

Trading Glass Ceilings for Glass Cliffs: A Conversation with Black Nonprofit Leaders

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Presented by the [Building Movement Project](#) (BMP)

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: Hello, everyone. Welcome to [this webinar](#) on BMP's latest report, [Trading Glass Ceilings for Glass Cliffs](#). We had over 800 people register for this webinar, which is great. I'm seeing some people are already putting their greetings in the chat, which is great to see. Thanks for doing that, folks. I just wanted to start out by welcoming everyone to this webinar conversation. We're talking today about BMP's latest report, which we titled *Trading Glass Ceilings for Glass Cliffs*. And we will also have a conversation with three Black nonprofit leaders about how the insights from the report reflect their experience.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge what's happening in the world, and the global context that has dominated the news for the past few days. Our thoughts are with the people of Ukraine and with Ukrainian Americans here in the US. And we're also thinking about people across the globe impacted by war and violence, who are seeking refuge and protection. As an organization, BMP expresses our solidarity with social movements here and abroad, in support of the rights of immigrants and refugees. We just understand that the news is affecting everybody joining right now in a lot of ways, and just wanted to extend our care and support.

As folks are engaging in this conversation, I want to acknowledge that you're not visible, but you are welcome to use the chat function both to send tech issues to BMP, and also if you want to share your experiences, feel free to do so through chat. Also want to invite people to share your reactions and experiences using social media. You can see the #RaceToLead at the bottom of this slide.

This webinar is being recorded. We'll share the link along with additional materials probably next week, and I'm going to invite folks to use the Q&A function if you want to ask questions of the speakers, rather than the chat, just because it's easier for the BMP team to sort and track questions that have been answered using that function. So with all of that being said, I want to just express my excitement about this conversation, the opportunity to review the findings and have this panel conversation with Karundi Williams ([re:power](#)), Margaret Mitchell ([YWCA USA](#)), and Prentiss Haney ([Ohio Organizing Collaborative](#)). You'll hear from all of them shortly.

I want to start with a little bit of background on BMP. We're a national organization that develops research tools, training, opportunities for partnership to both nonprofit organizations of the sector to support the voice and power of the people served by organizations. And since our founding over 20 years ago, BMP has been focused on these three main areas, movement building, particularly the current work around solidarity and transformational solidarity. The potential for that to help organizations and movements work collaboratively to have bigger impact than they might be able to on their own. Working with direct service organizations to embrace social change values and practices, and particularly to tap the voice and power of their constituency.

And then the leadership work. And the leadership work for the past several years has focused on racial gaps. We launched this [Race to Lead](#) initiative back in 2016 with a survey that more than 4,000 nonprofit employees responded to. The data led to this first series of reports, some of which were looking at the data through particular demographic lenses. So, LGBT folks of color, women of color, ED/CEOs. Some of the follow reports were looking at it from the perspective of particular states, where we'd reached a

critical mass and had significant partners on the ground who had been really key to pushing out the survey link.

In 2019, we re-surveyed the nonprofit field and more than 5,000 employees participated in the survey effort that time. And thanks to partnership with groups across the country, we were able to release not just this report, [Trading Glass Ceilings for Glass Cliffs](#), but the [Race to Lead Revisited](#) report and a series of local briefs looking at how the sector looks in particular places, where again, we had deep partnerships and our partners on the ground were able to ensure robust sample.

I want to pause here so that we can do some polls, just to get a sense of who's joining us today. The first poll is about your role. And so the question is what best describes your role? All right. So, over a quarter of folks on the webinar today are EDs and CEOs, which is great. It's also not surprising given that this report does focus on the experiences of EDs and CEOs. I want to invite those of you who are EDs and CEOs to help inform another research project that BMP is doing right now. It is a [survey of executive leaders of nonprofits](#) that we have underway right now, that's looking at the capacity building supports that executive leaders need both to support their organizations and their own leadership.

The second poll should be coming up on your screen. It's about your familiarity with our resources and how you have used the Race to Lead series. All right. So, a lot of folks didn't know much about the Race to Lead initiative. Welcome to being able to use these reports, because it does look like many folks are using the reports and resources to make the case for change, which really is great for us to hear and know. We also know that the reports do provide a lot of validation for people. And so if you are an ED/CEO of color and you read the report and there was some recognition that some of what's being talked about through the data is reflective of your own experience. You are not crazy and you are not alone in having these experiences.

