



Blocking the Backlash:

The Positive Impact of DEI in Nonprofit Organizations



**RACE
TO LEAD**



An initiative of
Building Movement Project



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About the Building Movement Project

The Building Movement Project (BMP) provides insightful research, practical resources, and pathways for transformative relationships that support nonprofit organizations, networks, and movements in their work to create a just and equitable world. Since 2016, BMP’s *Race to Lead* initiative has brought critical analysis and extensive data to the growing discussion about the racial leadership gap in the nonprofit sector. Through sector-wide surveys, focus groups, and organizational assessments, BMP explores how nonprofits can transform internal structures and systems to become more equitable workplaces and tackle the most significant social issues of our times.

Acknowledgements

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BMP is grateful to everyone who has supported the *Race to Lead* initiative, particularly the more than 3,000 respondents to the 2022 *Race to Lead* survey and the more than 3,000 nonprofit staff members who have participated in the *Building Blocks for Change* Race Equity Assessment.

Summary of Findings



This report, *Blocking the Backlash: The Positive Impact of DEI in Nonprofit Organizations*, examines data from the 2019 and 2022 *Race to Lead* surveys to investigate the impact DEI has had on respondents and their organizations.

There were four main findings:

- **DEI efforts increased between 2019 and 2022.**

A larger share of respondents (83%) reported that their organizations engaged in DEI initiatives in 2022, compared to the 2019 survey (74%). White-run organizations had the largest increase in DEI engagement. Respondents reported training as the most common DEI strategy organizations used in both 2019 and 2022, and it had the largest growth between the two survey periods.

- **BIPOC respondents gave DEI strategies higher ratings of effectiveness more often than white respondents.**

A new question asked respondents to rate the effectiveness of each of the DEI strategies in their nonprofit workplaces. Of the ten possible DEI strategies organizations employed, significantly higher percentages of BIPOC respondents than white survey takers rated half of those strategies as *extremely* or *very* effective. There was only one DEI strategy—pursue pay equity in compensation—that a considerably higher percentage of whites rated as *extremely* or *very* effective.

- **Respondents were most positive about the workplace when their organizations employed five or more DEI strategies.**

Both BIPOC and white respondents rated their work experience highest on several key measures (for example retention and voice) when their organizations had implemented five or more DEI strategies. In organizations that had no DEI activities, white respondents rated the workplace considerably higher than respondents of color and even higher than white respondents in organizations that employed one to four DEI strategies.

- **DEI initiatives do not equal racial equity.**

Despite many positive indications, the effects of DEI were ambiguous when examining structural issues in the nonprofit sector. Respondents of color reported that their race had negatively impacted their career advancement at similar rates regardless of the DEI efforts of their nonprofit workplaces. At the same time, white respondents working at organizations that implemented more DEI strategies demonstrated more awareness of white racial privilege.

Introduction



The Building Movement Project's *Race to Lead* initiative has surveyed nonprofit workers three times over a period of rapid change in society, including significant shifts in the workplace in general, and the nonprofit sector in particular. The 2016 survey was conducted six months before that year's presidential election, which exposed deep racial and cultural divides.¹ A few months after the 2019 survey closed, the COVID-19 pandemic reshaped workplaces,² and mass protests in response to the killings of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor focused national attention on racism.³ The 2022 survey was conducted

before the Supreme Court's decision that struck down affirmative action in college admissions and sparked widespread concerns about negative repercussions for nonprofits and foundations, especially given many had only recently adopted efforts to support racial equity.⁴ However, the growing campaign against "critical race theory" in schools⁵ and resistance to "diversity equity and inclusion" in workplaces⁶ were already clear threats when nonprofit workers responded to this latest survey in the *Race to Lead* series.

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- 1 Bacon, Perry, "How the 2016 Election Exposed America's Racial and Cultural Divides," (NBC News, November 11, 2016), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/how-2016-election-exposed-america-s-racial-cultural-divides-n682306>.
 - 2 Parker, Kim, Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Rachel Minkin, "COVID-19 Pandemic Continues to Reshape Work in America," (Pew Research Center, February 16, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2022/02/16/covid-19-pandemic-continues-to-reshape-work-in-america/>.
 - 3 Chavez, Nicole, "2020: The year America confronted racism," <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/12/us/america-racism-2020/>.
 - 4 Villarosa, Lori, Ben Francisco Maulbeck, and Gihan Perera, "Racial Justice Programs Under Fire: Foundations Are Running Scared When They Should Double Down," (Chronicle of Philanthropy, February 6, 2024), <https://www.philanthropy.com/article/racial-justice-programs-under-fire-foundations-are-running-scared-when-they-should-double-down>.
 - 5 Pendharkar, Eesha, "The Evolution of the Anti-CRT Movement: A Timeline," (EducationWeek, December 13, 2022), <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/the-evolution-of-the-anti-crt-movement-a-timeline/2022/12>.
 - 6 Habtemariam, Dawit, "Bracing Yourself for the DEI Haters," (Senior Executive, May 27, 2022), <https://seniorexecutive.com/preparing-dei-haters-skeptics/>.



Research estimated that the global market for DEI had been \$7.5 billion in the year 2020, and projected that the market would double to \$15.4 billion by 2026.⁷ But by 2024, articles routinely reported—with varying levels of glee or gloom—on the backlash against DEI in corporate America.⁸ The *Race to Lead* data cannot predict whether nonprofit organizations will follow the lead of corporations that are too often abandoning their commitments to race equity in recent years. However, the findings from the 2022 *Race to Lead* data challenge any rush to retreat from addressing racial equity in nonprofits.

The results clearly show that DEI initiatives positively impacted nonprofit workers and organizations. The first section of this report looks at the increased implementation of diversity, equity and inclusion strategies in nonprofits, comparing the 2019 and 2022 data. That section is followed by an examination of how respondents report on the effectiveness of different DEI strategies. The data shows that BIPOC survey takers are more

likely to rate DEI strategies as *extremely* or *very* effective than white respondents. The report then examines how the number of DEI strategies respondents report their organization implemented leads to higher satisfaction ratings of the workplace. There is also an appendix to this report that provides early insights from the growing dataset drawn from staff of nonprofit organizations that have utilized BMP's *Building Blocks for Change* race equity assessment.

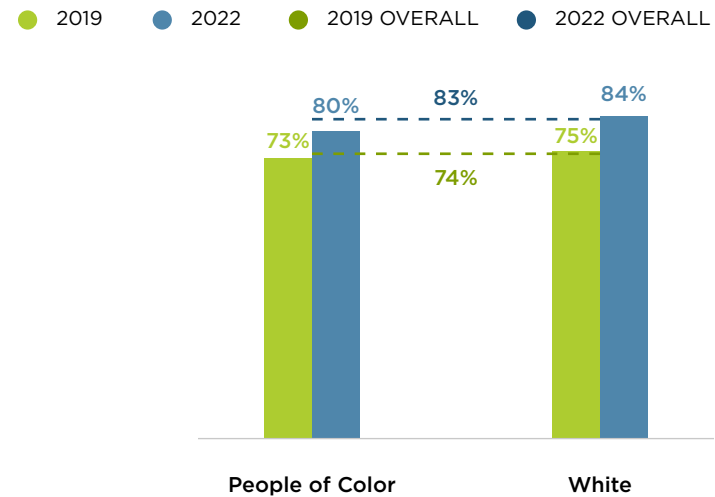
Taken together, the findings suggest that DEI efforts certainly have limits in the change they can initiate, but they are an important start for creating a more positive work environment, especially for BIPOC staffers in white-dominant nonprofit organizations. Even though DEI interventions cannot be expected to address the larger systemic issues of racial inequality and bias throughout the nonprofit sector and society at large, the field would squander the promise of more equitable and inclusive nonprofit workplaces if organizations reverse course on DEI.

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- 7 Global Industry Analysts, Inc., “With Global Spending Projected to Reach \$15.4 Billion by 2026, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Takes the Lead Role in the Creation of Stronger Businesses,” (PRNewswire, November 3, 2021), <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/with-global-spending-projected-to-reach-15-4-billion-by-2026--diversity-equity--inclusion-takes-the-lead-role-in-the-creation-of-stronger-businesses-301413808.html>.
- 8 See Abelson, Max, Simone Foxman, and Ava Benny-Morrison, “Wall Street’s DEI Retreat Has Officially Begun,” (Bloomberg, March 3, 2024), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-03-04/goldman-jpmorgan-cut-dei-efforts-over-lawsuit-threats> & Peck, Emily, “‘The backlash is real’: Behind DEI’s rise and fall,” (Axios, April 2, 2024), <https://www.axios.com/2024/04/02/dei-backlash-diversity>.

