, is part of a series of regional reports and includes comparisons to the 2018 *Race to Lead* brief on the subset of respondents from Massachusetts who completed the survey in 2016.<sup>1</sup>

This report includes findings from the more than 5,200 people who responded to the 2019 survey nationwide, the subset of 417 respondents who work for organizations in Massachusetts, and six focus groups<sup>2</sup> that took place in Boston in January 2020. The report focuses on the following topics:

- 1 Data reported by Massachusetts nonprofit sector employees regarding both their aspirations to lead and the barriers they face to professional advancement;
- 2 Respondent experiences of and views on the engagement of Massachusetts nonprofits with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and the challenges faced by staff and CEOs of color related to DEI efforts in the state.

Overall, the findings show Massachusetts trending in a positive direction, with more leaders of color in executive director and chief executive officer (ED/CEO) positions than in the previous report on the Massachusetts nonprofit sector. The findings also reveal increased awareness among white respondents about the obstacles facing leaders of color. At the same time, focus group discussions illustrated the ongoing toll on people of color in the state's nonprofit sector. Leaders of color who take on the top role in historically white organizations often are taxed with responsibility to diversify boards of directors and senior management teams while also appeasing funders who might be concerned about their leadership and changes in organizational demographics. At the same time, white leaders who are genuinely interested in addressing DEI are often at a loss for how to make those intentions a reality. As a result, the labor toward achieving more equity in predominantly white nonprofit organizations and the sector at large often falls to people of color, while organizations led by people of color remain underfunded and undervalued.

## Inequality in Massachusetts

The results highlighted in this report are of particular interest given the stark inequality that characterizes the Boston metropolitan region, where 78% of the Massachusetts subsample's survey respondents work. During the past three decades, substantial population growth in Greater Boston has been almost entirely driven by immigrants of color, alongside declines in the region's white population.<sup>3</sup> As the region has diversified, it has also further stratified.<sup>4</sup> The region's income inequality consistently ranks among the highest in the country,<sup>5</sup> with Black and Latinx households earning the least.<sup>6</sup> Boston itself is among the most intensely gentrifying cities,<sup>7</sup> with people of color being pushed out to surrounding suburbs while some central city neighborhoods become increasingly white.<sup>8</sup> Political representation at all levels has remained disproportionately white,<sup>9</sup> philanthropic dollars continue to disproportionately flow to organizations with white leaders,<sup>10</sup> and key public institutions including the city's public education system have resisted structural changes to deliver more equitable services.<sup>11</sup>

As of this report's publication in October 2020, Black and Latinx communities in Greater Boston and throughout Massachusetts are particularly impacted by COVID-19, as a result of structural health and income inequality.<sup>12</sup> These concentrated effects of the pandemic underscore the need to support leaders of color and resource people of color-led community-based organizations.

## Demographics

The Massachusetts *Race to Lead* sample differs from the national sample in ways that are consistent with local demographics. As shown in *Figure 1*, 47% of Massachusetts respondents identify as people of color (POC), compared to 41% in the national sample. Black and Latinx respondents make up a larger portion of the Massachusetts sample (Black 19% and Latinx 11%) compared to the national respondents (14% Black and 10% Latinx), although not at a rate that equals the actual demographic representation within the Greater Boston region (26% and 20%, respectively),<sup>13</sup> where more than three-quarters (78%) of the sample works.<sup>14, 15</sup>

FIGURE 1 | RACE/ETHNICITY

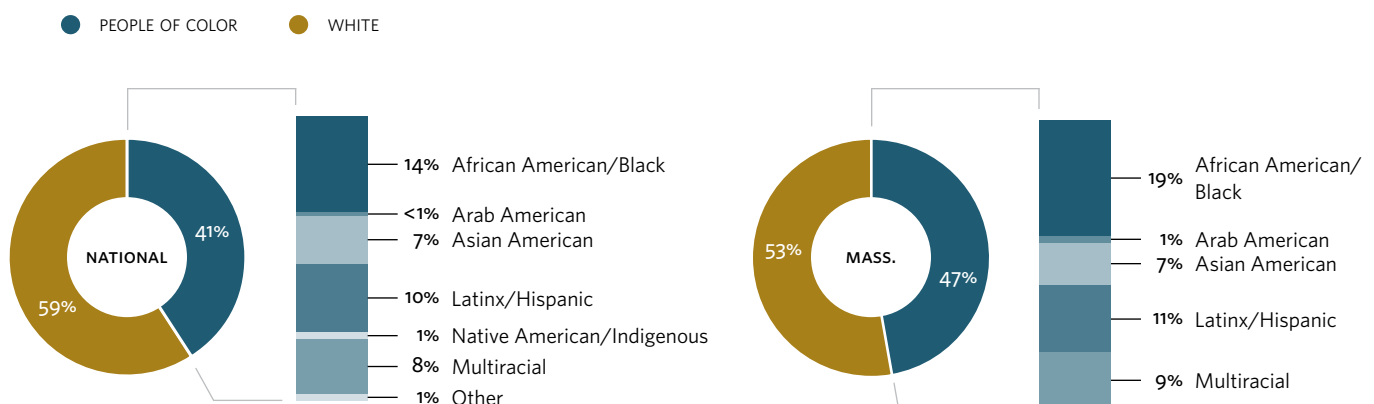
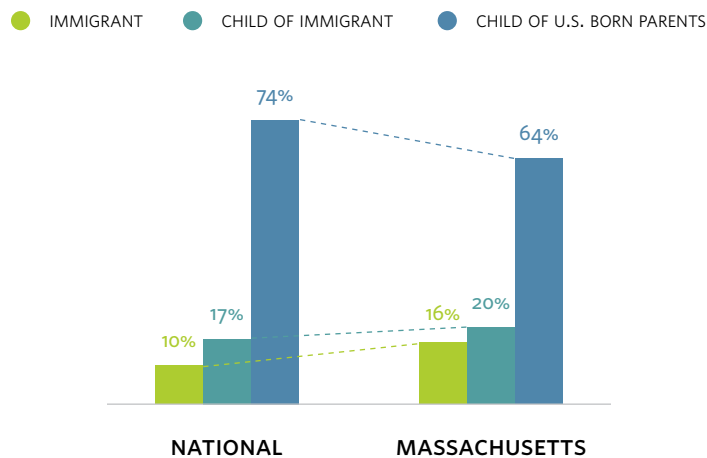


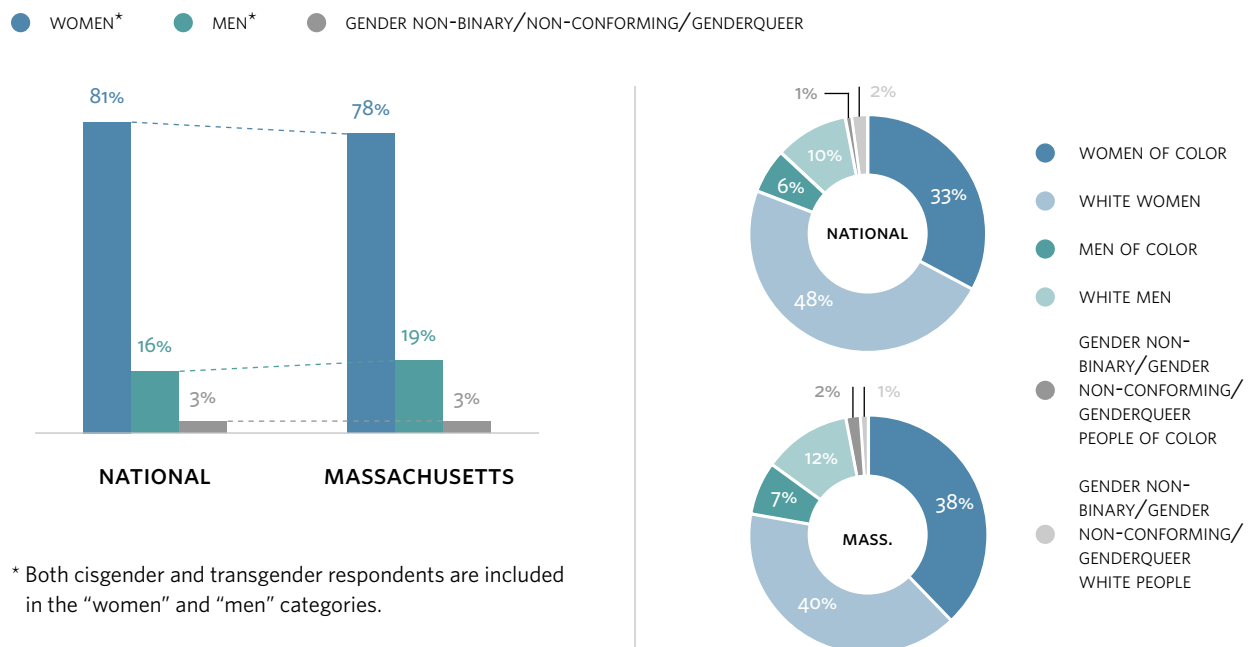
FIGURE 2 | IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE



Immigrants and children of immigrants comprise more than one third (36%) of respondents in Massachusetts, compared to slightly more than one quarter (27%) of national respondents, as shown in *Figure 2*. This difference is also consistent with population differences between the Greater Boston area and the United States at large.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of gender identity, as shown in *Figure 3*, the Massachusetts sample is more than three-quarters (78%) women – 40% women of color and 38% white women. Men are about one-fifth (19%) of the sample – 7% men of color and 12% white men. Three percent of survey respondents identified as gender non-binary/gender non-confirming/genderqueer; two-thirds of those respondents identify as people of color. Compared to national responses, the Massachusetts sample has somewhat fewer women (by 4 percentage points), more men (by 3 percentage points), and the same percentage of gender non-confirming respondents.<sup>17</sup> Almost one-quarter (24%) of Massachusetts respondents identified as LGBTQ+, a slightly larger percentage than in the national sample (21%).

