

RACE TO LEAD REVISITED:

Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap

Executive Summary

Race to Lead Revisited: Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap presents findings from a 2019 survey of more than 5,000 paid nonprofit staff on their experiences of race and leadership in nonprofit settings, including many of the same questions asked in BMP's 2016 national survey of nonprofit employees, which showed that people of color in the sector were similarly qualified as white respondents and had more interest than white peers in becoming a nonprofit leader.

This report also presents new data and analysis that explores how respondents experience diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in the workplace; personal and organizational financial circumstances; and views on how to both increase the diversity of organizational leaders and support people of color already leading in the nonprofit sector. The data demonstrates that nonprofit organizations are defined by a pervasive and systemic *white advantage*, a term used in this report to describe the concrete ways that structure and power in nonprofit organizations reinforce the benefits of whiteness. This is particularly evident when comparing organizations run by white people and organizations led by people of color. The data shows notable differences in the experiences of both people of color and white respondents based on the racial composition of their organization's leadership.

Race to Lead Revisited focuses on three key findings that illustrate what is required of individual organizations and the sector at large to move toward greater equity and inclusion:

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

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I am usually the only or one of a handful of BIPOCs [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] in the room. It's such an isolating, frustrating and infuriating dynamic ... The lack of leadership of color at every organization I've worked at has impacted not only the running of the organization, but my own professional and even personal development.”

—Black Woman

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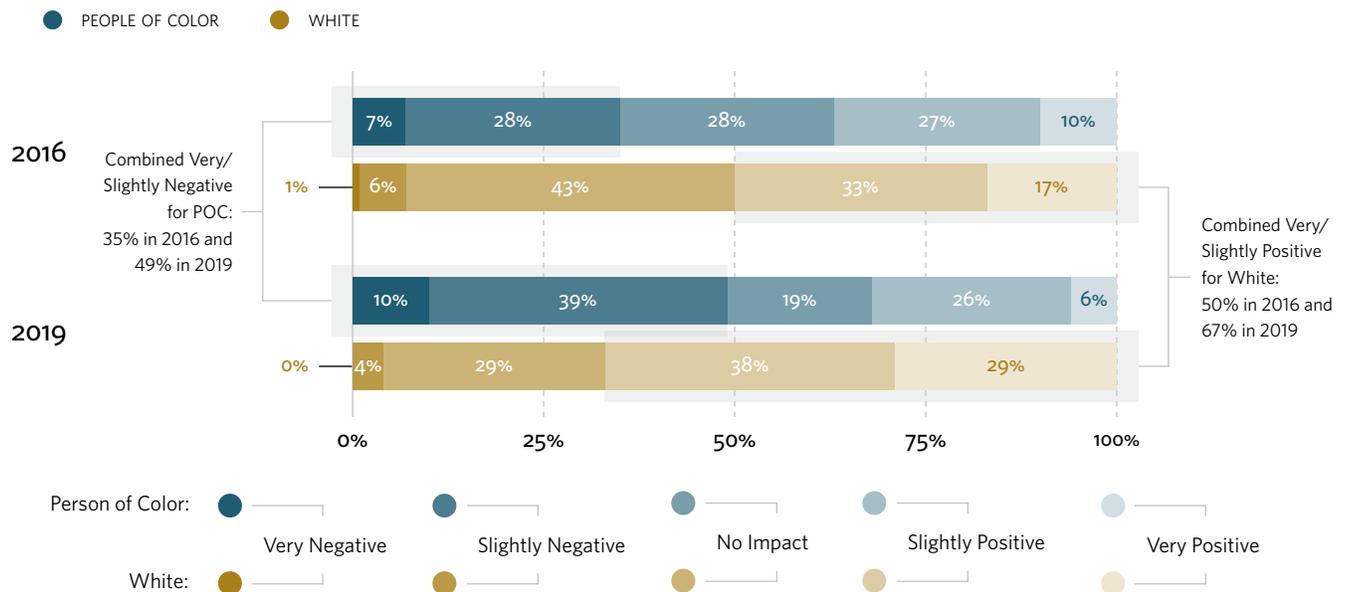
I was hired by a white woman and became part of a long line of white women who have led [the organization] as directors. It doesn't feel great to point that out, but I think our former director could relate to me and identified me as a leader partly due to race and culture.”