The DEI Boom

Questions on diversity, equity, and inclusion were added to the *Race to Lead* survey in 2019, initially to capture the growing interest in the impact of DEI efforts across the sector. Almost three-quarters (74%) of the 2019 *Race to Lead* survey takers noted their organization engaged in “any diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives or activities.” As *Figure 1* shows, this percentage increased to 83% in 2022. This 9 percentage point jump likely reflects efforts to respond to the “racial reckoning” in 2020. *Figure 1* also shows the breakdown between BIPOC and white respondents. In 2019, 73% of respondents of color and 75% of white respondents reported that their organization had engaged in DEI initiatives. The share of BIPOC respondents who indicated that their organization engaged in DEI initiatives increased 7 percentage points to 80% in 2022; for white respondents, there was a 9 percentage point increase to 84%.

FIGURE 1 | RESPONDENTS REPORTING “YES” TO THEIR WORKPLACE ENGAGING IN DEI



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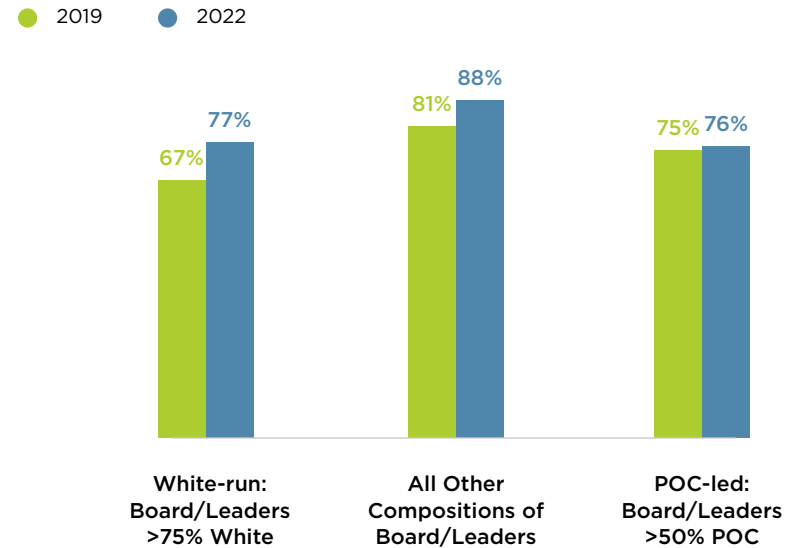
More significant efforts at DEI work have paid off with more diversity on the Board, and now we are beginning to have diversity in the staff. Workplans now focus on DEI impacts on our community, what the community needs from direct feedback, and not just what the organization thinks is needed. It is difficult and a struggle, but the organization is making progress. I also thought it was telling that only one staff member left during the active pandemic due to the stress of work and the world; the rest felt supported and motivated.”

—White Genderqueer Senior Manager

Where DEI Efforts Increased

The data shows that the increase in DEI activities was larger in predominately white-led organizations.⁹ As *Figure 2* shows, the smallest change was among respondents working for “POC-led” organizations. Roughly three-quarters of survey takers in organizations where at least half of their organization’s board and senior leadership were people of color reported that their organization had a DEI initiative in both 2019 and 2022. By contrast, the percentage of respondents working for “white-run” organizations who reported their nonprofit had DEI initiatives increased from two-thirds (67%) in 2019 to just over three-quarters (77%) in 2022, a 10 percentage point jump. In both surveys, respondents working for organizations with some level of diversity in board and staff leadership in between the “white-run” and “POC-led” categories reported the highest rates of DEI initiatives (81% in 2019 and 88% in 2022), but this 7 percentage point increase was less than survey respondents working at “white-run” groups.¹⁰

FIGURE 2 | RESPONDENTS REPORTING WORKPLACE ENGAGING IN DEI BY RACIAL COMPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

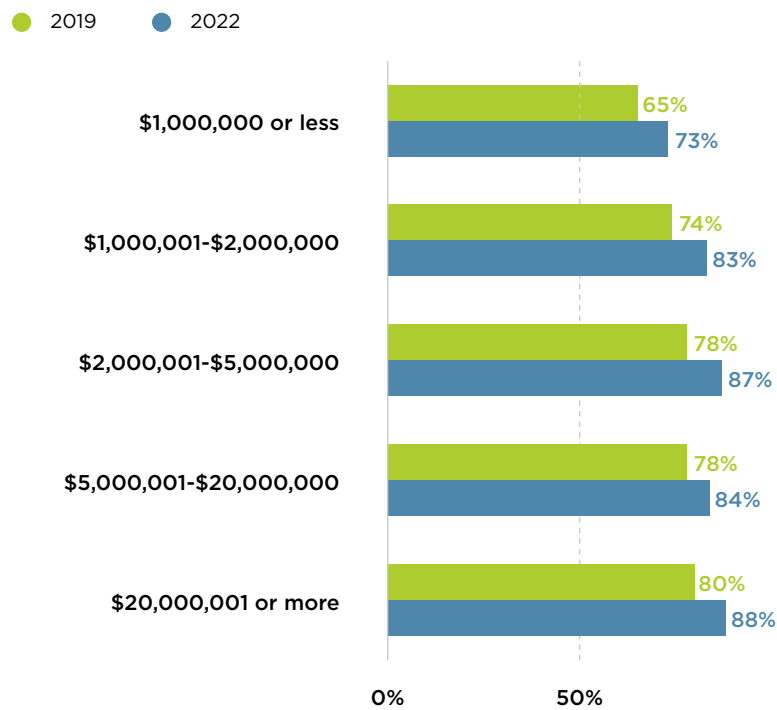


9 The 2019 and 2022 *Race to Lead* surveys asked respondents about the racial composition of their nonprofit’s board of directors and senior staff. BMP developed three categories based on this data: “White-run” for organizations with less than 25% BIPOC representation in staff leadership and on the board, “POC-led” for organizations with senior teams and boards that were 50% or more people of color, and “All Other” for organizations that didn’t meet either threshold. See “Key Findings from *Race to Lead* Surveys” at https://buildingmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BMP_RTL_Key-Findings.pdf.

10 Interestingly, the major shift between the 2019 and 2022 surveys was the reduction (by 13 percentage points) of the White-run category to one-third (32%) of the sample, and the growth of the All Other and POC-led categories (by 8 and 5 percentage points, respectively) to half (49%) and one-fifth (19%) of respondents.

Organizational budget was another factor that appeared to impact whether nonprofits took on DEI efforts. *Figure 3* shows that the increase in DEI activities between 2019 and 2022 was almost identical for all organizational budget categories, an 8 or 9 percentage point gain. However, the data also shows that respondents in organizations with budgets under \$1 million reported the lowest rates of DEI initiatives in both 2019 and 2022. This finding is especially noteworthy given nearly one-quarter (23%) of respondents in the 2022 *Race to Lead* survey reported that they worked for organizations with budgets of \$1 million or less.

FIGURE 3 | RESPONDENTS REPORTING ORGANIZATION ENGAGING IN DEI BY BUDGET SIZE



“

In March 2020, many organizations were faced with the reality of racism, and it became the topic of conversations in the workplace. My organization had begun DEI work before 2020, so it did not feel like a knee-jerk reaction when we continued them after George Floyd. I do feel like the work is more difficult in a distributed workforce vs. an in-office environment.”