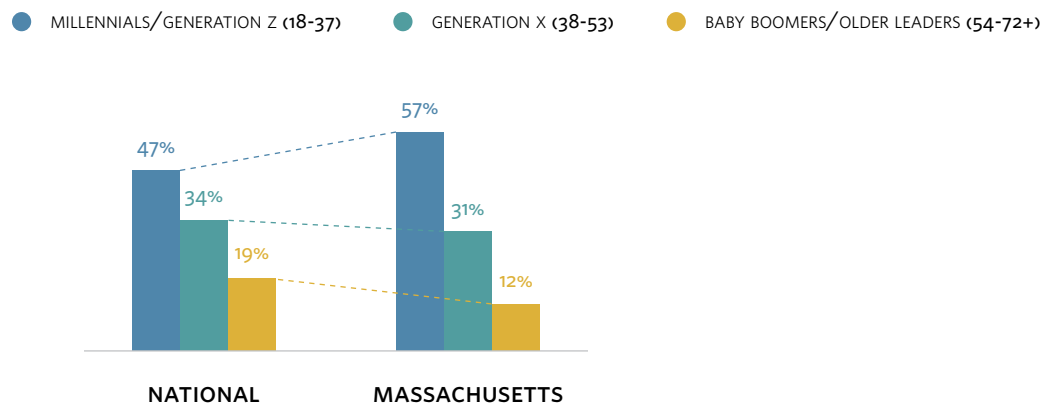
FIGURE 3 | GENDER IDENTITY



\* Both cisgender and transgender respondents are included in the “women” and “men” categories.

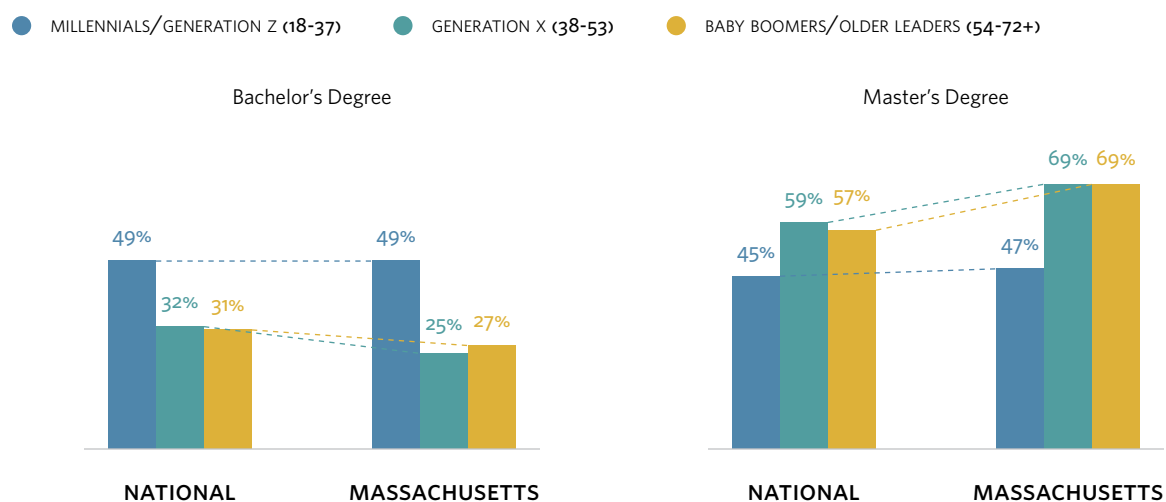
Young people comprise a substantially larger portion of the Massachusetts sample than the national sample. As shown in *Figure 4*, Millennial respondents comprise 57% of the Massachusetts sample compared to 47% of respondents nationwide, while Baby Boomers comprise just 12% of the state sample compared to 19% nationally. Gen X respondents comprise about one third in both samples (31% Massachusetts and 34% national). In Massachusetts and nationally, a large majority of Baby Boomer respondents were white; among other generations, the proportions of people of color and white survey respondents was substantially closer.<sup>18</sup>

**FIGURE 4 | AGE/GENERATION**



The educational background of Massachusetts respondents differs somewhat from the national sample. Bachelor's degrees are equally common, but a higher percentage of Massachusetts respondents have Master's degrees (57% Massachusetts compared to 52% national). As shown in *Figure 5*, this difference is also generational, with Master's degrees more prevalent for Generation X and Baby Boomer respondents.

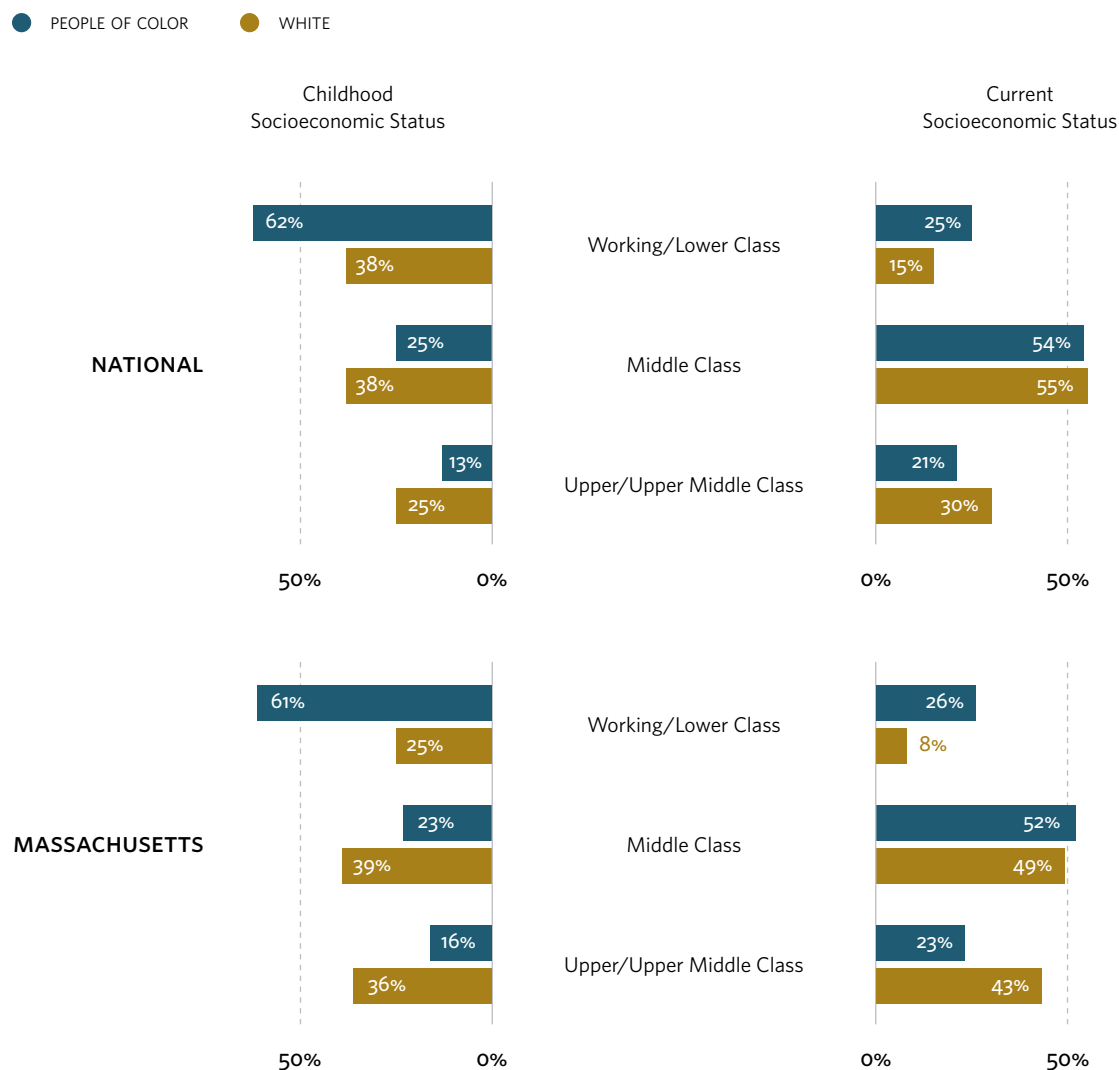
**FIGURE 5 | EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY AGE/GENERATION**





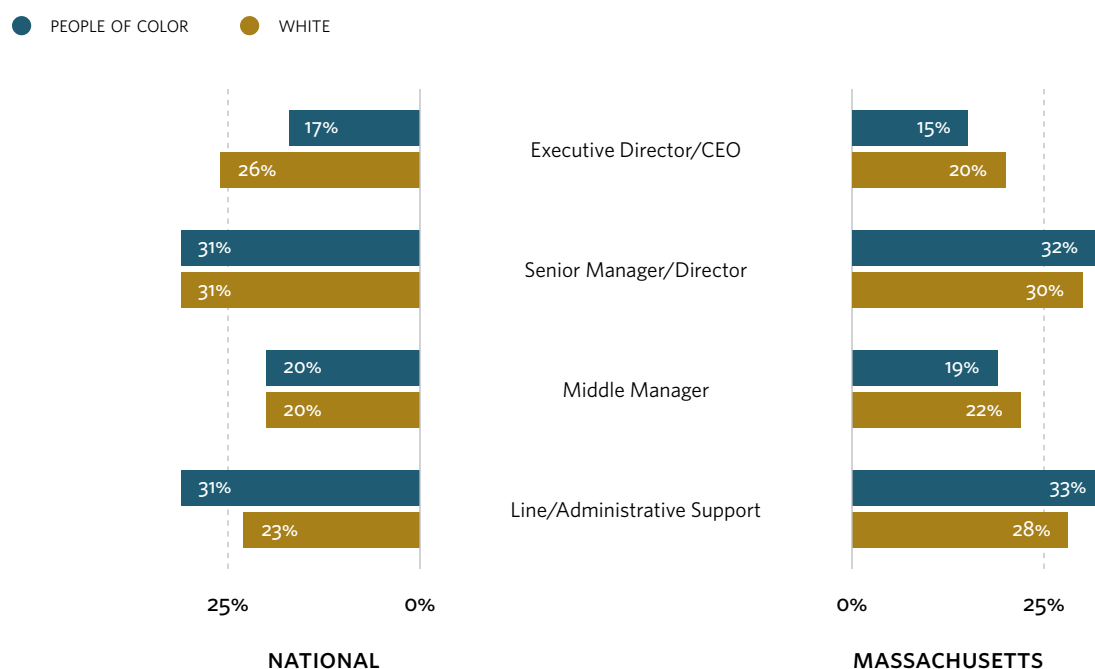
Survey respondents were asked to identify the socioeconomic status of their household both during childhood and at present. In Massachusetts, class diverges more sharply by race than in the national sample. As shown in *Figure 6*, 61% of respondents of color in Massachusetts grew up in working or lower class households. This was similar to response rates among people of color in the national sample (62%) and considerably higher than the percentage of white Massachusetts respondents who indicated the same (25%). Only a quarter (26%) of people of color in Massachusetts described their current socioeconomic status as working or lower class, also well above the rate for white respondents (8%). About half of Massachusetts respondents of all races described themselves as presently middle class (52% of people of color and 49% of white people), but white respondents are nearly twice as likely to identify as upper-middle or upper class. White respondents in Massachusetts were more affluent than white respondents nationally, with 43% currently identifying as upper or upper-middle class, thirteen percentage points greater than in the national sample (30%).