I'm going to move us on to digging into the report findings and you can see the five main findings here. I want to acknowledge that the title of the report is again, Trading Glass Ceilings for Glass Cliffs. And those terms have a particular origin. The term glass ceiling is now well known, but it was originally coined to describe career barriers faced by women in corporate sectors. And you can see this quote is a definition from a bipartisan federal commission from 1995.

Well, 10 years later, the "glass cliff" term was coined. And it was coined by researchers in England, because they had a key insight that women and people of color were getting the opportunity to lead companies, particularly at a point or exactly at a point when those companies were experiencing some kind of crisis, which then meant that those leaders were particularly vulnerable to being judged negatively. But that that was largely because they had inherited circumstances in the company that made those jobs very precarious and risky. And so we wanted to just acknowledge the origin of both of those terms, so that you also had some context what we mean when we're talking about glass cliffs in the nonprofit sector.

The first finding from the report was that leaders of color need supports, not more training. This quote that you'll see on your screen really helps to illustrate this piece around the desire and need for supports. And one of the supports in particular relates to institutional sponsors.

But I want to just pause and give a little bit of data context, because basically half of EDs and CEOs of color reported their race had negatively impacted their advancement in the nonprofit sector. That is similar to the data provided by people of color who are not in ED/CEO roles, but it's just worth

acknowledging that people are overcoming a lot before they get into these top roles. And one of those barriers is this lack of institutional sponsors who are lobbying on their behalf.

And the way that we've tried to get at this idea of institutional sponsors is that sponsors are often mentors in senior positions in the organization that people work for, who will advocate for their mentee's professional advancement. And so in the survey, we tried to distinguish between whether people report that they've had mentors at their job who provided that kind of support versus mentors outside of their job.

And so you can see here, the blue bar at the top is EDs and CEOs of color who reported that they had mentors at their previous jobs, that provided advice, support, connections. And that is 11 percentage points lower than the percent of white EDs and CEOs who reported that they had received that kind of institutional support. There is no effective difference though between EDs of color and white EDs in terms of whether they had mentors outside of their organization. So that more informal mentorship, that may not always lead to advancement within an organization.

And one of the ways that we think that leaders are compensating for the lack of access to institutional sponsors is a higher reliance on executive coaching. So that's what you see in the bottom pair of bars, where 59% of EDs of color reported that they have received coaching or executive coaching compared to 49% of white EDs. And so that 10 percentage point gap we think is how people are compensating for the lack of access to sponsors, but it's worth remembering that executive coaching is something that leaders are often paying for, whereas mentorship and sponsorship is something that is provided voluntarily by people who are senior to you in organizations or in the sector.

It's also worth noting this piece around needing support, but not more training. And you can see with both of these data points that there's no real difference between EDs of color and white EDs, in terms of whether they had received training on financial management and budgeting or training on fundraising.

And the reason I want to highlight this is because it's just another reminder that there is no basis for funders to have less trust in leaders of color when it comes to fiscal management. But we know from our data and from what we hear anecdotally, that leaders of color still encounter these barriers, in terms of trust from their funders, access to resources from funders and the ability to build relationships with funders. So again, training is not one of the shortcomings. It is not an issue. It's really the bias of funders and the nonprofit sector more broadly.

So the second finding is that leaders of color take on added burdens without additional compensation. And if these findings are resonating with you, just want to remind you to use the #RaceToLead and tag us in your posts on anything that's coming up as you're hearing these findings and reading these reports.

Going to start with another quote. This quote is from a survey respondent who is providing an example of the added financial barriers that leaders of color often have to take on to ascend to these top leadership roles. And the point that he's making around extra credentials, further education and development, it was particularly true for leaders of color who followed a white predecessor. 70% of EDs of color with a white predecessor reported having a master's degree or some other terminal degree. That was roughly 10 percentage points higher than both other leaders of color, as well as white EDs and CEOs overall. It's just a sad reminder of the adage that you have to be twice as good to get half as far as a person of color.

And once people get to the top job, they're still reporting more challenges and frustrations, as shown here in this figure, where you can see consistently this gap between the blue bar for EDs and CEOs of color and the amber bar for white ED/CEOs, where EDs and CEOs of color are more likely to report being often or always frustrated by lack of role models, lack of social capital and networks. It's somewhat ironic, but leaders of color are also more likely to be often or always frustrated by the stress of being called on to push DEI in their organizations.