—Black Woman Senior Manager

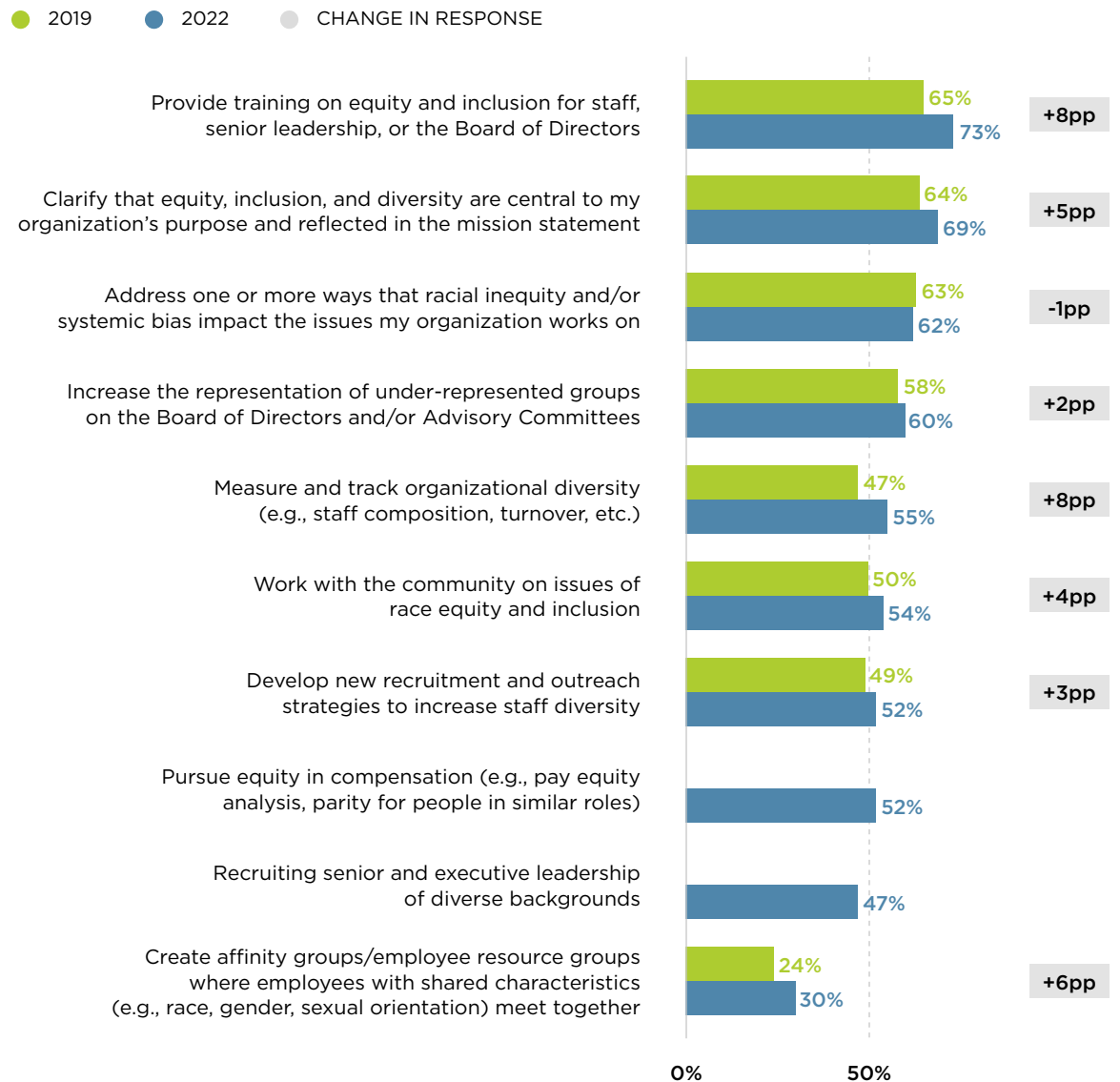
Types of DEI Strategies


The 2019 and 2022 *Race to Lead* surveys asked respondents who indicated their organization had engaged in DEI initiatives to provide more information by selecting from a list of potential DEI strategies, as seen in *Figure 4*.

Providing “training on equity and inclusion” was the most common DEI strategy in both survey years, with 65% of respondents in 2019 and 73% of respondents in 2022 indicating that their organization implemented training as a DEI initiative. The second most commonly reported strategy in both years was to clarify that DEI was central to the purpose and mission of the organization. This was selected in 2022 by 69% of respondents whose organizations had DEI initiatives, 5 percentage points higher than in 2019. The third most cited strategy focused on addressing the impact of racial inequity and systemic bias on the issue-focus of organizations, and was reported in 2022 by 62% of this subset of respondents, a 1 percentage point decrease compared to 2019.

DEI strategies that focus on the diversity of an organization’s staff and board can be seen in *Figure 4* looking at the fourth, seventh, and eighth row.

FIGURE 4 | DEI STRATEGIES RESPONDENTS REPORTED THEIR ORGANIZATION EMPLOYED





Increasing representation on nonprofit boards was reported by 60% and 58% of respondents in 2022 and 2019, respectively. Also, just over half (52%) of respondents working at organizations with DEI initiatives in 2022 reported that their organizations had developed “new recruitment and outreach strategies” to ensure greater diversity among their staff, a 3 percentage point increase from the 2019 survey. Just under half (47%) of survey takers reported that their organization’s DEI initiative included a focus on more diverse “senior and executive leadership;” which was a new DEI strategy added to the survey in 2022.

“Training on equity and inclusion” and “measure and track organizational diversity” were the strategies with the biggest increases (8 percentage points) between 2019 and 2022. That may be because these two strategies are common starting points for DEI initiatives and they often can be implemented in relatively standardized and cost-effective ways.

“

In my organization, DEI work, removing barriers to our programs and services, and creating internal culture and processes has been led by staff (myself included) for several years. It was, however, the pandemic, the profile of media coverage of the George Floyd murder, nationwide demonstrations and protests against police brutality, and some hard conversations with Board members that resulted in transition in Board membership and resulting Board support (and budget) for actually embedding equity in all aspects of the organization.”

—White Woman ED/CEO

Effectiveness of DEI Strategies



The 2022 *Race to Lead* survey gathered more information about DEI by not only asking respondents about the types of DEI interventions their nonprofits implemented, but also asking about the effectiveness of their organizations' DEI strategies in "improving diversity, equity and inclusion." Respondents rated each DEI strategy on a five-point scale from "not at all effective" to "extremely effective." Overall, very few respondents rated any of the DEI strategies as "not at all effective" (less than five percent across each of the strategies). So, the bulk of responses were divided between "somewhat" or "moderately" effective, and "very" or "extremely" effective. This analysis focuses on the responses at the positive end of the scale, to identify the DEI strategies that respondents felt were most impactful at their nonprofit workplaces. The findings show that BIPOC respondents were more likely to rate strategies *extremely* or *very* effective in half of the ten strategies presented. The reverse—white respondents rating a strategy more effective than respondents of color—occurred only once. The other four strategies show similar effectiveness ratings between BIPOC and white respondents.

“

DEI is not just training to be completed. It needs to be ingrained in every process, procedure, and interaction. As I say to my Task Force members and everyone else, 'It's not a sprint; it's a marathon.'"

—Black Woman Senior Manager

“

I would like to say that as someone who has been doing racial equity work for a decade, the biggest shift I have seen is people lacking expertise and knowledge rising to leadership positions in DEI. Their trainings are ineffective and based solely on implicit or unconscious bias. They are using identity as their basis for knowledge and it is undermining deeper, structural work."

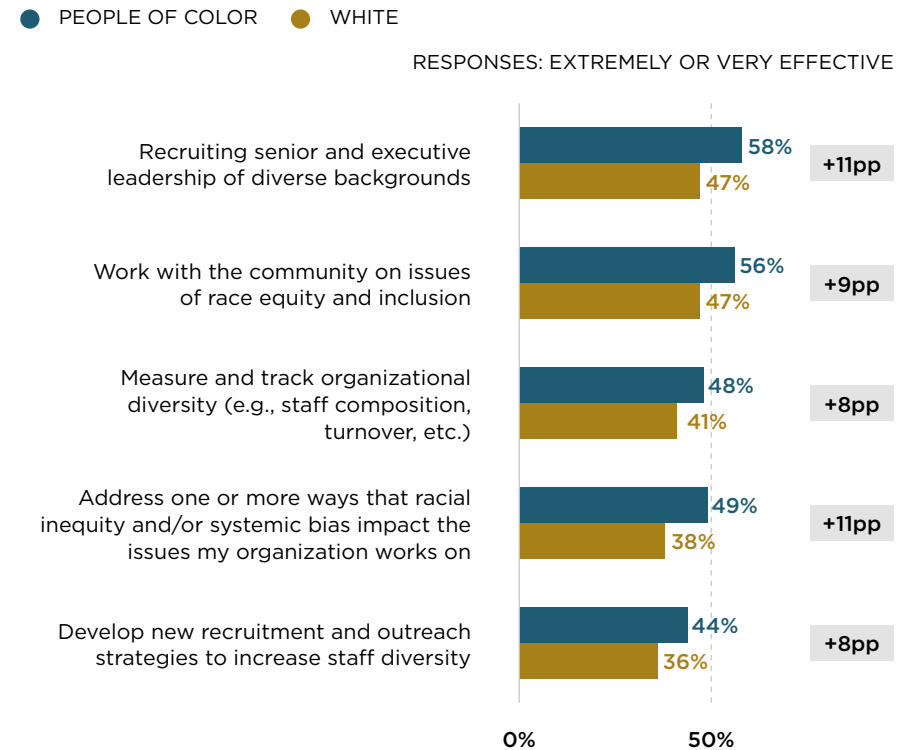
—White Woman Senior Manager

Strategies Preferred by Respondents of Color

Figure 5 focuses on the five DEI strategies where BIPOC respondents rated the intervention “extremely effective” or “very effective” at a rate more than 5 percentage points higher than white respondents. Fifty-eight percent of BIPOC respondents rated “recruiting senior and executive leadership of diverse backgrounds” as an *extremely* or *very* effective DEI strategy, compared to less than half (47%) of white respondents, an 11 percentage point difference. Similarly, there was an 11 percentage point gap between BIPOC (49%) and white (38%) respondents when rating the strategy, “address one or more ways that racial inequity and/or systemic bias impact the issues my organization works on.”