**FIGURE 6 | CHILDHOOD AND CURRENT SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS**



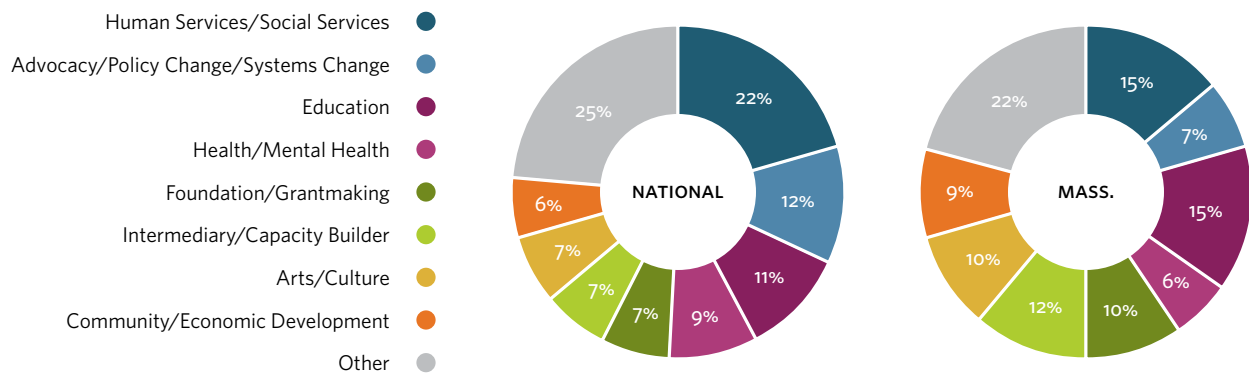
Among Massachusetts respondents, about one third (31%) hold a senior manager or director position and another third (30%) work in line, program, or administrative support roles. Compared to the national sample, a smaller proportion of respondents from Massachusetts were EDs/CEOs, which may correspond to the smaller presence of Baby Boomers in the state sample, for whom ED/CEO was the most common position. The Massachusetts sample also has a larger share of line, program, and administrative support staff, likely corresponding to the larger percentage of Millennials in the sample, for whom these positions are most common. People of color and white respondents in Massachusetts are distributed across roles at various levels similar to the national sample as shown in *Figure 7*.

**FIGURE 7 | CURRENT ROLE/POSITION**



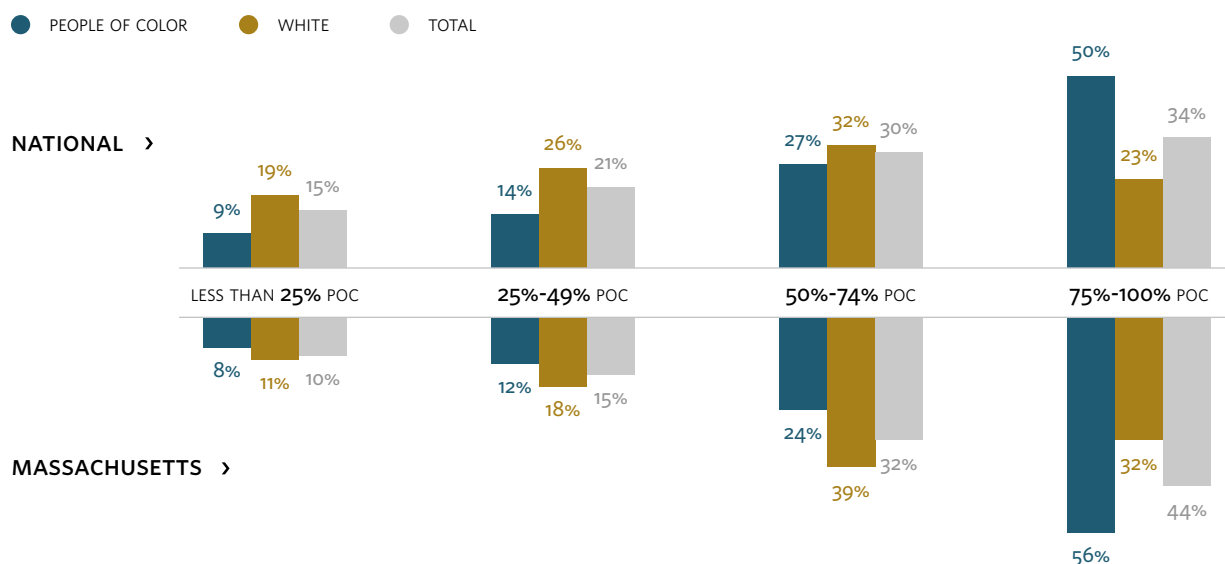
Respondents in both Massachusetts and the national sample work in a broad range of nonprofit organizations. In each sample, as shown in *Figure 8* on the next page, three-quarters of respondents were drawn from the same seven nonprofit focus areas out of 22 available options, but the percentages of respondents working in each area varies, with education (15%) and human/social services (15%) the most frequent activities for Massachusetts survey respondents, followed by organizations serving as intermediaries or capacity builders (12%). Almost 40% of respondents in both the national and state samples work for organizations with annual budgets between \$1-5 million. Massachusetts respondents are more likely than national respondents to work for organizations with budgets of more than \$5 million annually and less likely to work for groups with budgets less than \$1 million. Those differences may indicate that the Massachusetts sample reflects larger organizations on average or may simply reflect the higher labor and occupancy expenses in this comparatively high-cost region.

FIGURE 8 | RESPONDENT ORGANIZATIONS BY TYPE



Massachusetts respondents were more likely than national respondents to work for organizations that serve constituencies that are majority people of color. As shown in *Figure 9*, 44% of Massachusetts respondents work for organizations whose constituencies are three-quarters or more people of color, compared to 34% of respondents in the national sample who reported the same. White respondents in the state are also more likely than white respondents nationwide to work for organizations that serve majority-people of color constituencies: 71% of white respondents in Massachusetts reported that their organization served a constituency that was either more than half (39%) or more than three-quarters (32%) people of color. In comparison, 55% of white respondents in the national sample work for groups that serve majority-people of color constituencies. Massachusetts respondents of color are also slightly more likely than their national counterparts to work for organizations that serve people of color. The significant percentage of organizations for which people of color are the majority of the community served underscores the need to elevate leadership by people of color, both in Massachusetts and in the nonprofit sector at large.

FIGURE 9 | RACIAL COMPOSITION OF COMMUNITY SERVED

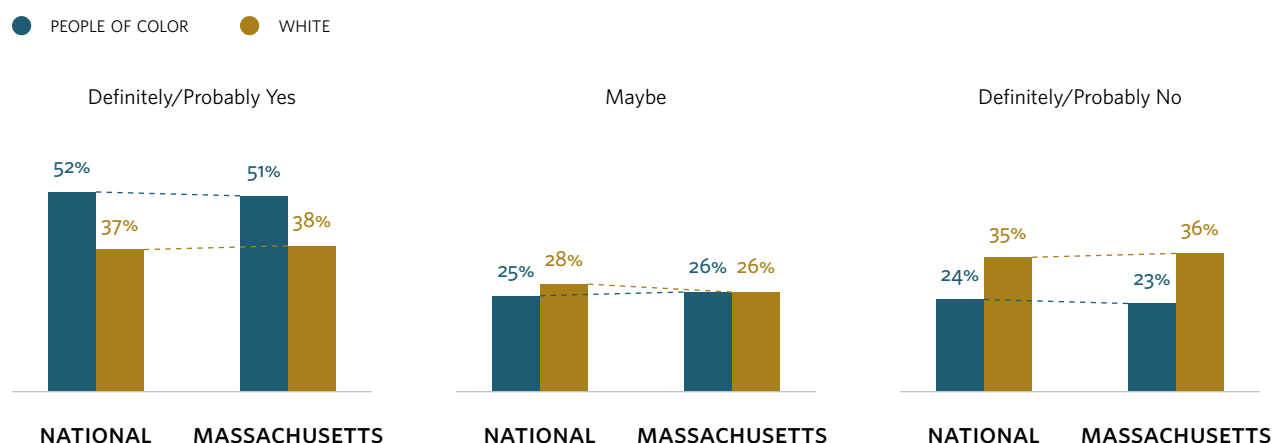


# Aspirations and Barriers to Leadership

One of the main findings in the national *Race to Lead* report series was that respondents of color were more interested in pursuing nonprofit leadership positions than their white counterparts. This holds true among Massachusetts survey respondents, among which people of color also aspired to leadership more frequently than their white counterparts.