I want to then focus this also on the salary and compensation issues. This issue around salary not being high enough is the one where leaders of color are expressing the most frustration out of these measures. It's also worth noting that the gap is also particularly large when it comes to feeling that people are being paid less than colleagues for the same work. So that leaders of color feel like they're being paid less than peer EDs and CEOs.

Moving on to the third finding that looks at identity-based organizations and the added pressures on leaders of color, of this type of nonprofit organization. And so this visual is showing to two pie charts showing the percentage of EDs, white EDs on the right, on the left, EDs of color, based on whether they reported that their organization was an identity-based non-profit. So one focusing on particular racial ethnic communities, immigrant communities, LGBTQ+ communities, et cetera.

So you can see that over half of leaders of color are leading that type of organization compared to only 22% of white EDs. It was interesting to see that there were some cases where EDs of identity-based organizations, whether they were people of color or white, were more similar in contrast with EDs of organizations that were not identity-based. For instance, 84% of EDs of color and 82% of white EDs leading identity-based organizations reported they were often or always frustrated with their demanding workloads. And that was in comparison to around three-quarters of both leaders of color and white EDs of more mainstream organizations. So that's just one example. It was also true when it came to the frustrations around pay, things like that.

This is a quote that helps to illustrate one of the particular challenges that leaders of identity-based organizations experience related to building relationships with funding sources. So nearly half of EDs of color leading identity-based organizations reported they were often or always frustrated by the lack of relationship with funding sources. That was compared to both leaders of color leading more mainstream organizations, as well as white leaders of identity-based organizations and white leaders of more mainstream organizations.

Moving on to the fourth finding, there are some unique challenges that come with taking over leadership from a white predecessor. And what we're showing with this figure is just how many EDs of color followed a white predecessor. It's almost half in our sample. This reminds us of another report that BMP put out earlier in the fall called Making (or taking) Space.

One of the key insights related to the particular challenges that come with taking over leadership from white predecessors from that other report was that boards are often nowadays selecting leaders of color to address or clean up some DEI issues that exiting white leaders have not been able to resolve. Which is one of the key drivers of that experience of moving into executive leadership for people of color becoming a glass cliff situation. Because they both have to do the internal DEI organizational culture change work, and also sustain and advance the organization in an environment where there often is not sufficient support and funding for the organizations, particularly when the organization is led by a person of color.

The last finding is just that the responsibility for transforming organizations in advance of those transitions is too often not being taken up by white leaders. And as this figure shows, around half of the EDs, CEOs we surveyed were potentially transitioning out of their leadership roles. Either they were thinking about transitioning or they already had plans underway. And it was interesting that this was true for both white EDs, as well as leaders of color. We know that there have been other times in the past when the sector panicked about a wave of executive transitions, but it really does seem like a transition is really taking place in the sector. It's just really important for us to be making sure that race is being considered and planned for as a part of the transition planning of organizations.

And here is one quote from a participant in a focus group around the importance of not just getting a person of color into that next leadership role, but making sure that that person has the support they need to succeed. Again, that leaders of color are not set up with a glass cliff situation.

That's all five of the findings from the report. I'm going to pause here for another poll question before we transition to the panel conversation. The poll question is, which of the areas below do you think pose the biggest management challenge for leaders of color? Is it board relations, DEI, funding, HR, strategy mission, capacity infrastructure? Just want to get a read on what people are seeing or experiencing as the biggest management challenges. All right. So a third of you are identifying funding as a particular barrier facing EDs of color, followed by board relations and then capacity and infrastructure, which might be a good reason for us to put the [link to that survey about nonprofit capacity and infrastructure](#) that we're doing with EDs back into the chat. Thanks so much.

All right. I want to now transition into the panel discussion and invite Karundi, Prentiss, and Margaret to start coming on video. I'm going to start us off by trying to have a little bit of a conversation around, we often think about the complications and struggles of leadership in just really personal terms. Maybe it's a relationship with a particular board member or staff person, or it's about that one grant that doesn't get renewed.

But I want to try to get us to have a bigger picture view on some of the trends and systemic forces, particularly as they impact Black leaders in the nonprofit sector in Black led organizations. Karundi, as you saw, this piece around funding and access to financial resources really is this frustration, particularly we know for Black led nonprofits. Curious what you're seeing as potentially making a real difference in the way that funding flows to nonprofits led by Black folks and people of color. And how can we as grant seekers move our funders to be more racially just?