Other strategies that BIPOC respondents were considerably more likely to find *extremely* or *very* effective compared to white respondents included “work with the community on issues of race equity and inclusion” (56% BIPOC compared to 47% white), “measure and track organizational diversity” (48% BIPOC compared to 41% white), and “develop new recruitment and outreach strategies to increase staff diversity” (44% BIPOC compared to 36% white).

FIGURE 5 | DEI STRATEGIES RATED MORE EFFECTIVE BY BIPOC RESPONDENTS

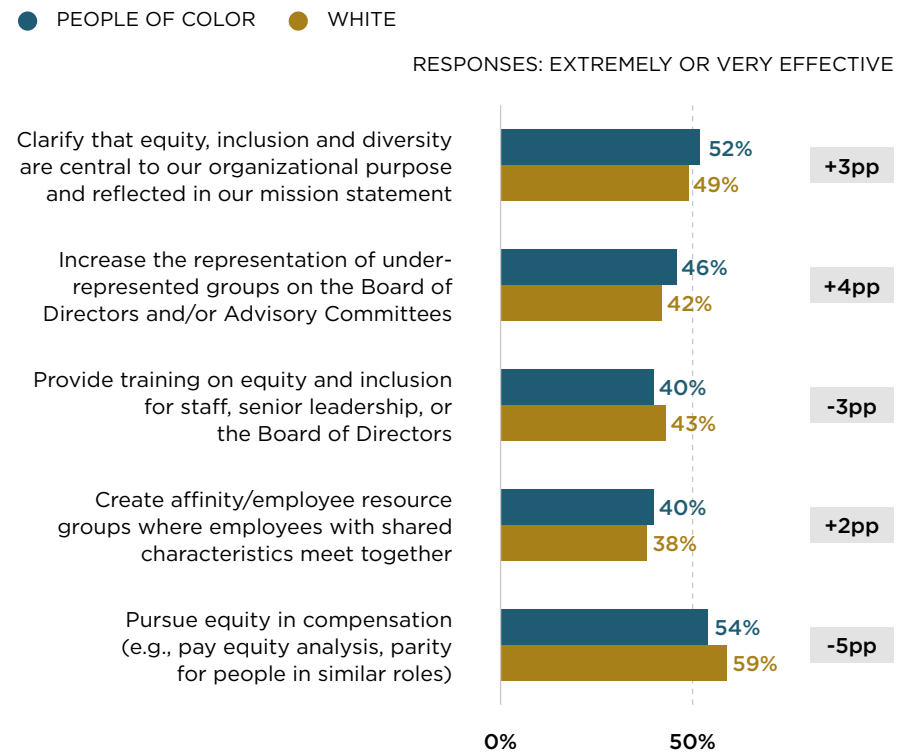


Strategies with Similar Effectiveness Ratings

There were four DEI strategies where similar percentages of people of color and white respondents provided ratings of *extremely* or *very* effective (see *Figure 6*). The two strategies most commonly reported by survey respondents, “training on equity and inclusion” and clarifying that “equity, inclusion and diversity are central” to the mission statements of organizations can be seen here. Training—the most commonly reported—was seen as *extremely* or *very* effective by only 40% of BIPOC and 43% of white respondents, while integrating racial equity into the mission was rated *extremely/very* effective by roughly half of BIPOC (52%) and white (49%) respondents. The intervention related to affinity groups and employee resource groups (ERGs) was selected least often as a DEI strategy, and it received the lowest ratings of effectiveness by both BIPOC (40%) and white (38%) respondents.¹¹

It is striking that the only DEI strategy that appeared to be preferred by white respondents was “pursue equity in compensation.” There was a 5 percentage point difference between the share of white respondents (59%) and respondents of color (54%) who rated this strategy *extremely* or *very* effective. This pay equity intervention was also the only DEI strategy rated *extremely* or *very* effective by more than half of white respondents.

FIGURE 6 | DEI STRATEGIES RATED SIMILARLY EFFECTIVE BY BIPOC AND WHITE RESPONDENTS



¹¹ ERG’s are a common DEI strategy in large, corporate settings and are formed to promote inclusivity, support, and advocacy for underrepresented communities within organization, providing a place for employees to connect, share experiences, and address issues related to DEI. Less than a third of respondents indicated that affinity groups/ERGs were a strategy being pursued in 2022 (as shown in *Figure 4* on [page 9](#)).

More DEI Makes A Bigger Difference

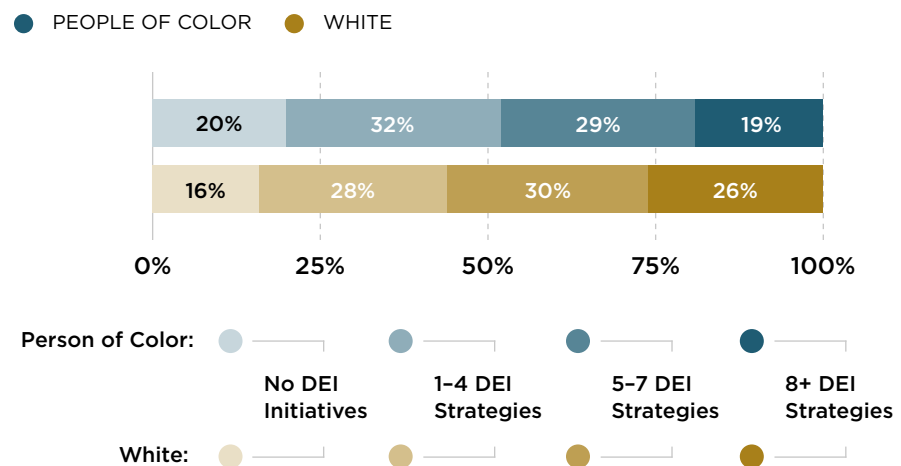
One way to understand the impact of DEI strategies is to look at how respondents rate their effectiveness. Another is to look at how the number of DEI strategies reported by survey takers correlates with their attitudes towards their workplace and organization.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of BIPOC and white respondents who reported that their organization had no DEI initiatives, compared to groups that implemented one to four, five to seven, or eight or more DEI strategies.¹² White respondents were more likely to report that they worked in organizations with five or more DEI strategies (56%), compared to BIPOC respondents (48%).

The *Race to Lead* survey also asked respondents to rate their level of agreement—on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree)—with the statement “I would be happy if I worked at this organization three years from now,” which is a measure related to staff retention. Similarly, asking respondents to rate their level of agreement with the statements “I feel I have a voice

in my organization” and “I am consulted before my organization makes key decisions that impact my work” probed their sense of control/efficacy in the workplace. The survey data shows that respondents who worked at organizations that implemented multiple DEI activities had more positive sentiments about their nonprofit workplace.

FIGURE 7 | NUMBER OF DEI STRATEGIES REPORTED BY BIPOC AND WHITE RESPONDENTS



¹² The DEI initiatives can be seen in Figure 4 on page 9.

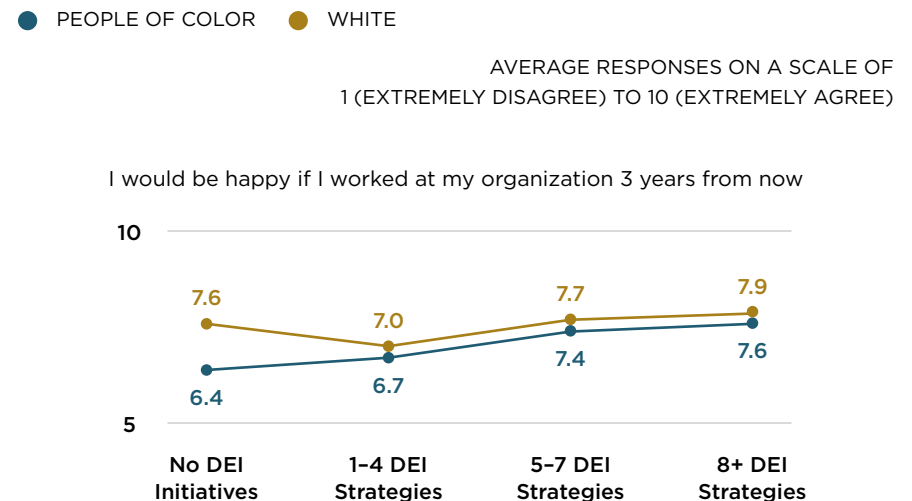
Workplace Experience Improves with the Number of DEI Strategies

The series of line graphs in the figures below shows that white respondents working at organizations that did not engage in any DEI work rated those workplaces more positively than people of color also working at nonprofits with no DEI initiatives. By contrast, among respondents who reported that their organization had only implemented a few DEI strategies, white respondents rated their organizations more negatively and their ratings were comparable to BIPOC respondents. Looking at respondents at organizations that implemented more than five DEI strategies, the ratings of both BIPOC and white respondents become the most positive.