As shown in *Figure 10*, more than half (51%) of Massachusetts respondents of color who were not already executive directors or chief executive officers (ED/CEOs) indicated that they *definitely* or *probably* wanted to pursue a nonprofit ED/CEO role, compared to 38% of white respondents. The gap between people of color and white respondents was slightly smaller in Massachusetts (13 percentage points) than nationally (15 percentage points). Compared to the findings in the previous *Race to Lead* brief on Massachusetts, the 2019 results show a slight increase in leadership aspirations among people of color (51% in 2019 compared to 49% in 2016), and a decline of interest in top positions among white respondents (38% in 2019 compared to 46% in 2016).

FIGURE 10 | LEVEL OF INTEREST IN TAKING A TOP LEADERSHIP ROLE (AMONG NON-EDS/CEOS)



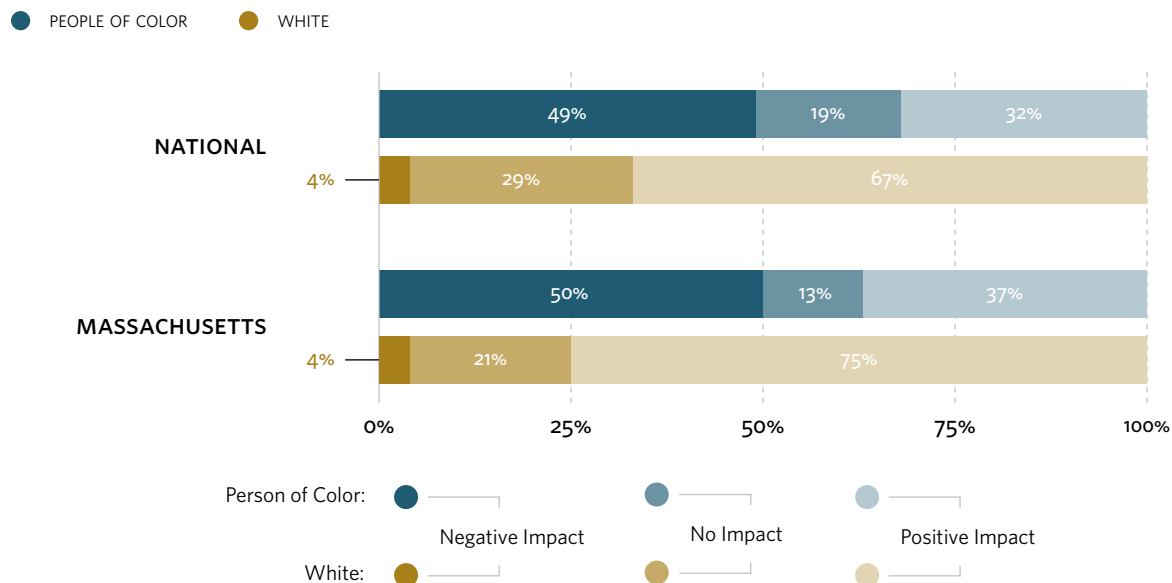
This interest in leadership persists despite racialized barriers to advancement experienced by people of color in the nonprofit sector. In Massachusetts, 41% of people of color reported that they *often* or *always* faced a lack of advancement opportunities, as shown in *Figure 11* on the next page, commensurate with response rates in the national sample. In comparison, among white respondents in Massachusetts, only 27% said they *often* or *always* faced a lack of opportunities for professional advancement.

FIGURE 11 | CHALLENGE/FRUSTRATION WITH FEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT



Half of people of color in Massachusetts (50%) and nationally (49%) said their race negatively affected their career advancement, compared to just 4% of white respondents from each sample, as shown in *Figure 12*. In Boston focus groups, participants across race described organizations that lack ladders, succession planning, or effective mentoring, as well as nonprofits in which favoritism and inconsistent standards yield unfair outcomes that have particularly negative impact for staff of color.

FIGURE 12 | IMPACT OF RACE ON CAREER ADVANCEMENT



Consistent with findings from the 2016 survey, more survey respondents of color in Massachusetts reported their race had a positive impact on their career (37%) compared to respondents of color nationally (32%). In focus groups with people of color for the 2018 *Race to Lead* brief on Massachusetts, participants hypothesized that people of color reported their race had a positive impact on their career advancement because they

may have initially found pathways into positions in predominantly-white organizations trying to diversify their staff or fill a specific community outreach role. However, focus group participants explained that many aspiring leaders of color eventually encounter limited avenues or encouragement for career development beyond those initial positions. In the 2020 focus groups with people of color, participants described a similar phenomenon, noting that internal candidates of color are often overlooked for open senior-level roles.

White respondents in Massachusetts were also more likely to report a positive impact of their race on their career; 75% of white respondents in the state compared to 67% nationally. This may reflect somewhat greater awareness of race and inequity in the sector among white respondents in the state compared to their national peers. However, translating that awareness into action is often a work in progress, as described further below.

Among Massachusetts respondents of color, 91% agreed with the survey prompt that *“people of color must demonstrate they have more skills than white peers,”* as did 76% of white respondents in the state (see *Figure 13*). Similarly, 83% of people of color respondents agreed that *“organizations looking for a new executive director who is the ‘right fit’ rule out candidates of color,”* as did 66% of white respondents in Massachusetts. These levels of agreement were higher than in the national sample, with a smaller gap in response rates based on race.

#### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

After there was no way I could convince them I deserved a promotion, although my work showed it, I left to run campaigns and work for the state. They recruited me [back] for this role. And then I recruited other people of color.”

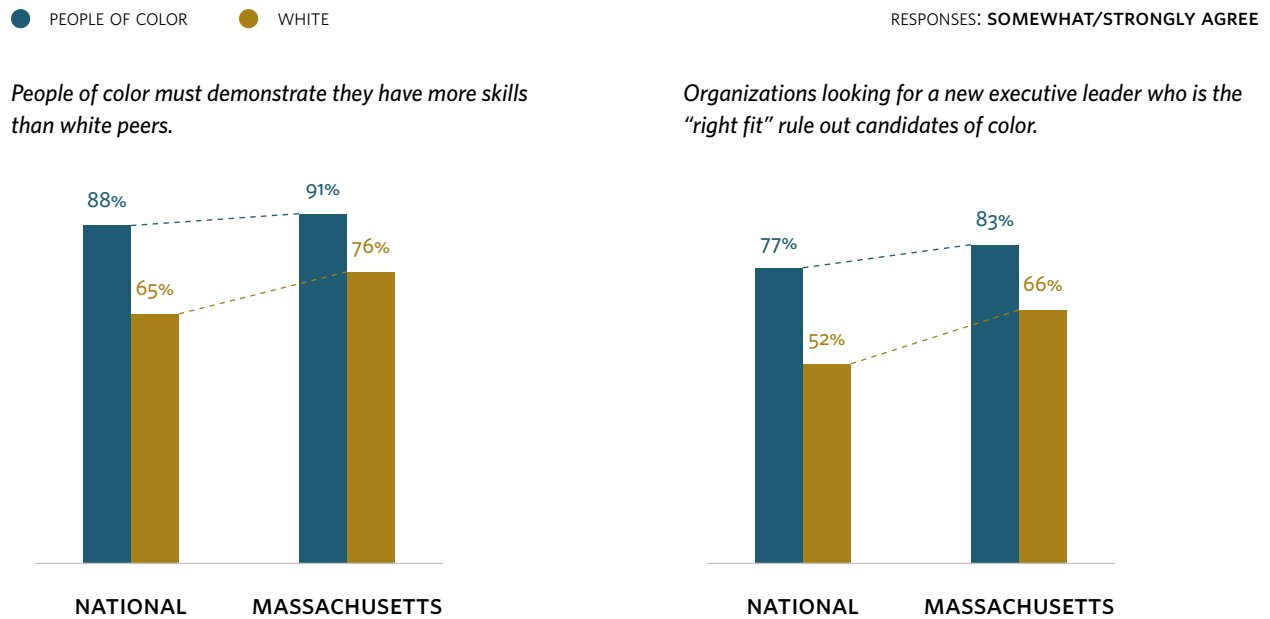
—Person of Color ED/CEO Focus Group Participant

“

The reality is that Black people and people of color in general are over-credentialed for the roles they’re holding. How many boxes do we have to check to be qualified?”

—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer Focus Group Participant

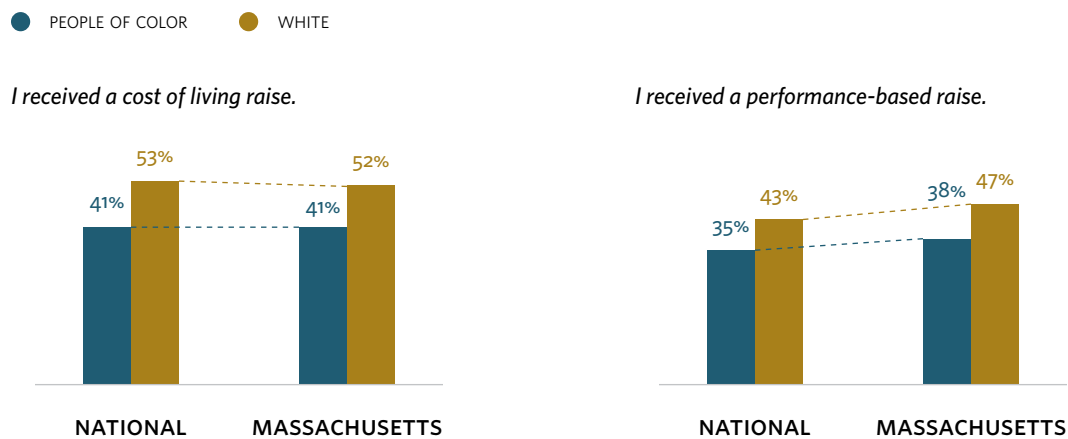
FIGURE 13 | PERCEPTIONS OF THE LEADERSHIP GAP