Karundi Williams: Well, thank you so much for having me and thank you for this report and for having this conversation. I appreciate that question and I have to say, I have to answer it two ways. One, there's not a lot of changes that we're seeing in terms of funding flowing to Black led organizations.

I looked at [this report in 2018](#), from Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, that found that only 6% of philanthropic dollars goes to racial equity work and only 1% go to racial justice work. And this is post-Obama. Everybody assumed that all of a sudden, because we had a Black president, we saw this big wave of EDs of color and leaders of color coming in and taking over organizations, that all of a sudden we were going to see more resources flowing towards racial equity work and racial justice work and also to Black leaders. And that's actually not true.

And really thinking about even in 2020 when we saw the racial uprising. There's a lot of data trying to point towards all of these resources flowing into this area of work. I don't think the numbers are telling the real story, because we're still lagging really far behind in terms of money coming towards Black led organizations and organizations doing racial justice work.

So, to just frame my answer by saying, there isn't a whole lot of difference that I am seeing. But as a Black leader and having taken over an organization that was previously white led and had gone through a lot of transition, some of the lessons I can share in terms of what I've learned, and what I think can make a difference is one, in philanthropy, we are seeing a lot of people of color, program offices of color, more Black women in leadership roles within philanthropy. And I think that could make a huge difference and that trend has to continue.

I think as a movement, we need to figure out a strategy that puts more people that look like us in these rooms that are making decisions about resources flowing to organizations that are Black led and to work that is racial justice or racial equity. That's one way I think we could see a difference. I've seen small differences in changes because of that. That's one thing.

And then I think as leaders and I can speak from my experience, having unapologetic, authentic conversations with funders is really important. I was not shy about saying what exactly that I needed. There's an approach about calling in your funder partners to really partner with you in a really deep way, to support what it is that you're trying to build.

There is a lot of conversation in philanthropy right now about supporting racial justice work and supporting Black leaders. I think there's an accountability in that that we need to ask is, how are you actually living into these big statements of supports for people of color, et cetera?

I think for me, some of the ways that has worked for me is having really genuinely honest and unapologetic conversation and asking for exactly what I need, and not being shy about it. And as a newer ED, I've been two and a half years in the role, I was a little shy and uncomfortable at the beginning. And now I just go in and say, "This is what I need. This is what the work is going to take to resource, then therefore, this is my ask." So I think that has made a big difference.

I do think letting some funders go, to be honest with you. I came into an organization that had funders who supported our work for a long time. A lot of them were in the "wait and see" posture, to see what I was going to do, et cetera, et cetera. And after a while, I just didn't spend a whole lot of time trying to convince them to come along with me.

So making a strategic decision at some point about where you want to spend your time and energy, with funders who actually our values aligned and really committed to doing that work and being real with them, and also releasing people and not chasing. Because I had to make that call and be like, "We've tried to engage you three or four times. And at this point, we're just going to let that go." I think having those type of strategies and approaches has really worked well for me at least.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: Thank you so much. There's a lot of response in the chat, as you were speaking. It really resonated with folks. I'm going to shift to a different systemic force that I do think is impacting organizations in the sector, which relates to I think our movement culture, and some of the expectations around what it means to hold leadership.

And so Prentiss you're part of a younger generation of nonprofit leaders who are moving into executive roles, at the same time it seems like, there's increasing skepticism about formal leadership. There seems like there's increasing distrust of hierarchy. And curious, how are you carrying out some of the difficult decisions and day-to-day responsibilities that are just involved in running an organization? But doing it in a way that's in light of and responsive to and aligned with our values and beliefs as a progressive movement.

Prentiss Haney: For one, wow. That's a huge question. And thank you for having me here to have this discussion. I actually want to flip the question a little bit, because I think we pigeonhole ourselves when we talk about a new generation stepping in that they don't want hierarchy. They don't want structure.

Let's actually take it back a couple of generations. If we look at the boomer generation, the folks in the middle of the Civil Rights movement, who literally paved a entire new way of how we could demand for and fight for justice in this country. They did that. And then the generation immediately after that, the Xers were instituting that new path forward. And then we look at the Millennials, the age of the internet, the Obama age, who created a new way in which we could imagine how we could connect and have belonging and move in the world. And now we're in this Zoomer, this Generation Z generation that is trying to institute a new institution.