In response to the statement about being happy to work at the same organization in three years, *Figure 8* shows a pronounced racial gap between BIPOC and white respondents working at organizations without DEI initiatives, with whites more positive (7.6) than people of color (6.4). The ratings of white respondents working at organizations that only implemented one to four DEI strategies were notably lower, but the gap between the average ratings of white and BIPOC respondents (7.0 and 6.7, respectively) narrowed significantly. The ratings became more positive for both white and BIPOC respondents as the number of DEI strategies they reported at their organizations increased.

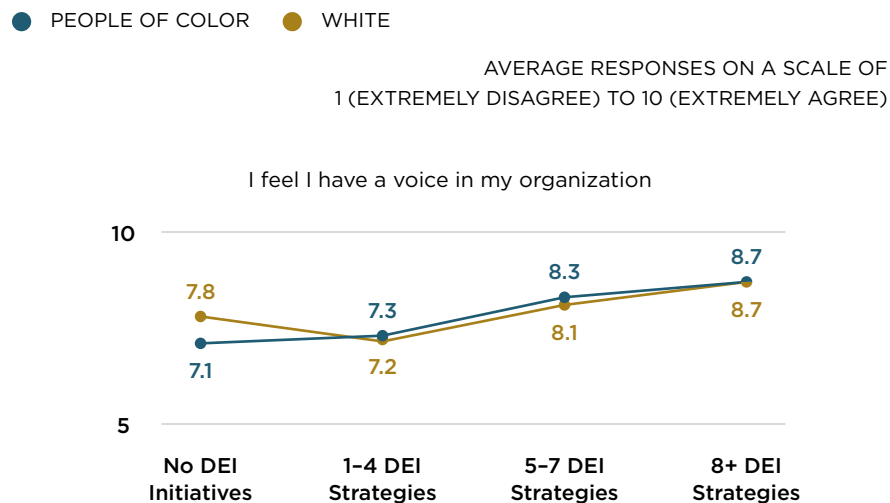
Survey takers who reported that their organizations had implemented five to seven strategies provided ratings of 7.7 for white people and 7.4 for people of color agreeing that they would be happy to still be working at their organization in three years. The ratings climbed even higher among respondents working at nonprofits that had pursued eight or more DEI strategies.

FIGURE 8 | INTENTION TO STAY AT ORGANIZATION BY NUMBER OF DEI STRATEGIES



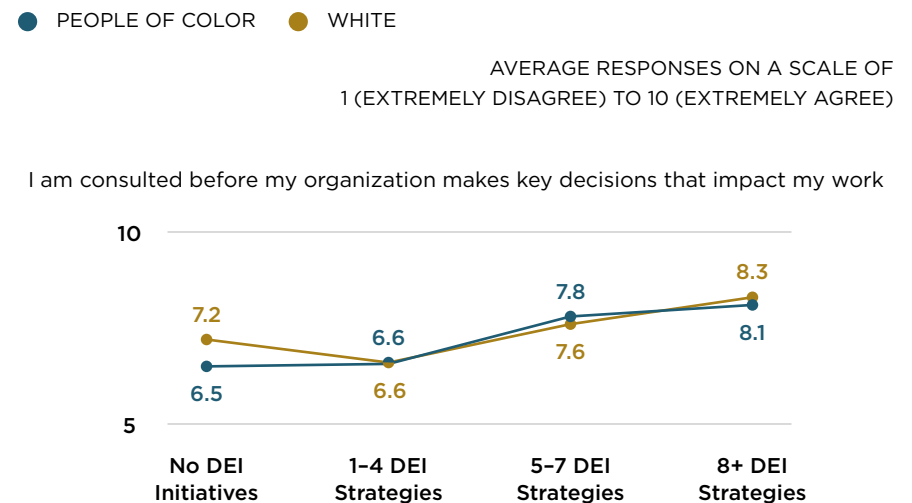
As seen in *Figure 9*, the average rating for white respondents who agreed that they “have a voice” in their organization followed the same trend. The ratings of white respondents who worked at organizations with no DEI initiatives was 7.8, compared to an average rating of 7.1 among BIPOC survey takers who also reported no DEI efforts in their nonprofit workplaces. The racial gap essentially disappeared for respondents in organizations with one to four DEI strategies (average ratings of 7.3 for white and 7.2 for BIPOC respondents). However, both white and BIPOC respondents working at organizations with five to seven DEI strategies gave their organizations higher ratings on the statement about voice (8.3 for white people and 8.1 for people of color). Among survey takers working at nonprofits that had implemented eight or more DEI strategies, the average rating was even higher, at 8.7, for both BIPOC and white respondents.

FIGURE 9 | SENSE THAT HAVE A VOICE AT WORK BY NUMBER OF DEI STRATEGIES



That trend continued in response to the statement about whether respondents are “consulted before my organization makes key decisions” impacting their work (see *Figure 10*). White respondents working for organizations with no DEI initiatives had an average rating of 7.2 on this statement; notably higher than the rating of 6.5 by BIPOC respondents. In the other categories, white and BIPOC respondents had similar ratings. Both BIPOC and white respondents working in nonprofits with one to four DEI strategies rated their organizations at 6.6. The ratings improved for respondents who worked for organizations that had five to seven strategies (average ratings of 7.6 for white and 7.8 for BIPOC respondents), and even further for those with eight or more DEI strategies (average ratings of 8.1 for BIPOC and 8.3 for white respondents).

FIGURE 10 | SENSE THAT CONSULTED AT WORK BY NUMBER OF DEI STRATEGIES



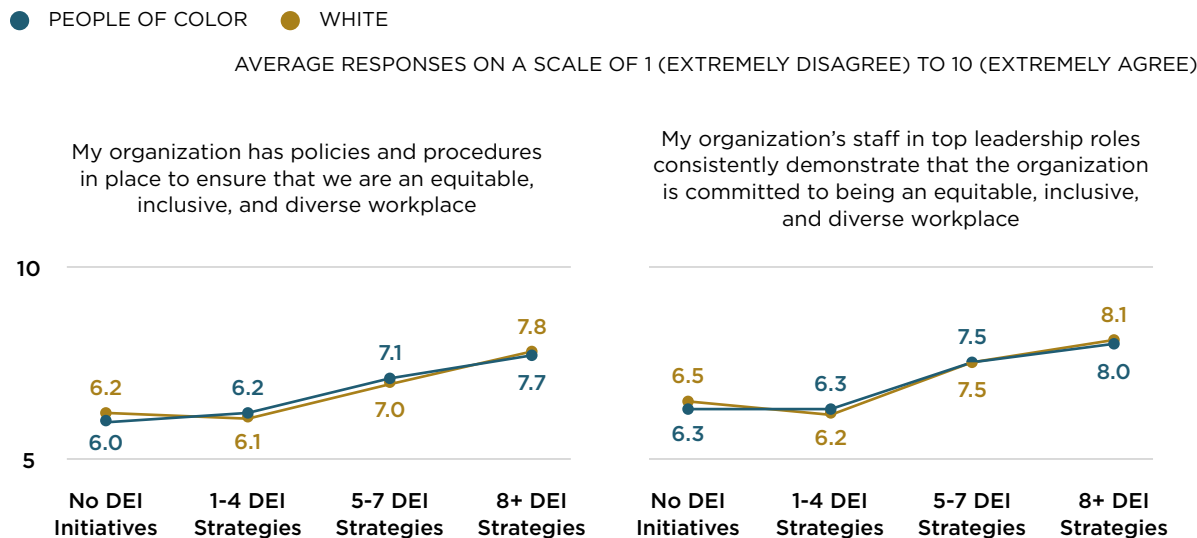
Sentiment Also Improves on Other Qualities of Equitable Workplaces

Survey takers also rated their agreement with several statements that probed other qualities of equitable organizations, as shown in *Figure 11*. In response to the statement about having “policies and procedures” to ensure that their organization was “an equitable, inclusive and diverse workplace,” the ratings followed a similar pattern when viewed through the number of DEI strategies. BIPOC and white respondents working at organizations with no DEI initiatives and those working at nonprofits with one to four DEI strategies had similar ratings (around 6 out of 10) on the statement about policies and procedures. But the ratings were roughly a point higher (around 7 out of 10) for both white and BIPOC respondents who reported that their organizations had done five to

seven DEI strategies, and the ratings were even higher (nearly 8 out of 10) for respondents working at organizations with eight or more DEI strategies.