## Salary Challenges

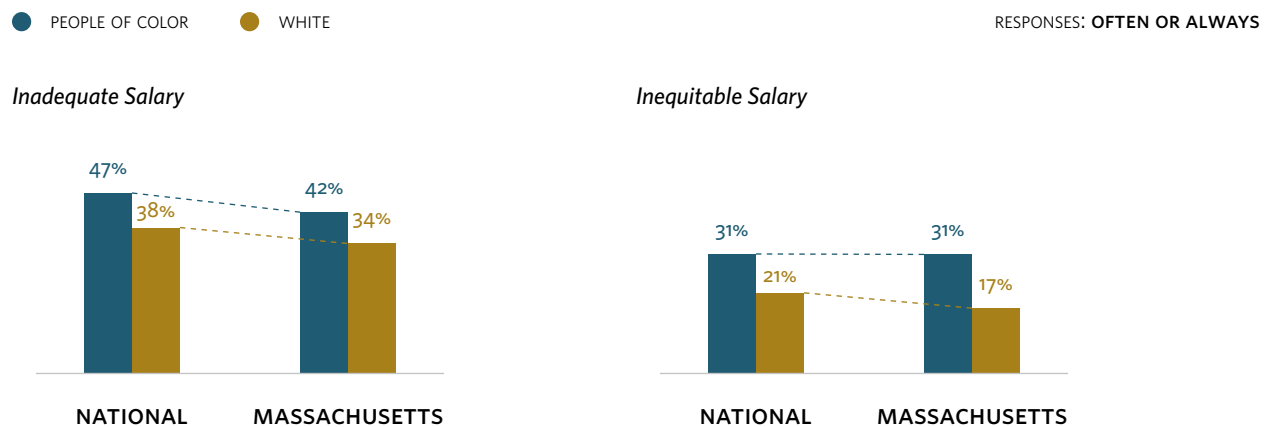
Survey data on salary also reflects disparities of experience and opportunity based on race. In both the Massachusetts and national samples, people of color and white respondents reported some differences in experience with promotions, raises, and the adequacy and equitability of salaries. People of color were less likely than white respondents to report having received a raise, as shown in Figure 14.<sup>19</sup>

FIGURE 14 | RESPONDENT COMPENSATION



Respondents of color in both samples were also more likely to report their salary was not high enough (42% of people of color and 34% of white respondents in Massachusetts;<sup>20</sup> 47% of people of color and 38% of white respondents nationally), as shown in *Figure 15*, as well as more likely to report that it is inequitable, meaning that it is not commensurate with salaries of colleagues doing similar work (31% of people of color and 17% of white respondents in Massachusetts; 31% of people of color and 21% of white respondents nationally).

FIGURE 15 | SALARY CHALLENGES AND FRUSTRATIONS

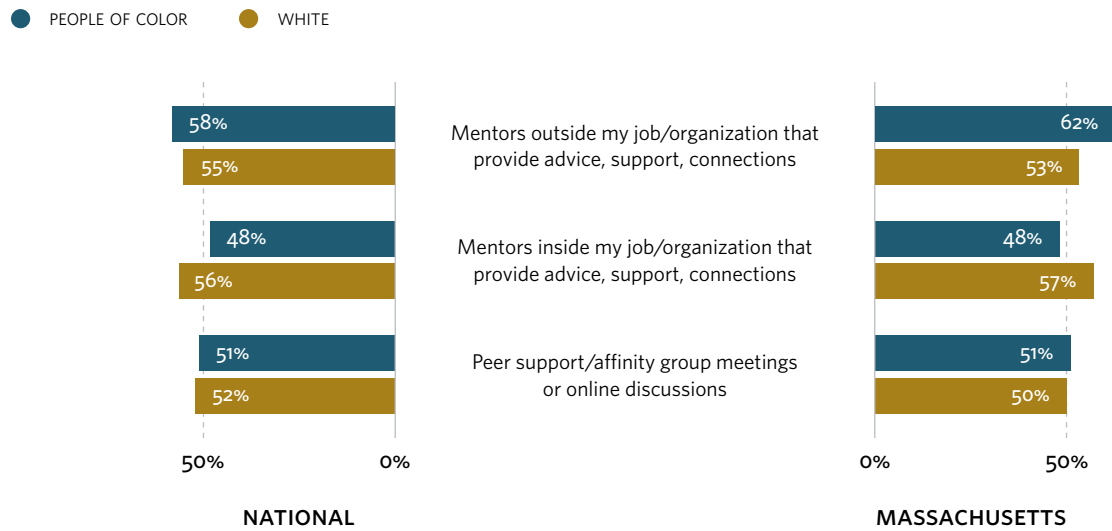


## Mentors and Networks

Survey respondents were asked about their access to mentors and role models, as well as the importance of social capital and networks in the nonprofit sector. Consistent with findings from the 2016 *Race to Lead* survey, respondents of color are more likely to rely on mentorship and support *outside* their workplace compared to white respondents. This phenomenon is more pronounced in Massachusetts than nationally: as shown in *Figure 16* on the following page,<sup>21</sup> 62% of people of color and 53% of white respondents in the state compared to 58% of people of color and 55% of white respondents nationwide reported mentors outside their organizations. In contrast, and at similar rates to nationwide responses, people of color were less likely to have mentorship *within* their organization (48% both in Massachusetts and nationwide) compared to white respondents (57% in Massachusetts and 56% nationwide).<sup>22</sup> People of color and white respondents in both samples reported similar levels of peer support, with roughly one half of respondents saying they have access to peer support.

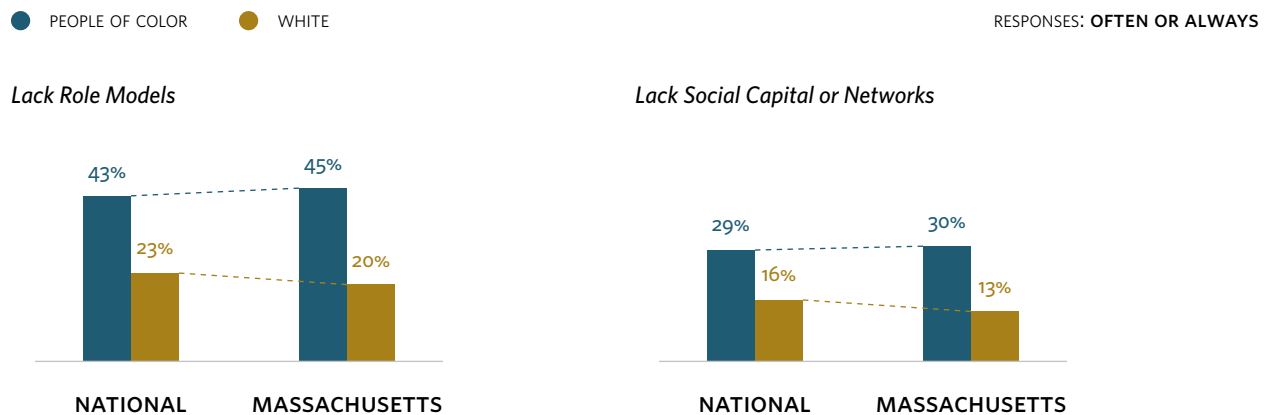


FIGURE 16 | SUPPORT RECEIVED



Considering the disparity between people of color and white nonprofit respondents regarding access to mentorship, it is no surprise that people of color were also more likely to say they *often* or *always* lack role models, as shown in Figure 17. Respondents of color are about twice as likely as white respondents to say they *often* or *always* experience a lack of role models (20% of white people and 45% of people of color in Massachusetts compared to 23% of white people and 43% of people of color nationwide). Similarly, 30% of people of color in Massachusetts said they *often* or *always* face challenges related to a lack of social capital and networks, compared to 13% of white respondents who reported this challenge.

FIGURE 17 | CHALLENGES AND FRUSTRATIONS WITH LACK OF ROLE MODELS AND NETWORKS

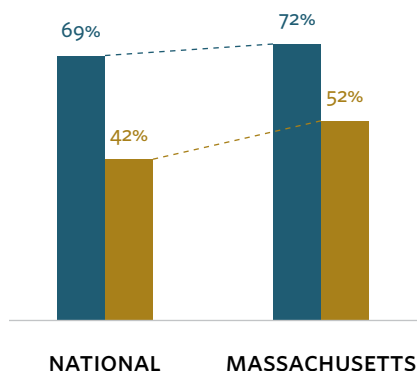


These challenges regarding professional networks and access for people of color are reflected in responses to the survey prompt that *“It is harder for people of color to advance because they have smaller networks,”* with which 72% of people of color in Massachusetts and 52% of white respondents agreed, as shown in *Figure 18*. People of color in the state were ten percentage points more likely to agree that the size of their professional network was a challenge to their career compared to peers nationwide, although the gap between white respondents and people of color is somewhat smaller in the local sample compared to nationally. The contrast in responses by people of color affirming their access to mentors outside their organizations and their agreement that smaller professional networks limit career advancement suggests that the networks and mentorship available to people of color and white people in Massachusetts have distinctly different capacity to contribute to professional advancement.

FIGURE 18 | NETWORKS

● PEOPLE OF COLOR ● WHITE RESPONSES: SOMEWHAT/STRONGLY AGREE

*It is harder for people of color to advance because of their smaller networks.*



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

I would dare to say that the Black professionals I know have a larger network than almost every white person I know. We know more people; we have deeper connections. It's just whether or not those people can open doors. I know lots of people but those two worlds don't cross over. It's not really about the number.”

—Gen X/Baby Boomers of Color  
Focus Group Participant

“

I feel like people of color tend to have a lot of connections and a lot of people they know who can be there for them, but I do think we have smaller professional networks. I'll be talking to white people and they know so many people who have gotten them jobs and positions. My parents know nobody, you know?”