I think what we actually need to talk about is not that young people are against institutions. They're trying to reimagine new social institutions that meet the need of how we actually meet each other and connect with each other in the 21st century.

When I stepped into this role, I think I've been blessed maybe because I have an angel on my back or something that I felt like my brain works in multiple different ways, where I can live in the moment and see what's happening in terms of what's happening in the field, but also understand the history, the legacy of what people have left behind. And the challenge is existing in those two worlds, and people trusting that you can be a steward of taking the best lessons and what we've learned about institutions in the past and be unafraid of innovation moving forward. And like everything you said, when a person of color steps into that role, folks get hesitant of, can they steward the information we've known before and create way for innovation?

So what I've been able to see in this role is that I have to be the steward of innovation. I have to be the person that has the calm steady hand to even hospice things that no longer serve us, out. And when you are in that leadership and young, you have to have a wise soul to move those things forward. But wisdom comes from listening and seeing where you can get a kernel of truth from everyone who is putting something in it.

There have been nights where I just felt like I didn't know a path. But every time that I sat back and listened to everything that I hear from everyone that is invested in me, invested in the organization I'm trying to co-lead with my co-director, I've been able to grow. So that's what I'm thinking about. I think it actually takes wise leadership and wise leadership is not about age, it's about the ability to listen and see what's out there in the world and bring in the best things that you know it's your God given gift to put out there.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: Thanks so much. I'm seeing a lot of, again, traffic in the chat and I think identifying what are those practices that you've "hospiced" out, might be interesting to just share with folks. What are the list of organizational practice to send to hospice care?

Prentiss Haney: I'll talk about hospice and stewarding. So the hospice is literally taking a gentle hand to allow what no longer serves the organization to leave. Part of what I've learned about human nature and leading is that no one wants to feel like they no longer are valued or what their contribution is doesn't matter anymore. That's not necessary.

Actually, what I believe is necessary as leaders is to put in front of someone the vision and a direction and a authentic invitation to walk into it. And if you want to walk into it, there's investment for you and a path for you. If you don't, you can walk away, because you actually have agency. To me, the hospice thing is actually about reminding people of their agency and not stripping them of it. And so that's what has taken a long time because we're so conditioned to not think we have agency. I have to remind people that you always have agency inside of this. You can say yes or no. That is true.

And that's helped hospice some of the things out. And also while you're hospicing, you have to also be laying the foundations for a new culture. And that's where the stewarding helps, because you bring some of the old pieces in, you bring in new pieces. And then the third part of this after you hospice, steward is then you have to midwife the new. You have to literally allow the rebirth in the organization to come. And that birth is something that has to be grown and invested and tended to.

What I've seen is that over the last two years, even in the beginning of this year in my organization, I've seen what I've midwived come to life. And every other thing that had to happen before, had to happen from the hospicing and the stewarding for us to actually birth a new life. And it takes the time that it takes.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: Awesome. Thanks so much, Prentiss. I want to move us on to talking just a little bit more about some of the results from the survey, because it really does demonstrate that there's this variety of added burdens falling on of leaders of color, particularly when it comes to leading an identity-based organization.

Margaret, as the CEO of YWCA USA, which is a historic network that is very large and the association is across 200 communities, feminist, longstanding commitment to eliminating racism. What are the things that you have seen in terms of the added struggles for the network, but also particularly for women of color, as they ascend into leadership roles of those types of organizations?

Margaret Mitchell: I have to comment on what's been said. This has been just an incredible conversation. First of all, I am always appreciative of Building Movement Project. It is very affirming, the data. I can remember landing and discovering this work and in 2016, 2017, and the validation was so powerful for me. And to see this work which centers on me, I am not an afterthought. I can see my voice, I can see myself and I can begin to use it in a variety of ways. The way I mentor, the way I build scaffolding, the way I help funders to understand all of that. This is not a feeling. I was told before that I was just having feelings, and now to be able to validate it all is really just absolutely incredible.

I just loved Karundi's comments and I am just so absolutely grounded in her unapologetic "Everybody is not going to be for you." We just can twist ourselves into doing things for funders that harm our work, harm our soul and harm our outcomes. And so we're looking, you don't want anybody that don't want you, end of story.