Similarly, the ratings on the statement about the commitment by top leadership to an equitable, inclusive, and diverse workplace, were notably higher among respondents who reported that their organization had pursued at least five DEI strategies. The ratings of respondents working for organizations that had no DEI initiatives or had only implemented one to four DEI strategies ranged from 6.2 to 6.5 in their agreement that the leadership demonstrated commitment to DEI. But the average rating of both BIPOC and white respondents was a full point higher—at 7.5 out of 10—when they reported working at organizations with five to seven DEI strategies. The average ratings were even higher among respondents whose workplaces implemented eight or more DEI strategies (at 8.1 for white and 8.0 for BIPOC respondents).

FIGURE 11 | ADDITIONAL QUALITIES OF EQUITABLE WORKPLACES BY NUMBER OF DEI STRATEGIES



Sector-Wide Issues Persist

Despite many positive trendlines related to implementing DEI strategies where survey takers worked, the *Race to Lead* findings also indicated respondents of color still experienced significant racial bias.

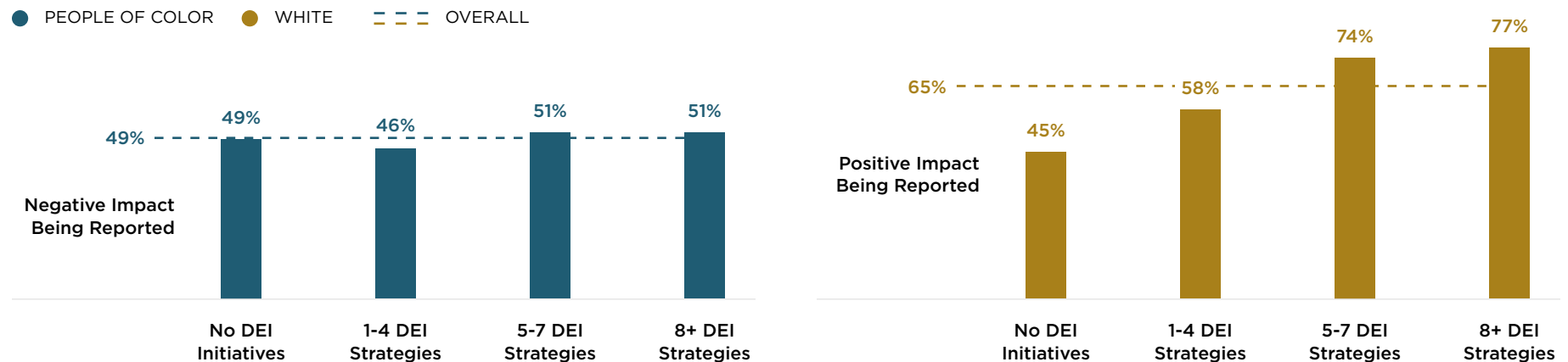
DEI and Racial Barriers to Advancement

The *Race to Lead* surveys have repeatedly shown that BIPOC respondents report that their race had a negative impact on their advancement over the course of their careers. In 2022, 49% of BIPOC respondents overall indicated negative career impacts due

to their race, and this finding remained consistent regardless of how many DEI strategies were undertaken by their organization.

In contrast to the data from respondents of color, the number of DEI initiatives appeared to have a significant impact on how white respondents answered the same question. As *Figure 12* shows, 65% of white respondents overall reported that their race had a positive impact over the course of their careers, but only 45% of white respondents working at organizations that had no DEI initiatives indicated that their race positively impacted their advancement. The percentage of white respondents acknowledging positive impacts due to their race increased steadily with the number of DEI strategies their nonprofit workplace had implemented.

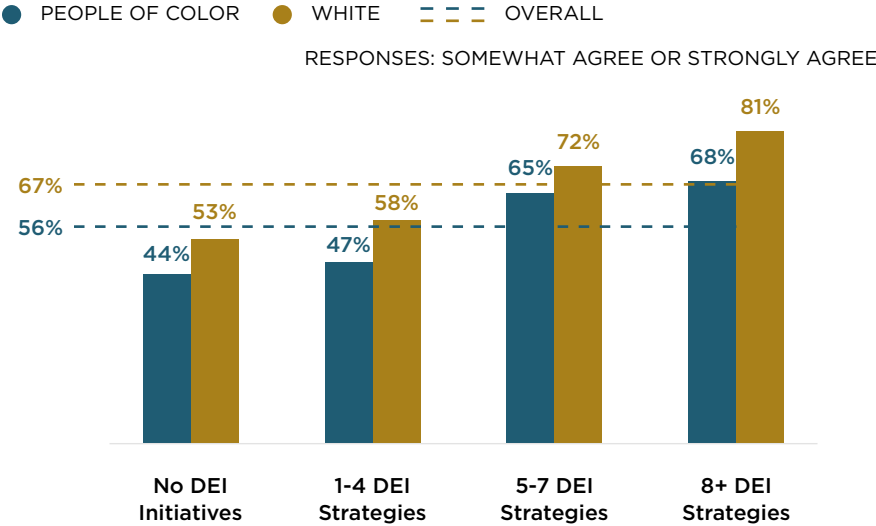
FIGURE 12 | IMPACT OF RACE ON CAREER ADVANCEMENT BY NUMBER OF DEI STRATEGIES



Contrasting Views of DEI

Respondents indicated varying levels of agreement with the statement “current DEI efforts are changing the nonprofit sector” to become more equitable and inclusive. Overall, more than half (56%) of BIPOC respondents strongly or somewhat agreed with the statement and roughly two-thirds (67%) of white respondents also agreed. As *Figure 13* shows, levels of agreement increased among respondents who reported that their organizations had implemented more DEI strategies. This suggests that working in an organization with more DEI strategies increases support for DEI and the belief that these efforts are having positive impacts in the sector.

FIGURE 13 | PERCEPTION OF THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF DEI SECTORWIDE



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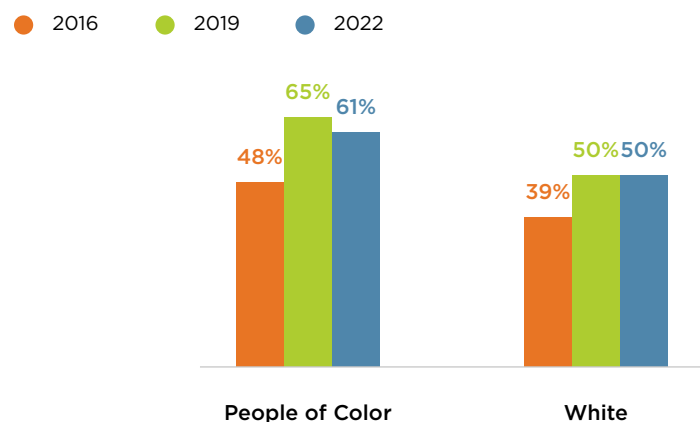
Most nonprofits I have worked for are very interested in doing DEI training, reframing their mission, and taking one-off symbolic actions to address racial and gender equity, but are unwilling to examine and fundamentally change the structural causes of inequities that usually rest in formal and unstated cultural aspects of how the organization runs, histories of leadership and how people are hired and promoted, and creating space and accommodations for different working styles, needs, etc.”

—White Woman Middle Manager



Since the first *Race to Lead* survey in 2016, BMP has also asked respondents to rate their levels of agreement that “nonprofits trying to address race and race equity in their organizations often create tensions that they are not equipped to resolve.” *Figure 14* shows that there was a marked increase in the percentage of BIPOC and white respondents who agreed (strongly or somewhat) with the statement between the 2016 and 2019 surveys. However, the level of agreement declined for respondents of color from 65% in 2019 to 61% in 2022 and held steady at 50% for white respondents. This data shows that respondents of color have been more concerned about resistance to DEI initiatives over the three surveys. However, the write-in responses that were most specific and compelling in addressing the pitfalls of unsuccessful DEI initiatives were written by white respondents.

FIGURE 14 | PERCEPTION OF NONPROFITS’ ABILITY TO ADDRESS RACE EQUITY



“

Nonprofits aren’t *creating* tensions through DEI work, they’re unearthing tensions that have always been there but it wasn’t safe enough for BIPOC stakeholders to bring them up, but then they are absolutely often ill-equipped to handle those issues, especially historically white-led orgs.”

—White Gender Non-Binary Senior Manager

“

The challenge I’ve experienced directly is that senior leadership shows up to DEI trainings, tries to lead DEI conversations, etc. but then when a harmful incident happens, they do not have an operational understanding of how to address inequity.”