—White Woman

1 THE FINDINGS OF THE ORIGINAL RACE TO LEAD REPORT STILL HOLD THREE YEARS LATER

Race to Lead Revisited confirms findings in the original 2017 report that people of color have similar leadership qualifications as white respondents. As in the first *Race to Lead* report, more people of color aspire to become nonprofit leaders than their white counterparts, and the 2019 results show the gap between the two groups is widening. In contrast to three years prior, people of color were substantially more likely to state that race is a barrier to their advancement, while white respondents were more likely to agree that their race provides a career advantage. People of all races were more likely to agree with statements describing obstacles people of color face in obtaining leadership positions. Both these findings point to greater awareness of the problem but a lack of change in actual conditions. There were incremental improvements among all respondents about the career support available to them, and respondents overall reported fewer instances of encountering specific career obstacles. However, white respondents reported more types of support and fewer challenges than people of color, and the gap between the two groups on these experiences either remained constant or grew compared to the original *Race to Lead* report.

TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU THINK YOUR RACE HAS PLAYED A ROLE IN YOUR OWN CAREER ADVANCEMENT?

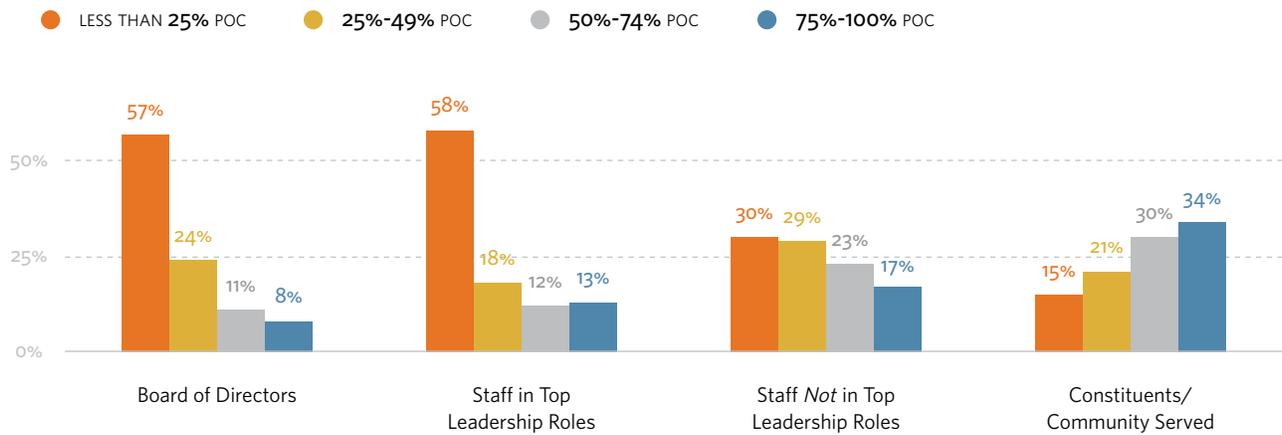


2 THERE IS A WHITE ADVANTAGE IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

This report categorizes the nonprofit workplaces of survey respondents into three organizational types: *White-run* organizations in which the board and leadership is more than 75% white; *POC-led* organizations in which more than 50% of the board and leadership are people of color; and *All Other* organizations with leadership configurations in between the other two categories. Notably, the All Other category also skews significantly toward leadership demographics that are predominantly white. Among these three organization types, almost half of survey respondents worked in White-run organizations, followed closely by All Other organizational configurations, and a much smaller share of survey respondents worked in POC-led organizations. People of color in White-run organizations reported the least positive experiences compared to people of color working in the two other

organizational categories. The white advantage is also evident in the financial status of both organizations and individuals in the nonprofit sector. White-run organizations are more likely to have larger organizational budgets than those led by people of color. Also, white people in the sector are more likely than peers of color to have another source of household income, more likely to receive additional income like bonuses or cost of living increases, and less likely to support other family members outside their household.

