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## Executive Summary

The Building Movement Project's report, *On the Frontlines: Nonprofits Led by People of Color Confront COVID-19 and Structural Racism*, shines a spotlight on how 2020's social upheavals are affecting people of color-led (POC) nonprofit organizations and their communities, programs, leadership, and financial sustainability. The report also provides recommendations to strengthen these nonprofits, leaders of color, and their communities well beyond the crisis response and recovery period and for decades to come.

The nonprofit sector, the third largest employer in the United States,<sup>1</sup> is in a state of uncertainty and flux in the wake of the pandemic and economic instability. Not surprisingly, POC-led nonprofits, which tend to be smaller, less resourced, and community-based, face an even more challenging set of circumstances. Their very survival—and that of the communities who rely on them—is at stake.

Simultaneously, POC-led nonprofits are leading and participating in advocacy and organizing efforts for equity and justice. The uprisings of 2020 against anti-Black racism have galvanized POC-led organizations to build cross-racial coalitions and to push for systemic and structural changes.

As this report shows, POC-led nonprofits are on the frontlines of response and recovery efforts related to both the pandemic and the calls for systemic change. As a result, their programs and strategies are shifting, and their financial and leadership needs are increasing. Despite these conditions, POC-led nonprofits are refusing to return to business as usual. They are charting new paths for systemic change, solidarity, and sustainability. The nonprofit sector, philanthropy, and government actors must follow the lead of POC-led nonprofits in order to secure a more equitable and just future for everyone.

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As we talk about recovery and resiliency, those words are attached to systems change. We know there's no going back to business as usual. We shouldn't want to go back to business as usual. That's what got disrupted. The light has shined. We know the disparities. We know the inequities. This is our moment to fix it and get it right, to treat people with dignity and respect.

—Keisha Browder, United Way of Santa Cruz County

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## On the Frontlines: Nonprofits Led by People of Color Confront COVID-19 and Structural Racism



Building Movement Project



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## Key Findings Overview

**1 | Organizations led by people of color are preparing for multiple crises in the immediate future due to unmet survival needs, a resurgence of COVID-19, and policies that criminalize communities of color.**

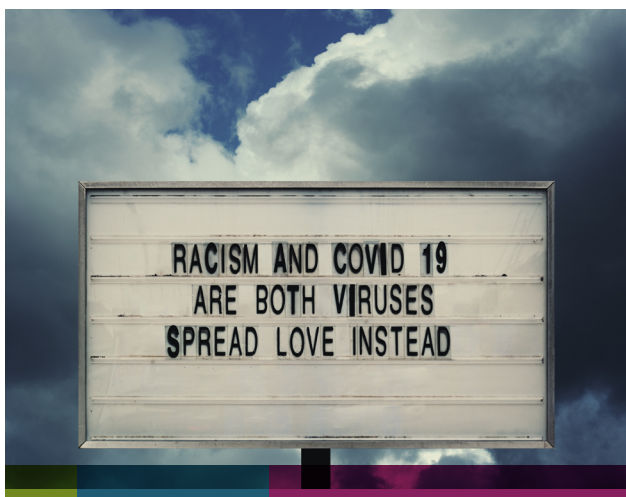
Many leaders of color expect that unmet survival needs related to food insecurity, jobs, housing, more COVID-19 illnesses and deaths, and harsh economic consequences will significantly increase over the next year. Some leaders are also anticipating the potential for backlash to the uprisings against police brutality and systemic racism, as well as an uptick in surveillance and criminalization of communities of color.

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We see a tsunami coming at us in the months ahead.

—Margaret Mitchell, YWCA Greater Cleveland

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**2 | POC-led organizations that are responding to the uprisings against anti-Black racism need partnerships and investments that deepen their organizing, advocacy, and solidarity efforts.**

The mass uprisings against police violence and systemic racism have catalyzed advocacy and solidarity efforts among Black-led and non-Black people of color led groups alike. Yet, Black-led groups reported decreases in funding in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic. Organizations led by non-Black people of color identified the importance of centering Black communities through solidarity efforts.

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We have the direct line to a lot of local elected officials. I think the anger and the frustration of protesters, we can use that as a kind of wind to say, “Hey, governor, what are you doing around this? You see all these people behind us? Here are some policy demands that we have.

—Angela Lang, Black Leaders Organizing for Communities (BLOC)

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**3 | Since the start of the pandemic, organizations have been pivoting to meet the pressing demands of their communities and filling the gaps left by ineffective government policies and systems.**

COVID-19 has only exacerbated existing needs and inequities caused by structural racism, poverty, and inequitable policies. In response, POC-led nonprofits are implementing new programs and activities, launching food banks and mutual aid programs, serving as multilingual information hubs, and experimenting with ways to connect with their members and constituencies given social distancing guidelines.

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We have to be super flexible, roll with the punches, and not get attached to any one way of our work looking over the next year, because every few weeks, we get new information.

—Kandace Vallejo, Youth Rise Texas

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**4 | The toll on nonprofit leaders of color, particularly women of color leaders, is immense.**

The overwhelming consensus is that the current climate is taking an immeasurable psychological, physical, and emotional toll, especially on women of color leaders. POC leaders identified the importance of creating a culture of well-being and sustainability within their organizations and in the nonprofit sector as a whole.

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When we get out of this, six months later, a huge disproportionate number of leaders of color will disappear from this work because of the burnout.

—Eric Ward, Western States Center

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## 5 | *The long-term financial stability of POC-led nonprofits is unclear.*

While most of the organizations surveyed are on somewhat stable ground for the immediate future due to flexibility extended by foundation grants, emergency funds, and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans via the CARES Act, many are concerned about their long-term sustainability.

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We need money, and trust. When we tell you, “We know what we’re doing,” you can believe us. We need not just funding for this six-month period of crisis, not just for a year, but multiple years of funding so we are enabled and have the capacity and resources to create transformation. That would be my biggest hope.

—Jamila Medley,  
Philadelphia Area Cooperative Alliance

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*POC-led nonprofits and their communities have been fundamentally re-shaped in 2020. It is clear that there will be no return to normalcy in the wake of the pandemic, economic instability and the national uprisings to address anti-Black racism. That is why the nonprofit sector, policymakers, and philanthropy all have vital roles to play in creating a more equitable and just future for all our communities.*



Building Movement Project

For more information, please visit  
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