—White Woman Senior Manager

Implications: Blocking the Backlash



The findings from this report affirm the importance and effectiveness of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts in nonprofit organizations, especially for staff of color. The data also suggests that DEI is a starting point, not a solution, for addressing issues of racial bias in the sector, and that many organizations need more capacity and expertise to push through common tensions that arise in nonprofit workplaces when they are taking steps to become more equitable and inclusive.

DEI efforts were increasingly common in the nonprofit sector in 2022. People of color tended to provide higher ratings of effectiveness when asked about DEI strategies their organizations implemented, and white respondents agreed more strongly that DEI efforts were making the sector more equitable and inclusive. When asked to indicate their agreement with key statements about their experience in the nonprofits where they work, respondents tended to rate their organizations more positively when they worked at organizations that had implemented a larger number of DEI strategies.

Taken together, these findings should strengthen the resolve of organizational managers, funders and thought leaders in the nonprofit sector to resist the current backlash against DEI. There are also particular implications from the findings that can increase the impact of DEI interventions to make nonprofit workplaces more welcoming to staff and leaders of color.

- **Fund DEI initiatives in small nonprofits.** Many nonprofit workers, including roughly a quarter of respondents to the 2022 survey, work for organizations with small budgets. So it is concerning that organizations with budgets of \$1 million or less lag 10 percentage points behind all other budget categories in implementing DEI strategies. This data highlights the need for the nonprofit sector to ensure that cost is not a barrier to DEI interventions required to make all workplaces more equitable and inclusive. Smaller organizations should have access to affordable DEI supports. These nonprofits also need funding to pay for the specialized consulting and capacity building that is critical to overcoming initial resistance to DEI efforts and fully implementing impactful, multi-faceted DEI programs.
- **Address concerns about effectiveness and resistance.** BIPOC respondents were more likely to rate DEI activities in organizations as *extremely* or *very* effective than white respondents, especially on DEI strategies related to diversifying and tracking the diversity of senior leadership and staff. The one strategy that white respondents rated considerably higher than respondents of color was pursuing equity in compensation. One interpretation of these racial

differences in the kinds of DEI strategies that are preferred is that BIPOC respondents experience a psycho-social benefit from DEI strategies that bring more leadership and staff of color into organizations, and white respondents experience a financial benefit from pay equity strategies.

Also, white respondents who worked at organizations that had implemented one to four DEI strategies, rated their organizations more negatively on key statements about their happiness in their workplace than white respondents working at organizations that had not engaged in DEI or those who reported their workplaces pursued five or more kinds of DEI efforts. The less positive ratings by white respondents for most DEI strategies and the dip in the ratings of workplace experience appear to corroborate anecdotal reports that DEI initiatives sometimes trigger defensiveness on the part of white staff who want to protect their power, and sense of self-esteem and inherent goodness.¹³ While there have also been debates among DEI practitioners and organizational leaders about what kinds of frameworks and interventions best contribute to the goal of making workplaces more equitable and inclusive, it is clear from the data that the more DEI strategies used by an

organization, the more positive both BIPOC and white staff rate their experience.¹⁴ This finding supports the importance of “pushing through” initial resistance to DEI efforts in nonprofits.

- **Strengthen work to dismantle structural barriers.**

In general, the findings in this report suggest that the key for organizations striving to be more equitable is to simply get started. Even if implementing a couple of DEI strategies triggers some resistance on the part of white staff, the data shows that BIPOC and white respondents working at organizations that have implemented five or more of the strategies view DEI initiatives more favorably, have more positive experiences in their workplaces, and many other positive developments.

White survey takers demonstrated greater awareness of “the white advantage”¹⁵ in the nonprofit sector as the number of DEI strategies in their organizations increased. However, respondents of color consistently reported that their race had negatively impacted their advancement regardless of the number of DEI strategies implemented at their nonprofit workplace.

13 See Park, Lauren and Lin Gensing-Pophal, “Why DEI Backlash Exists and What to Do About It,” (SAP Insights), <https://www.sap.com/insights/viewpoints/why-dei-backlash-exists.html> & Zhen, Lily, “To Avoid DEI Backlash, Focus on Changing Systems – Not People,” (Harvard Business Review, September 21, 2022), <https://hbr.org/2022/09/to-avoid-dei-backlash-focus-on-changing-systems-not-people>.

14 See Harmeling, Susan, Ph.D., “Death By DEI: An Explosive Field Must Police Itself More Carefully,” (Forbes), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/susanharmeling/2023/08/24/death-by-dei-an-explosive-field-must-police-itself-more-carefully/> & Diaminah, Sendolo, Scot Nakagawa, Rinku Sen, Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, and Lori Villarosa, “How (Not) to Dismantle White Supremacy,” (The Forge), <https://forgeorganizing.org/article/how-not-dismantle-white-supremacy>.

15 See Key Finding 2 in “Race to Lead Revisited: Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap” at <https://buildingmovement.org/reports/race-to-lead-revisited-national-report/>.

BIPOC respondents rated recruiting more diverse senior leadership and staff as an effective DEI strategy, which could—in the long run—address the more systemic barrier facing people of color in career advancement. However, if the DEI backlash takes hold in the nonprofit sector, it is also possible that the accomplishments people of color will face added scrutiny and that leaders of color will be undermined and pushed over the proverbial “glass cliff.”¹⁶

“

I really appreciate this survey and your commitment to advancing DEI. Please help organizations like mine take their work to the next level, lean into difficult conversations, make change, and create a culture of respect, honesty, and dissent.”

—White Woman Senior Manager

¹⁶ See “Trading Glass Ceilings for Glass Cliffs: A Race to Lead Report on Nonprofit Executives of Color” at <https://buildingmovement.org/reports/trading-glass-ceilings-for-glass-cliffs-a-race-to-lead-report-on-nonprofit-executives-of-color/>.

Appendix:

Early Insights from the Building Blocks for Change Race Equity Assessment



One additional source of data and insights on how nonprofits can advance diversity, equity, and inclusion comes from the staffers in organizations that have adopted BMP's *Building Blocks for Change* (BB4C) race equity assessment. The BB4C assessment, used by racial equity consultants and by organizations on their own, produces information for individual organizations and can be aggregated to provide findings for the sector overall.

While preparing to launch the 2019 *Race to Lead* survey, the Building Movement Project staff also began developing the framework for what would become the *Building Blocks for Change* race equity assessment. In the 2019 survey, BMP introduced a new set of questions to explore the distinct differences between how people of color and white respondents experienced their nonprofit workplaces. At the time, the data indicated that these racialized differences were particularly pronounced when analyzing survey responses based on whether respondents worked for White-run nonprofits, compared to respondents in the POC-led or All Other categories.¹⁷ The data from those new questions introduced in 2019 also informed the development and beta-testing of BMP's race equity assessment.

The *Building Blocks for Change* (BB4C) assessment process involves three main phases. The key element of the first phase is administering a survey across an entire nonprofit's staff. Following the completion of the survey, the organization receives a custom report generated by algorithms that were rigorously tested for reliability. In the final phase, the organization stewards and implements ongoing race equity strategies. The dataset generated by the assessment survey includes responses from organizations that were beta-testers of the assessment starting in June of 2020 and nonprofits that have utilized the assessment following its public launch in February of 2023. As of the writing of this report, more than three thousand nonprofit employees had completed the assessment, but the data will grow as more nonprofit organizations adopt the BB4C assessment to advance their internal race equity strategies.¹⁸

The parallels between the survey instruments used for the *Race to Lead* research on the sector and the *Building Blocks for Change* assessment for organizations create an opportunity to compare the two datasets. For instance, the overall percentage of respondents of color are similar in both datasets.

¹⁷ See *Figure 19* in “*Race to Lead* Revisited: Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap” at <https://buildingmovement.org/reports/race-to-lead-revisited-national-report/>.

¹⁸ The total number of respondents that is the basis for the analysis of the BB4C sample is 3,094 individuals; these respondents were affiliated with 61 nonprofit organizations at the time that they completed the survey. The *Race to Lead* dataset from 2022 includes responses from 3,066 survey takers.

As shown in *Figure A*, 40% of respondents to the 2022 *Race to Lead* survey were BIPOC, as were 37% of the respondents to the assessment. However, the BB4C dataset is weighted toward respondents working at white-run organizations. *Figure B* shows the percentage of respondents in each sample based on the demographics of the organization they work for. Half of the assessment’s dataset are respondents working for organizations where less than 25% of the Board of Directors and Senior Leadership are people of color; a notably higher percentage than the comparable sample from the 2022 *Race to Lead* survey. This difference between the BB4C assessment and the *Race to Lead* survey makes sense; as *Figure 2* on [page 7](#) shows, respondents working for “white-run” organizations reported the biggest increase (10 percentage points) in DEI initiatives between 2019 and 2022.