And since I'm probably the only one that has had three children with a midwife here at home, I loved that. And birthing at home with a midwife, there's this incredible ability that grows and happens over

the months, that develops the agency. It's not that you're going to stay home in the middle of an emergency if something is going wrong. You're empowered to constantly make the always decisions. And that was what Prentiss was talking about, setting the table and inviting people to come into the frame and make choice. I think that that is incredible. The way we build our internal organizations is going to be a reflection. And our work, our culture, culture of our organizations is always built in the shadow of the leader. And so inside, it's what is happening inside, that really is the quality of the work.

I think being able always to think about... Since coming to USA, I came January 3rd of 2022. You knew me, Sean, in my previous role, in Cleveland. I remember sending a note to you in December. "I'm going to USA, don't leave me." I think I've been chewing on this moment versus movement. We were all part, we're all in this around a movement. We saw a moment, an important moment, but it's also really critical to understand how we keep going in this movement work. And it is about caring as we climb. It is about understanding the data. It is about being unapologetic. As we hone our crafts, and as we continue, I love that, inviting in is so really necessary. The grass tops, the tree tops, the structural pieces and the elements must change.

We are often doing work and a dear friend of me, Dr. Art James always said, "We're handing somebody who's having a heart attack, a band-aid." And it really, because we are on the ground doing this work, we can be helpful around when and where money could better be used. And if you're going to do this work in grass tops, what influence are you going to use in the structures also to be able to make change?

Because philanthropy has an important role to play in the systems. It is a system, it was built by a system. And when we are not pushing, "Hey, I'm going to do this, I'm going to have outcomes," what are you doing? We're all in this together. Is this about you feeling good or is this about us moving forward? And so all of that is in there, as we think about creating and sustaining a movement versus a moment.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: Thanks so much, Margaret. I'm going to invite all of us to come off of mute, because we're going to start moving into some of the questions that are coming in, because there's a lot of interest in what the role is of the board, but also how you are negotiating or managing board dynamics as well.

I think part of what's interesting about the three of you is differing organizational models, in terms of organizing advocacy and training services. And yet, this consistency and this commitment to our communities. And so curious, what do your boards look like? Or what are your observations about what it takes to have the board be fully supportive? And if you inherited a board that was already on board, great. But I think people are looking for advice around how to shift their boards. Anyone have any insights on that?

Karundi Williams: Sure. I'm happy to start here. I have a terrific board. So I'm blessed in that regard, but I know that's not necessarily true for every ED and CEO. My board and my organization started really transitioning around the same time. So when we were rebranding and renaming, we were once Wellstone Action. Our original founding board really started transitioning at the same time the organization was changing. And so a lot of my board members, when I joined re:power as the ED in 2019, a lot of the board had also changed and was changing during my transitioning in. I have been blessed with an incredible and supportive board.

But one thing I have found, or advice I can share is really defining your relationship with your board when you arrive. Having really candid conversations about what type of relationship you want to have.

Oftentimes, I think new EDs may lean on their boards for direction or advice or thought partnership. That's okay. And if that's what you need as an executive director, then you should lean on your board to provide that, if that is the type of relationship you want with them. So having a conversation that establishes, what do you need and what type of relationship do you want to have, feels important. I've read all these articles about, the board shouldn't get involved in your everyday running of the organization. That is true. If you inherit a board that is all up in your business, there is a conversation to be had about what is the role of the board versus your role, and how do you reset that type of relationship?

I don't want to obviously offend anybody, but there is also a conversation to be had about transitioning people off your board. I had a board that had some founding members and as we were changing as an organization, we wanted to attract different type of leaders in the movement, because our work was also shifting. So how do you have conversations with your board about where you're going, what your direction, what is your vision for the organization, and what you're looking for in your board to support that. And what makeup that you believe will actually support the work in itself.

Because let's not forget, this is about the work. And a lot of our organizations, both Margaret's organization and Prentiss, we have a particular kind of work that we are doing. So how are you defining, identifying the type of board that has expertise in the work that you do, that can bring that thought partnership to you and that supports to you? I think just like I said, unapologetic, real, transparent, honest conversation that has to happen with your staff, with your funders, with your partners, those conversations had to be had with your board as well.

I will also note one other thought here is that often boards, because of all of the transitioning of white leaders and there's usually leaders of color and Black leaders are being brought in to clean up after white leaders, there should be I think support in the transition timeline. Whether your transition is a year, as folks are transitioning internally, your board should be going through a process of how do I help ensure the organization is ready and prepared to support a new leader of color? Because your organization, most organizations in our movement is not ready internally for followship of a person of color. A Black woman can only speak as a Black woman. They're not ready for that.