—Millennials of Color Focus Group Participant

A similar pattern is present regarding connections to funders, a type of relationship that is often highly valuable for advancement to leadership roles in the sector. As shown in *Figure 19*, 21% of white respondents in Massachusetts said they *often* or *always* contend with the challenge of lacking relationships with funding sources, compared to 36% of people of color in the state. The gap of 15 percentage points between people of color and white people in response to this question exceeds the national gap of 10 percentage points.

FIGURE 19 | LACK OF RELATIONSHIPS WITH FUNDING SOURCES



# Race, Leadership, and DEI

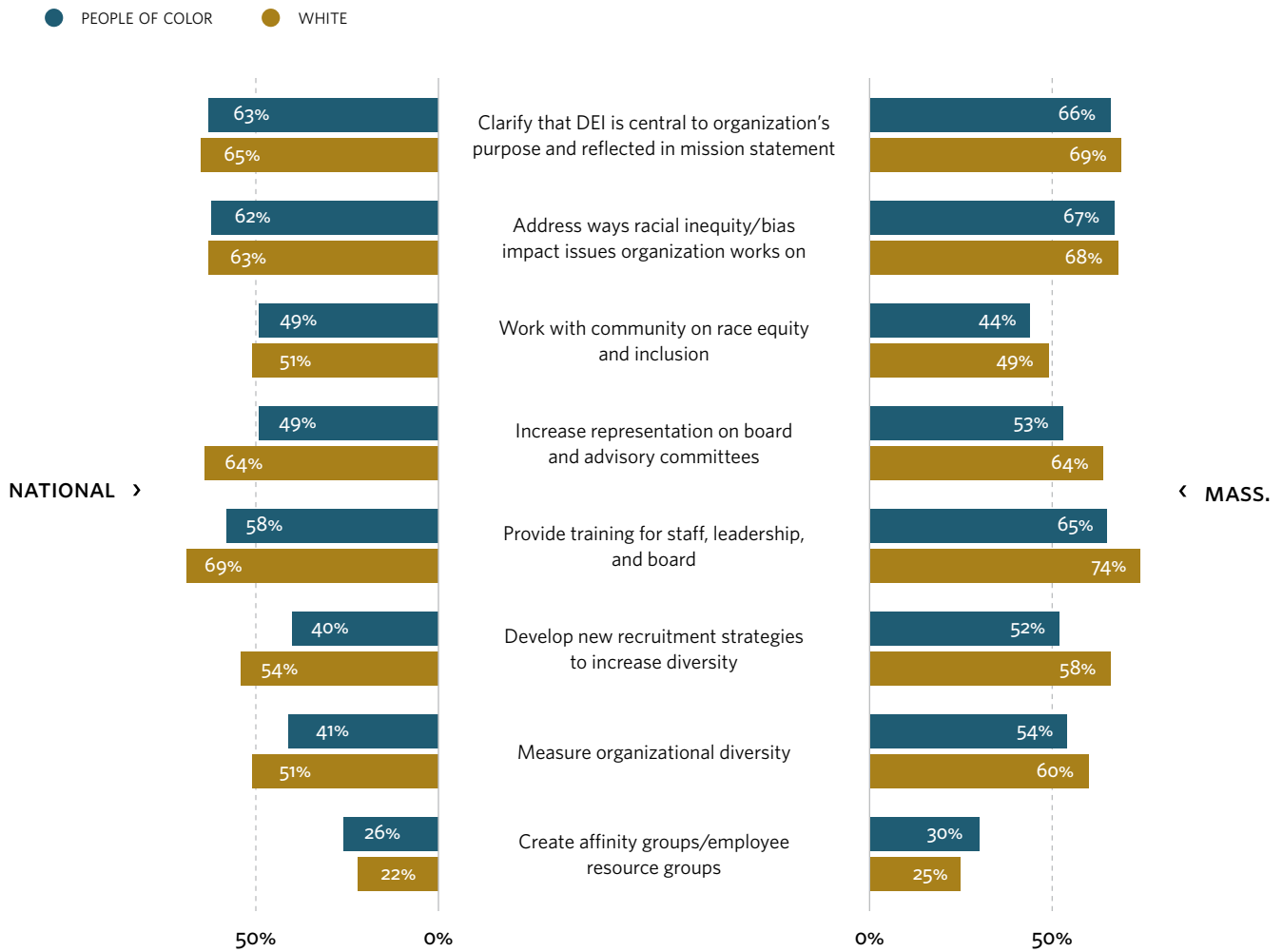
Many nonprofits in the United States are taking steps to address racial inequity in the workplace, and this pattern is particularly apparent in Massachusetts. Compared to the national sample, survey results from Massachusetts show that more organizations are engaged in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work. Notably, this greater engagement with DEI strategies appears to be correlated with somewhat greater racial diversity in organizational leadership and higher awareness among white respondents of issues of racial inequity in the nonprofit sector.

While evidence of progress in Massachusetts is encouraging, there remains a considerable distance between these trends and successfully centering the aspirations of leaders of color and the needs of their communities. First, leaders of color are performing a disproportionate amount of the labor to diversify organizations with historically white leadership, which are often better resourced, while groups already led by people of color remain underfunded. Second, DEI efforts are frequently taxing to staff of color, demanding ongoing and often-unrecognized work from people of color at staff and leadership levels, and require a more explicit focus on shifting organizational culture to make lasting change.

## Organizational DEI Efforts

Eighty-two percent of respondents in Massachusetts indicated that their organization was engaged in DEI efforts, compared to 74% nationally. Both people of color and white respondents in Massachusetts were more likely than their national counterparts to report that the organizations they work for are engaged in DEI strategies, as shown in *Figure 20* on the next page.<sup>23</sup> When respondents indicated that their workplace was engaged in DEI work, the survey asked that they choose from a list of potential strategies in use at their organization. The top three strategies in both the Massachusetts and national samples were *provide training for staff, leadership, or board; address ways that race inequity and bias impact the issues the organization works on; and clarify that DEI is central to the organization's purpose and reflected in its mission*. With the exception of the strategy *work with the community on race equity and inclusion*, all of the strategies offered by the survey are more widely used in the Massachusetts sample than nationally.

FIGURE 20 | CURRENT DEI INITIATIVES

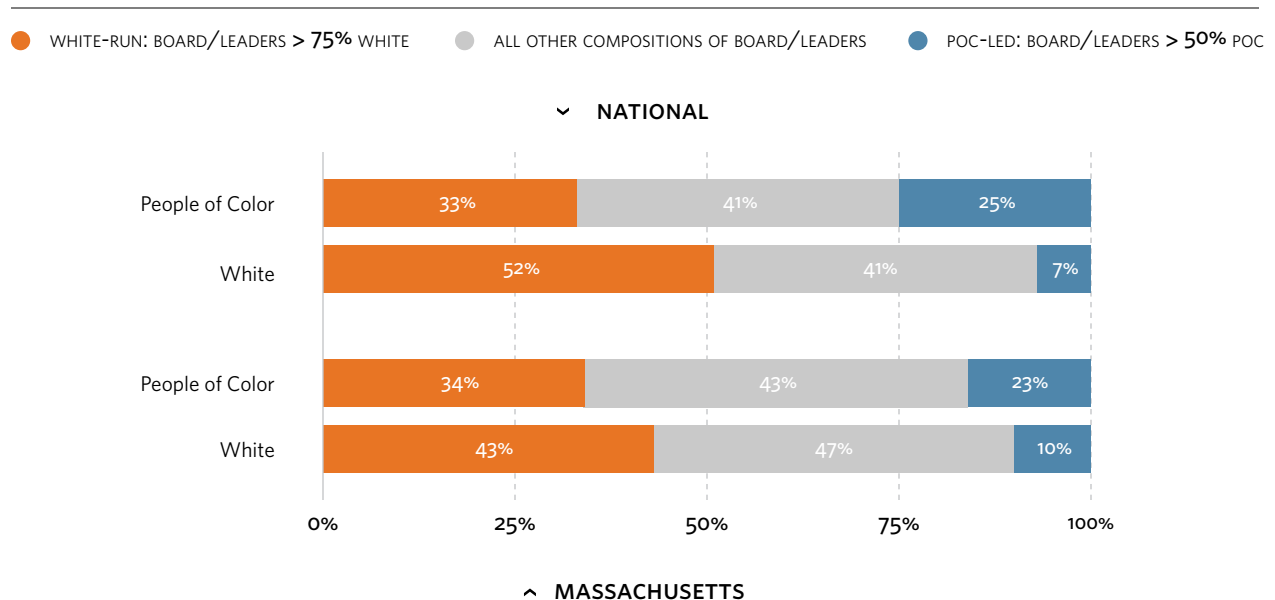


## DEI and Organizational Demographics

BMP's *Race to Lead Revisited* report (June 2020) categorized nonprofits into three types based on the racial composition of both boards of directors and staff in top leadership roles. The "White-run" category consists of organizations in which both the board and the organization's senior staff members are less than 25% people of color, meaning that white people constitute at least 75% of those in the top levels of leadership. The "POC-led" category includes organizations that have 50% or more people of color on the board of directors and in staff leadership. The third category of "All Other" organizations includes groups that do not meet the threshold for either the White-run or POC-led designations.

In the Massachusetts sample, a smaller proportion of survey respondents reported working for White-run organizations (39% Massachusetts vs. 45% national) and a larger proportion of respondents worked for organizations that fall into the All Other category (45% Massachusetts vs. 41% national). As seen in *Figure 21*, white survey respondents were nine percentage points less likely than their peers nationally to work in a White-run organization (43% Massachusetts vs. 52% national), and six percentage points more likely to work in All Other types of organizations (47% Massachusetts vs. 41% national). Respondents of color in both samples were most likely to work for organizations in the All Other category (43% Massachusetts vs. 41% national).