Every element of the assessment relates to one of four capacities that undergirds the BB4C assessment: Conversation, Leadership, Learning and Voice. This capacity-based framework is foundational to fostering more racially equitable workplaces, and helps nonprofits apply an organizational development approach to their DEI efforts. The *Building Blocks for Change* assessment measures the organization’s capacity in each of the four areas by asking staff a series of questions that parallel the structure of the questions in the *Race to Lead* survey where respondents rated their level of agreement on a scale from 1 (extremely disagree) to 10 (extremely agree). For instance, the assessment asks a question similar to having “a voice in my organization” shown in *Figure 9* on [page 16](#). It is one of roughly a dozen statements related to the “voice” capacity, which refers to an organization’s ability to listen to diverse perspectives and amplify the influence of people who have generally not been

heard in the past. The algorithms that generate the custom assessment reports calculate organizational scores for each capacity based on how individual staff respond to each of the statements within each respective capacity.

FIGURE A | RACE/ETHNICITY BY DATASET

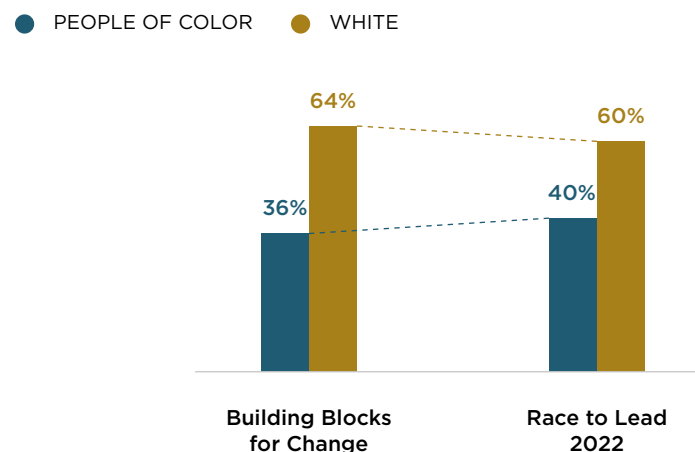
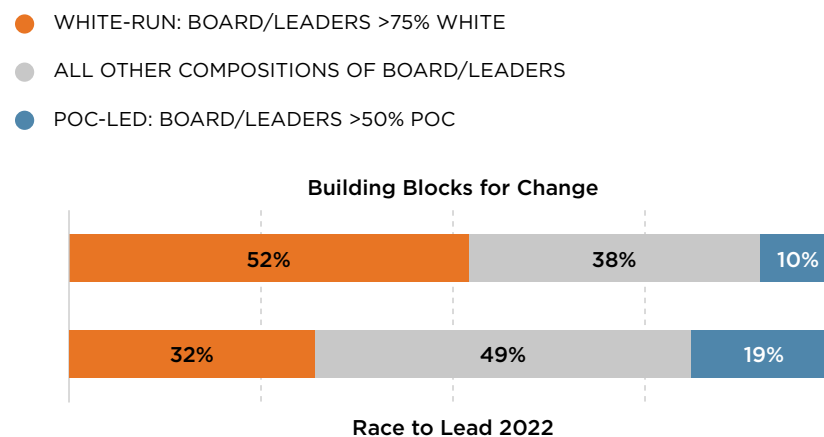


FIGURE B | COMPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP BY DATASET





LEARNING

The Learning Capacity refers to a willingness to learn, test new ideas, and change.



LEADERSHIP

The Leadership Capacity speaks to the importance of senior leaders to champion race equity.



CONVERSATION

The Conversation Capacity is rooted in the idea that meaningful race equity efforts require the ability to have hard conversations.



VOICE

The Voice Capacity refers to the ability to listen to voices and amplify influence from broader groups of people, especially people of color.

Each capacity highlights an area where organizations can develop in order to make progress towards being more equitable and inclusive workplaces. The custom reports often show notable differences among the four capacities. The capacity that receives the lowest score is often the one that organizations will focus on strengthening. For instance, an organization that has lower scores for the “Conversation” capacity is one where staff tended to have less agreement with a statement like “We are not afraid of having conversations about race equity.” Therefore, that organization might prioritize training on interpersonal communication styles and skillful facilitation for organization-wide dialogues.

“

BB4C is a very high-quality assessment and the report doubles down on the quality of the assessment. It has been transformational for our organization.”

—Leader of an Organization that Utilized BB4C

“

BB4C added so much efficiency and a very quick turnaround, which meant that I could hit the ground running with the clients I was supporting from day one.”

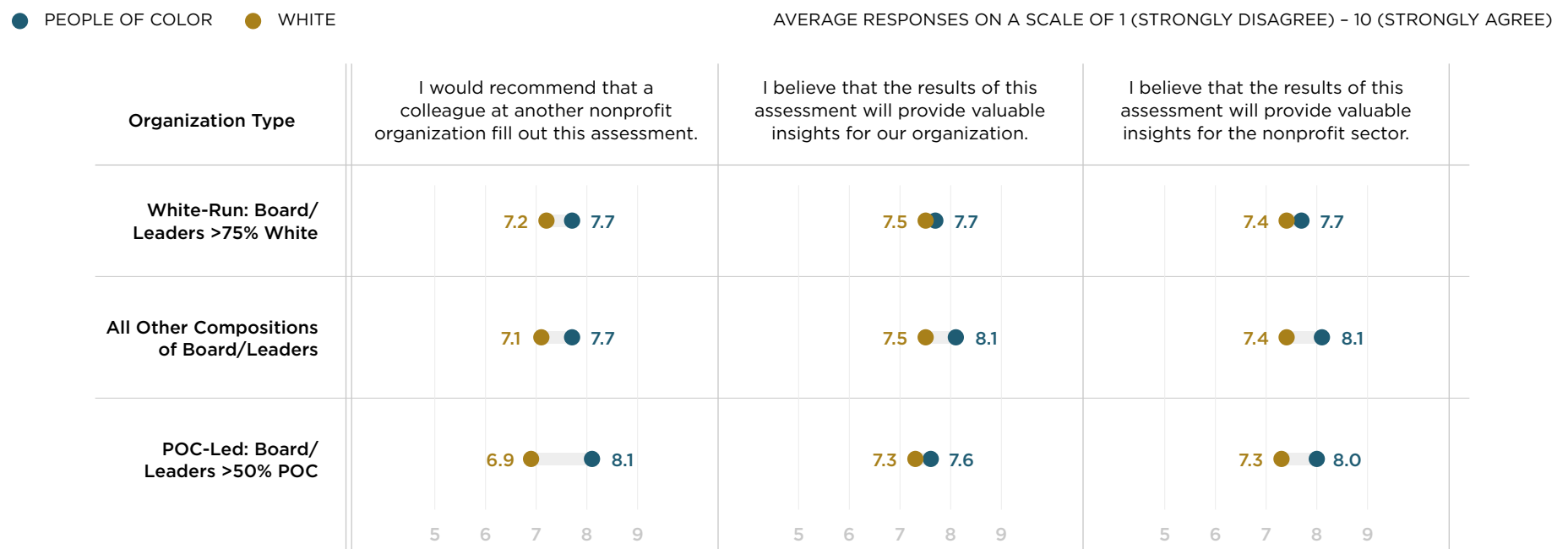
—Consultant/Capacity Builder Using BB4C with Client Organizations

Figure C shows the average scores of people of color and white people in response to three statements at the end of the assessment meant to capture feedback. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree) the average scores for the statement that recommends the assessment to “a colleague at another nonprofit” were similar between people of color and white people working at white-run organizations (7.7 and 7.2, respectively). People of color working at POC-led organizations were even more positive in their agreement that they would recommend the assessment to another organization (8.1 for BIPOC, compared to 6.9 for whites in POC-led groups). While the ratings of people of color were consistently higher for each of the statements regardless of the racial composition of the

organization’s leadership, the gaps were relatively small between BIPOC and white staff on whether they believed the assessment would provide “valuable insights” for their organization and the nonprofit sector.

The BB4C dataset is gathering baseline data about staff perceptions and experiences of their nonprofit workplaces. Overall, the data suggests that the organizations utilizing the assessment have room for improvement in staff ratings and workplace sentiment. Over time, the data will offer more valuable insights for the field, particularly as prior users of the assessment begin documenting their internal change processes.

FIGURE C | FEEDBACK ON BUILDING BLOCKS FOR CHANGE BY RACIAL COMPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP





Building Movement Project

For more information, please visit The Building Movement Project at www.buildingmovement.org or contact us at info@buildingmovement.org