So what is the role of your board in engaging in the transition process to prepare the organization for the incoming leader? And how can you have a conversation with your funders to say, the org is going through a transition. This next year, we're going to go through a whole process. What is the role of supporting the board with consultants or whatever the case might be to take us on a journey, to prepare all of us to be ready, to set up a leader of color for success? And if that didn't happen before you get there, what is the process in the first year of your tenure to really partner with your board to get ready for all that? So those are some of my thoughts.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: Thanks. And Margaret, I'm curious if you have any other thoughts about boards, whether from previous organizations you've led or what you're seeing in the network. But I also see a question that came into the Q&A around how do you navigate imposter syndrome? And it's a question that I've asked you directly in the past. I just wanted to pose it publicly, in addition to any thoughts you have on the board dynamics.

Margaret Mitchell: Boards are an important part of our work. And so our excellence around this, understanding the psychology of boards often means really deeply understanding racialized trauma, the racialized trauma of the Black body and the racialized trauma of the white body, because it does show

up in our boards. We're not just counting who's on a board, but we are taking them on a journey. And when we are leading equity organizations, we want our board, some board members will come with that. Most, regardless of the body they are in, will not. And it is part of our role to continue to peel back how inequities live in our policies and practices that have been established by the board. It is an ongoing process.

So you are bringing along the equity, the racial equity of the board. At YWCA, we do a virtual challenge and we have white board members, I usually invite board members year one to do it as an option, as I did today with our national governing board. And then in year two, it is mandated. And then in year three, you're inviting vendors and then you're mandating vendors. You're bringing everybody along as well as your staff in your organization.

We are so conditioned. We're so conditioned. We are un-brainwashing. We are unwinding our own crazy tapes in our brain. We are dismantling worldviews, regardless of your color, the body you're in. And that has to happen for boards.

I like to do what I call a coffee connection, which is the informal gathering outside of the board meeting. Because the board meeting is really about the business of the board, and you might be meeting one-on-one with board members, but you also, you want that forming and norming and storming to happen. You want to hear from those voices. I used what I call a coffee connection to do those things, and to have crucial conversations to grow together, to be able to examine things. And then ask the question, do you think this is causing harm? Could we do it differently? So you begin to think about everything.

It means that if you are a Black CEO and your compensation has been measured against other African American CEOs, as women, you might say, "I want to be measured against every white male CEO and see what their compensation is against mine. Could that be the new policy that we have?" And you just keep growing. But oftentimes, you've got to lay down, you got to keep laying down this groundwork in the approach to be able to get there. That is when the science and the art, the excellence of who we are and what we do comes into to play. It's a different game that we have to play as executive directors of color. It's a different game.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: Such a great point around the unlearning, the reconditioning and Karundi said, sometimes you do have to let board members go. And there is some data informed research that for board transitions to really be effective, the tipping point is a third of the board changing. It's not like you actually change the whole board. It's just that third. As a leader, you can bring in new board members, so that you have that third tipping point, it can accelerate the progress. So that all of the things that Margaret's talking about, in terms of shifting culture, can happen on a faster timeline.

Margaret, I want to make sure that you can share some of the wisdom around the imposter syndrome, because I had asked you about it previously. You had such great insights about how you had supported women of color when you were at YWCA Cleveland to understand, but also rethink some of the issues around imposter syndrome that they were expressing as your staff members.

Margaret Mitchell: I actually don't remember what I said, but I will say that, what I say typically to my team and young staffers is you do you. You can't ever be an imposter of you. It's just not physically possible.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: That's what you said.

Margaret Mitchell: The more you continue to like you, to be in you, to be in the body and to begin to lose less of what you think, when you come prepared, when you come prepared, all of those imposter syndromes, it's just a trap. It's just a trap that we often allow that tape to be playing. And as it plays, we have to often learn how to use it for us and not against us. Certainly, I can never say that I didn't struggle. But as I have continued to grow over the years in being comfortable with who I am, and that is always just about that intellectual curiosity around discovery and discovery of yourself. I'm sorry. I don't remember exactly what I said, but thanks.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: That was it. You can't be an impostor of you. Prentiss, there was a question that came in, if you could talk a little bit more about some of the leadership practices. I think there's interest in shared leadership, the fact that you have a co-director, any other ways that the OOC is rethinking or reenacting leadership in ways that may differ from what we're seeing as traditional structures.