FIGURE 21 | RESPONDENTS BY RACIAL COMPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP



## A Heavy Lift for Leaders of Color

Leaders of color appear to play an outsized role in the work of diversifying organizations historically dominated by white leadership. In focus group discussions, leaders of color described their work to educate white donors and institutions, often as part of fundraising work, and sometimes by joining white-dominated decision-making boards and advocating for change from within. Leaders recounted a range of concrete and ongoing strategies, including: engaging boards in processes of “facilitated attrition,” as one participant in the focus group for ED/CEOs of color described the process of encouraging existing board members to retire or resign to facilitate the recruitment of a better-aligned and more diverse board; engaging networks to recruit new board members of color; hiring and mentoring senior leaders of color; finding meaningful roles for donors to play that reduce their authority in the organization while maintaining their financial support; and more. Leaders of color described spending significant amounts of time engaging staff and board members to learn about race, re-writing bylaws, and making widespread organizational cultural change.

The challenges that people of color survey respondents described regarding their lack of relationships with funders (see *Figure 18* on page 15) is also reflected at the organizational level, with disparities in funding according to race and leadership. As shown in *Figure 22* on the next page,<sup>24</sup> in Massachusetts, 54% of respondents working for White-run organizations reported budgets of \$5 million or more and just 13% indicated their organizational budgets were below \$1 million. Among respondents working for POC-led organizations in the state, only 33% reported budgets above \$5 million and 20% worked for nonprofits with budgets below \$1 million.<sup>25</sup> Not only are there comparatively fewer POC-led groups, but those that exist contend with smaller budgets.

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

I'm sitting here with all of these leaders of color talking about diversifying our boards and it ends up becoming the responsibility of the nonwhite people in organizations to diversify these white spaces. The question that I think that we have to always put on the floor is, 'Hey, white people, get your people.' At a certain point, it's not just a responsibility of people of color.”

—Person of Color ED/CEO Focus Group Participant

“

What [funders] are doing is saying, 'Look, I'm going to give you \$50,000 because ... this is what we have and this is what you deserve.'”

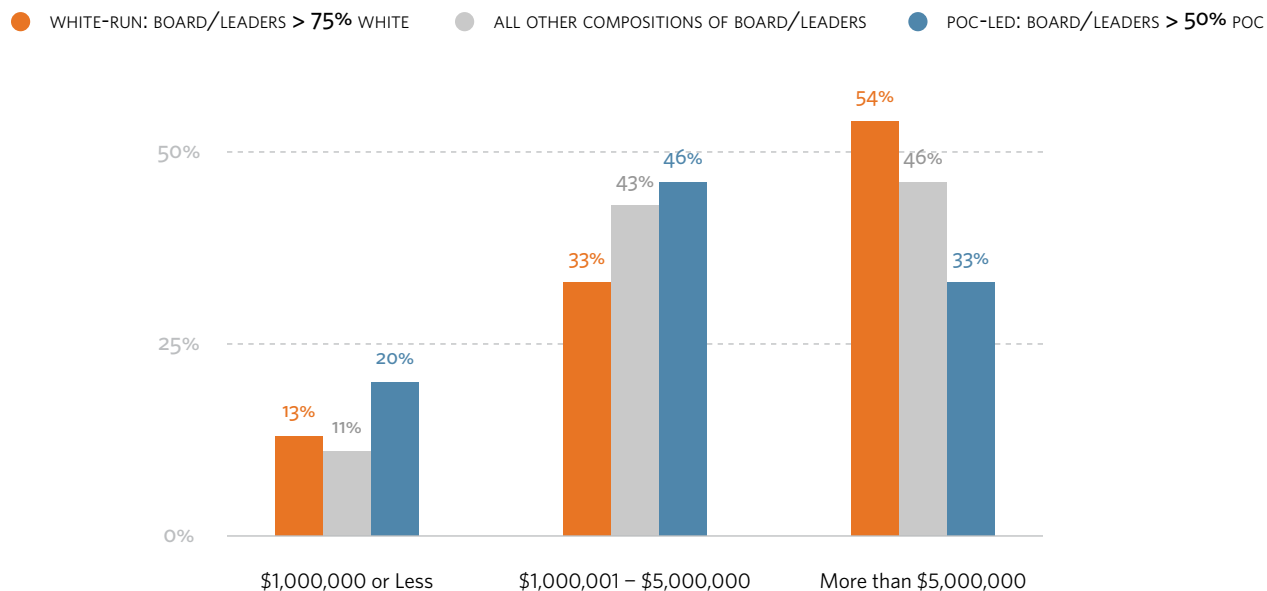
—Person of Color ED/CEO Focus Group Participant

“

You have to be not scary. It's got to be one or two people that feel like you're trustworthy. 'Oh, no, she's our kind of Black person. Trust this person. She can come to coffee.' And then they give you the stamp [of approval] and open the doors to let you in. And otherwise it's crickets.”

—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer Focus Group Participant

**FIGURE 22 | MASSACHUSETTS BUDGET SIZE BY RACIAL COMPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP**



In focus groups, participants of color described how funders routinely convey to leaders of POC-focused nonprofits that their organizations deserve smaller grants, either because they're seen as being able to do more with less, or because they're understood to be working on niche issues that are not of general concern, or because their organization's work is generally not deserving of larger support. Leaders of color described that they routinely confront the assumption that they are incompetent, and that in order to be heard and have their work seen, they may need a white person who can open doors, facilitate introductions, and communicate that the leader of color is safe to work with.

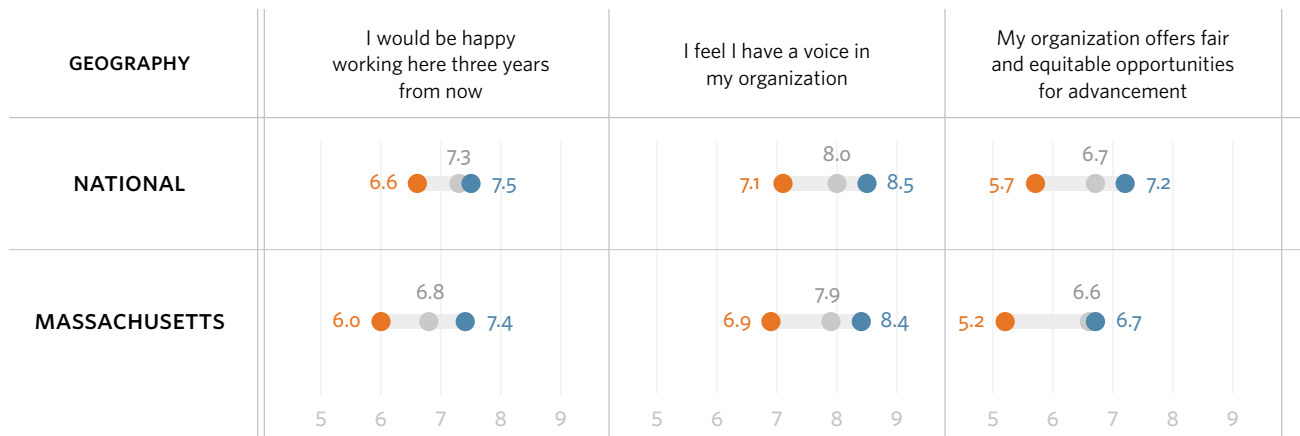
Despite the financial barriers facing POC-led groups, Massachusetts respondents of all races who worked for POC-led organizations indicated higher average agreement with three positive statements about their nonprofit workplaces (*Figure 23* on the following page) compared to respondents who worked for White-run organizations. On a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*), the statement *"I would be happy if I worked at this organization three years from now"* generated an average level of agreement of 6.0 from respondents in White-run organizations compared to 7.4 for respondents in POC-led organizations and 6.8 in All Other organization types. For the statement *"I feel I have a voice in my organization,"* the average agreement was 6.9 in White-run groups compared to 8.4 in POC-led groups and 7.9 in All Other organization types. Finally, for the statement *"My organization offers fair and equitable opportunities for advancement and promotion,"* the average level of agreement for respondents in White-run groups was 5.2 compared to 6.7 in POC-led organizations and 6.6 in All Other organization types. The same pattern holds true at the national level, with staff from organizations where more people of color hold board and top leadership roles expressing significantly more agreement with positive statements about these aspects of their nonprofit workplace experience.



FIGURE 23 | WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES BY RACIAL COMPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

● WHITE-RUN: BOARD/LEADERS ≥ 75% WHITE    ● ALL OTHER COMPOSITIONS OF BOARD/LEADERS    ● POC-LED: BOARD/LEADERS ≥ 50% POC

AVERAGE RESPONSES ON A SCALE OF 1-10



## Beyond Awareness

In many organizations, DEI efforts yield uneven progress toward change. The higher rate of DEI efforts in Massachusetts compared to the national sample does appear to correlate with more awareness among white respondents about challenges facing people of color and systems of exclusion in the nonprofit sector. As shown in *Figure 24* on the following page,<sup>26</sup> when asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements about the challenges facing successful DEI initiatives, white respondents in Massachusetts were more closely aligned with the level of agreement of people of color compared to their white peers nationwide. However, awareness may not always translate into action.

Compared to focus groups held to inform the 2018 *Race to Lead* brief, white participants in the 2020 focus groups generally demonstrated more awareness and knowledge of how race and inequity impact their work and the sector than white focus group participants in 2018. However, some white leaders also described feeling overwhelmed by

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

Many people want to be doing this [DEI] work but struggle with [finding] time because we're already so over-taxed with the basics of [advancing] the mission of our organization.”