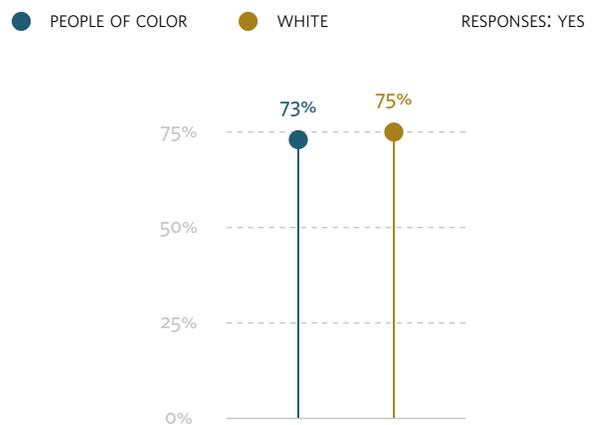
HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE RACIAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF YOUR CURRENT ORGANIZATION?



3 DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI) EFFORTS ARE WIDESPREAD AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS IS UNCERTAIN

New survey questions show that close to three quarters of respondents work for organizations with DEI initiatives, and training was the most frequently reported activity. Despite the prevalence of these efforts, people of color in focus groups reported few shifts toward equity in the workplace. Among respondents working for White-run organizations and All Other organizations with the exception of groups led by people of color, respondent experiences with DEI efforts were less positive for people of color than white people; that racial gap shrunk among respondents working for POC-led groups. Extensive DEI efforts among nonprofits seem to have resulted in increased awareness of race and equity issues among both respondents of color and white people compared to the first survey, but there are substantial differences in how people of color and white people understand the role of race in the nonprofit world. Overall, the increased awareness of race and equity has yet to change the racialized experiences of people working in the sector.

DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION ENGAGE IN ANY DEI INITIATIVES OR ACTIVITIES?



Hundreds of write-in responses and focus group observations indicate an exhaustion experienced by people of color in the nonprofit sector. People of color shared reflections about the constant demands of both job responsibilities and navigating issues related to race, and particularly the intersection of race and gender. Whether their frustrations related to being among the only people of color in a predominantly white organization, or considering whether to challenge racially fraught incidents given the potential for retaliation, or simply being overlooked and unheard, these reflections exemplify the disparity of nonprofit sector experiences among people of color compared to white peers.

Although the challenges generated by the COVID-19 pandemic will likely affect the sector for months and years to come, this should not serve as a justification for nonprofits to set aside issues of race equity in the workplace. Instead, the disruption and tension of this moment can help accelerate change, as is visible in the unprecedented protest over the killing of Black people. The nonprofit sector can similarly embrace the opportunity to begin renewed work to deal with the long-term inequities and social ruptures made even more visible by the global health and economic crisis.

Based on survey and focus group findings, *Race to Lead Revisited* offers recommendations for how the nonprofit sector and individual organizations can think differently and change behavior to make more significant progress toward racial equity. The persistent gaps between the experiences of people of color and white respondents highlight the need for nonprofit leaders, funders, and supporters to understand and acknowledge the systemic white advantage that permeates the sector. To take effective action to meaningfully address racial inequities, existing DEI efforts on race and racism must move beyond awareness and discussion to enact tangible changes in organizational policies and practices. To do that, organizational leadership must examine the formal and informal rules guiding their workplaces that maintain white dominance. Change in the sector can only happen when nonprofit groups identify the concrete, structural factors that reproduce racial leadership disparities, and undertake new and transformative steps to fundamentally include and expand the voices and experiences of people of color.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

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When we tried to have a conversation about white supremacy culture internally, our white female ED shut down and tried to leave the room. Further conversations about white supremacy culture were equally as unproductive.”

—Pacific Islander and White Multiracial Woman

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It is challenging constantly being the only Latina in all-white and mostly male circles. It is a constant challenge of knowing when to be strategic to stand up for my community and when I need to hold back or else be left out of decision-making circles and labeled as the ‘angry Latina.’”

—Latina Woman



Building Movement Project

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