Prentiss Haney: I'm just loving everything everyone is saying. I think a couple different things. One, I believe in a co-director model, because it builds in accountability and trust. I really believe that you have to move at the speed of trust. And the fact that I have a co-director where, for one, this job is extremely isolated. There's just no way to, it's just isolated. There's not other folks you really can talk to about it. Having another person who is sharing in the experience, in the load is actually a way that we dismantle white supremacy. There's never one person that is trying to change the world or move a thing. It's always a shared endeavor, historically and in the present.

In terms of our organization, a couple things, maybe a couple things I would say. One, we truly believe in an abundance of leadership, truly in an abundance of leadership. I don't have a thought in my mind or a feeling in my body that every person that I choose to intentionally invest in cannot grow and be the best that they can be and offer something that grows all of our power.

I think too often, we believe that we have to be crabs in the bucket and figure out who's going to get to the top, but actually crabs don't exist in buckets. They come out of the sea. So the fact that they don't need to be in no bucket. There is a place for all of us to grow who we are. And so our organization focuses on finding people who are ready and willing to be invested in.

One of the things we tell our staff all the time is we don't expect you to be perfect here. We expect you to grow. If you are here and ready to grow and take the investment into the growth, you will be more than you could imagine yourself. I think the other piece is that our work requires a deep level of self-mastery. You have to be reflective, understanding what are the things that come in your way? What are the things that show up? I have a white co-director. What are the ways in which, what are the stories that I tell myself about what it means to be a Black man leading with a white woman? What has society told me about that? How can I figure out what that is in me, so that I don't let that get in the way of the conversations we need to have, the way we need to lead together? How do I put shame, blame and guilt to the side, to be present for what is right in front of me and make choices there?

And so why the culture of our organization is where it is, is because we have modeled at the top of it, that we're going to show vulnerability, that we're going to grow together, that we're going to be consistent. I think someone in the chat earlier said, people are against structure. People are not against structure. Folks want structured lives, but they want the structure to meet the needs of where they are.

We have structures that meet the needs of where people are. And then when we say we invest in you, we really mean it. We coach, we do professional development, we have mental health services. But

more importantly, because we believe in you, this is the thing of about investment. You have to believe in a person you're investing in for you to challenge them to move forward.

If you don't believe in them, and you're trying to challenge them, that's not going to move them to the next level, because they need to know that you're going to stand shoulder to shoulder with them when you're running down that path together. Because our team knows that when I challenge and push you to your next level, I'm running that race with you, it allows for the walls from that corporate background or that person who tried to steal your job or that person who told you you were not enough, that those stories don't have to exist here. We can actually make a new story and a new narrative.

That's what I strive to do every day and I know that I can't take people places I haven't been, which means I have to go there and interrogate that and meet every day. Because what I let out is as far and it's a depth of which our organizations can go. I am so proud that we've been able to cultivate an environment where people trust that they can be vulnerable and grow here. What is life other than growth and change? What is it? If we can cultivate spaces of growth and change, we can accomplish whatever our mission is, but I'll stop there.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: Well, I just want to thank all three of you for taking the time to have this conversation. It feels like we were just scratching the surface, and probably need to figure out a way to respond to that demand for Prentiss to have his own podcast. And it feels like there's a book of thoughts and ideas around how to lean into these organizational roles, so that they're not quite as isolating and unsustainable as they have been.

Thanks to all of you for joining today's conversation. Thanks for everybody who was in the chat, and continue to look out for more information from BMP. And please don't just get on BMP's mailing list, also follow re:power, Ohio Organizing Collaborative, YWCA nationally and in your hometown, please support all of these organizations and these leaders. Thank you.

Prentiss Haney: Thank you.

Margaret Mitchell: Thank you for the co-leadership of BMP as well.

Prentiss Haney: Yes.

Sean Thomas-Breitfeld: Awesome. I'm going to just close with just sharing the screen, so that those of you who want to do the [capacity survey](#) can see the link again. We look forward to sharing the [recording](#) by email for everyone who registered as well as it'll go on our blog and YouTube channel. You can revisit to hear more of the brilliant gems from Karundi, Margaret, and Prentiss. Thanks everybody, for being with us today.