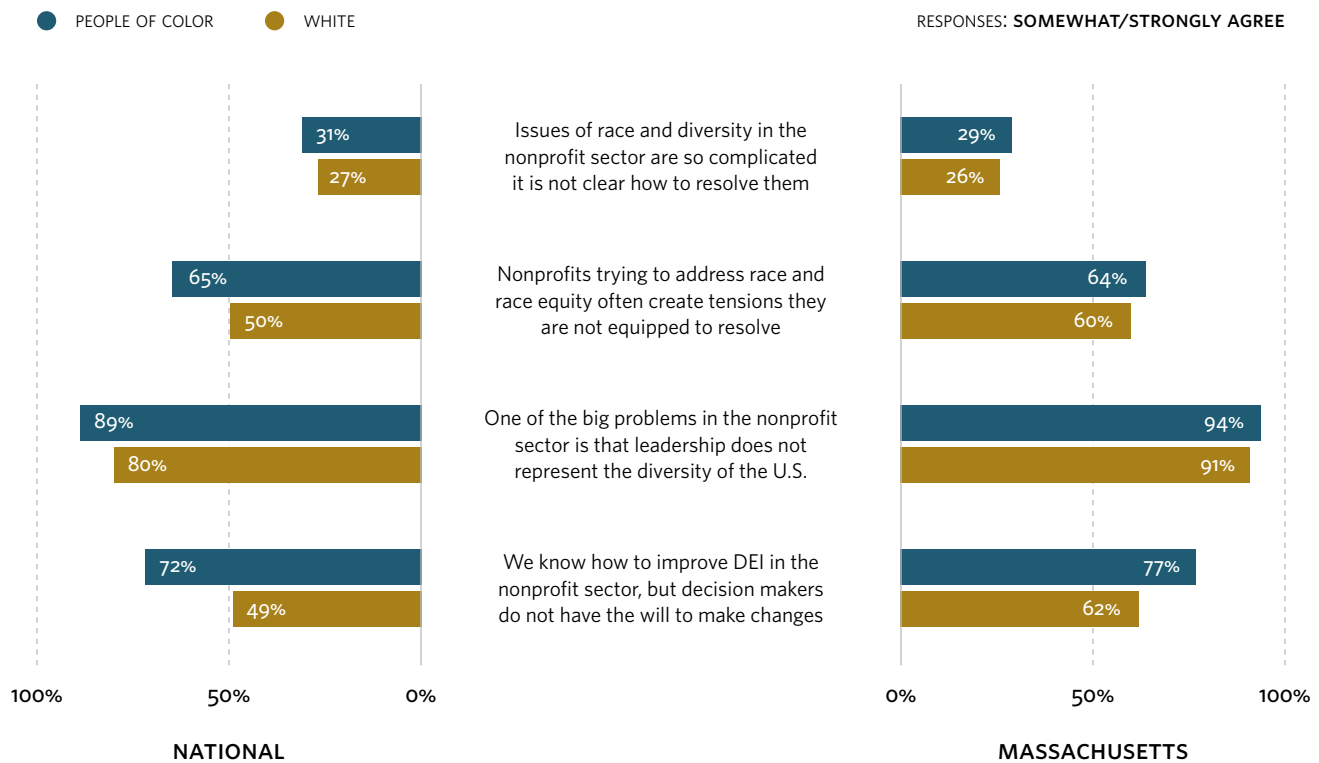
—White ED/CEO Focus Group Participant

“

Big funders and family foundations value the well-meaning white person. They congratulate, they elevate, they identify with [them].”

—Person of Color ED/CEO Focus Group Participant

FIGURE 24 | CHALLENGES OF IMPROVING DEI IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR



the magnitude of changing their organizational culture and doing the day-to-day work to implement DEI strategies. Several white focus group participants felt stymied by their distance from professional networks of people of color and unsure of how to cultivate connections to fill board and staff openings. Participants in focus groups across race also discussed the dynamic of “virtue signaling,” a critique that describes taking public positions on DEI issues in a way that prioritizes attention or praise for doing the right thing more than making actual change. Both people of color and white respondents in focus groups talked about the ambiguities between what DEI work was change-making and what was simply talk.

Focus group participants described mixed outcomes of their organizations’ DEI work. A number of stories illustrated a slow pace of change, with steep learning

#### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

One of the things I’m finding for myself as a CEO is [I need to] talk to others who are going through [DEI work], who are on the journey as well. It would be great to talk in terms of: ‘What’s worked? What are the challenges? What are your fears?’”

—White ED/CEO Focus Group Participant

curves for white staff attempting to change hiring practices, shift the ways they supervise and provide feedback, establish accountability, stay the course with DEI work even when these efforts are challenging, and more.

While some focus group participants of color felt supported by DEI processes to create organization-wide conversations about race and inequity, or encouraged by seeing their organization's board slowly become more diverse, the overarching feeling about DEI efforts was skepticism. Across generations, participants of color discussed the limits on diversifying leadership without a commitment to change organizational culture and practice. Several participants in the focus group with Millennials of color interpreted this dynamic of diverse leaders maintaining the organizational status quo through a generational lens. They expressed particular frustration with senior leaders of color defending organizations from criticism instead of supporting younger staff members in their efforts to make change. In the focus groups with executive leaders and more senior employees of color, participants frequently acknowledged that people of color who rise through a nonprofit's ranks may tend to uphold the existing values of the institution. Across focus groups with people of color, participants were particularly aware of those limitations as they considered their own ability to advocate within their organizations, and the degree of risk they felt about facing consequences for speaking out.

#### IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

I just feel like the more we delve into like each of these pieces [of DEI work], the more it's like, 'Oh, we're actually not doing this right.' We thought we were doing a thing to address [a problem] and that intervention is actually creating unintended harm.”

—White Millennial Focus Group Participant

“

You can have people from all colors of the rainbow [in leadership], but they're going to be people who are going to back up the CEO at the end of the day.”

—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer  
Focus Group Participant

# Opportunities for Change

The nonprofit sector's widespread investment in DEI activities provides an opening for change on racial equity. One overarching recommendation is that nonprofits take on the challenging work described below with peer organizations with similar goals. For more in-depth descriptions of the change efforts outlined below, see *Race to Lead Revisited: Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap*.

## OPPORTUNITY 1

### Focus on Structures and the Experience of Race and Racism

Structural analysis of race and racism, especially for white-dominant groups, is a critical foundation for race equity work. This work must be coupled with efforts to understand and validate the individual and collective experiences of people of color in nonprofit organizations.

## OPPORTUNITY 2

### Policies Have Meaning ... If Enforced

Groups committed to DEI efforts must examine and change organizational policies to reflect the organizational commitment to equity. A realignment of policies and practices is only effective if they are acted on consistently and universally.

## OPPORTUNITY 3

### Put Your Money ...

Organizations led by people of color simply need more funding. To interrupt the cycle of replicating the inequities the sector is committed to fight, funders need to examine their own practices and ensure organizations led by people of color receive the resources needed to thrive.

## OPPORTUNITY 4

### Reflecting the Community: Racial Diversity in Action

Recruiting and retaining racially diverse staff and board leaders takes a sustained investment in time and resources. It also requires shifting power by listening to staff and board members of color and changing organization policies and practices accordingly.

## OPPORTUNITY 5

### Responsibility and Results

Organizations committed to DEI must establish thoughtful and measurable ways to assess progress based on a widely-shared plan for what should change, who is responsible, and how results will be documented and reviewed annually.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Kunreuther, F. and Thomas-Breitfeld, S. (2018). *The Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap in Massachusetts: A Race to Lead Brief*. Building Movement Project. <https://racetolead.org/massachusetts/>
- 2 Focus groups took place in January 2020 organized by the following demographic categories: Millennial and Gen Z people of color; Gen X and Baby Boomer people of color; Millennial and Gen Z white people; Gen X and Baby Boomer white people; EDs/CEOs of color; white Eds/CEOs.
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- 4 Schuster, L. and Ciurczak, P. (2018). *Boston's Booming...But for Whom? Building Shared Prosperity in a Time of Growth*. Boston Indicators. <https://www.bostonindicators.org/reports/report-website-pages/shared-prosperity>
- 5 Florida, R. (August 29, 2019). "Ranking Cities by the New Urban Crisis." Bloomberg CityLab. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-08-29/ranking-cities-by-the-new-urban-crisis>  
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- 6 See endnote 3.
- 7 Richardson, J. Mitchell, B., and Edlebi, J. (June 2020). *Gentrification and Disinvestment 2020*. National Community Reinvestment Coalition. <https://ncrc.org/gentrification20/>
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- 10 Gray, A. (September 18, 2020). "How to Disrupt the Whiteness of Boston Philanthropy, One Dollar at a Time," Boston Magazine. <https://www.bostonmagazine.com/news/2020/09/18/racial-equity-fund/>
- 11 Schneider, J., Piazza, P., Carey, A. J., and White, R. S. (2020). *School Integration in Massachusetts: Racial Diversity and State Accountability*. Beyond Test Scores Project and Center for Education and Civil Rights. [https://cecr.ed.psu.edu/sites/default/files/Demography\\_Report\\_FINAL\\_7.24.20.pdf](https://cecr.ed.psu.edu/sites/default/files/Demography_Report_FINAL_7.24.20.pdf)
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- 13 United States Census Bureau. Quick Facts: Boston City, Massachusetts. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/bostoncitymassachusetts>

## ENDNOTES (cont.)

- 14 The sample demographics are contextualized against those of the Greater Boston region, where 78% of the sample works; this report does not include comparisons of *Race to Lead* survey data between these two geographies.
- 15 Due to rounding, some percentages that appear in the figures throughout the report may not precisely reflect the absolute numbers or add to 100%.
- 16 See endnote 3.
- 17 Differences in this report are statistically significant unless otherwise indicated. We did not detect a statistically significant difference in this comparison. Where there are large differences between comparison groups, sample size and statistical power may contribute to lack of significance.
- 18 Generations are categorized based on birth year as follows: Generation Z (1998 or later); Millennial (1982-1997); Generation X (1966-1981); and Baby Boomer (1947-1965).
- 19 See endnote 17.
- 20 See endnote 17.
- 21 See endnote 17.
- 22 See endnote 17.
- 23 See endnote 17.
- 24 See endnote 17.
- 25 See endnote 17.
- 26 See endnote 17.



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