

# The Push and Pull: **Declining Interest in Nonprofit Leadership**



**RACE TO LEAD**  
SURVEY



An initiative of  
Building Movement Project

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>03</b>
<b>Who Wants to Lead... and Who Doesn't</b> .....	<b>05</b>
<b>Leadership Pushes</b> .....	<b>09</b>
<b>The Dilemmas of BIPOC Leadership</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>Addressing the Pushes, Finding the Pulls</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>What We Need to Do</b> .....	<b>19</b>

## 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

*The Push and Pull: Declining Interest in Nonprofit Leadership* was authored by Frances Kunreuther, Sean Thomas-Breitfeld (BMP's Co-Executive Directors), and Tessa Constantine (BMP's Research Manager). Maham Ali, BMP's Research Associate, provided invaluable data analysis for this report.

BMP is grateful to everyone who has supported the *Race to Lead* initiative, particularly the more than 3,000 nonprofit staff members who responded to the 2022 *Race to Lead* survey.

# Introduction

The Building Movement Project's *Race to Lead* initiative has conducted surveys of those working in the nonprofit sector three times—in 2016, 2019, and 2022. *The Push and Pull: Declining Interest in Nonprofit Leadership*, is the first in a series of reports that includes the 2022 data.<sup>1</sup> This report examines the steady decline in the aspiration to lead for respondents not already heading organizations. The data indicates that BIPOC respondents interested in leading a nonprofit often appeared to be pushed towards leadership to correct their negative experiences in the sector. To stem the tide of disinterest in top roles, the report explores what might motivate more nonprofit staffers to aspire to leadership in the sector.

## The Push and Pull

Ideally, nonprofit staffers would be inspired to lead organizations through encouragement, skills development, opportunities for advancement, positive role models, and the belief that they can make an impact by building on the foundation laid by their predecessors. *The Push and Pull* report, refers to these kinds of affirming experiences as leadership “pulls.” In contrast, leadership “pushes” are caused by the

desire to attain a position of power to address negative organizational structures and/or obstacles to advancement.<sup>2</sup>

The latest *Race to Lead* survey data indicates that, rather than being pulled into leadership, aspiring leaders are more often pushed towards leadership to escape difficult work experiences and to make things better for themselves and others. These leadership pushes were especially true for BIPOC respondents.

### *The Push and Pull* data shows:

- In 2022, staffers who were not in top leadership roles expressed less interest in leading nonprofit organizations. This comes after increased interest among BIPOC respondents in 2019 compared to 2016. In all three surveys, BIPOC respondents aspire to lead more than their white counterparts.
- BIPOC respondents' aspiration to lead peaks in their thirties and forties before it begins to decline. White respondents' interest in leading is highest in their twenties and then declines as they age.

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1 Methodology and demographic information can be found at Race to Lead Demographics: 2016-2019-2022 at [https://buildingmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BMP\\_RTL\\_Demographics.pdf](https://buildingmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BMP_RTL_Demographics.pdf).

2 See <https://hbr.org/2022/05/to-get-results-the-best-leaders-both-push-and-pull-their-teams>.

- Respondents, particularly people of color, appear to be pushed towards leadership in order to overcome challenges they face in nonprofit workplaces ranging from inadequate salaries to lack of mentors at work.
- There is a higher level of leadership aspiration among BIPOC survey-takers working under white leaders and in white-run organizations. Respondents in white-run organizations report less positive work experiences than those in POC-led groups, indicating another push to leadership.
- BIPOC Executive Directors/CEOs continue to report less support from boards and staffers, both during their transition into the organization and once they are established. BIPOC leaders in the process of leaving their jobs cite burnout as their top reason.
- Among aspiring leaders, issues ranging from the mission of the organization to the impact of the work were seen as significantly more important since 2020. This pattern is especially true for BIPOC respondents.

Nonprofit organizations and the sector have an opportunity to address the declining interest in top leadership positions. This means creating more pulls towards leadership, particularly investing in well-functioning (rather than dysfunctional) internal operations so that leaders have the ability to succeed without constant self-sacrifice. Making executive positions doable and adding more support for leaders could address not only what is pushing, rather than pulling, BIPOC staffers into leading, but also pushing Executive Directors out of their jobs. This is even more important given the types of external challenges leaders will continue to face in the coming years.

# Who Wants to Lead... and Who Doesn't

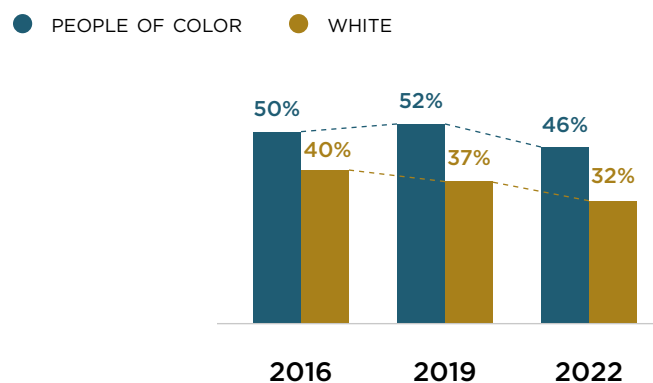
The Building Movement Project launched the *Race to Lead* surveys in 2016 to answer the question, why are there so few leaders of color in the nonprofit sector? One of the main findings in both the 2016 and 2019 *Race to Lead* survey data was that BIPOC respondents—who were similarly qualified to lead—aspired to head nonprofit organizations more than white respondents.<sup>3</sup> This held true in 2022, where the gap between BIPOC and white respondents interested in leading a nonprofit was similar to 2019 at 14 percentage points.

## Declining Interest to Lead

Though BIPOC respondents consistently aspire to lead organizations more than their white counterparts, the percentage interested in the top position has declined. As seen in Figure 1 BIPOC respondents who are not currently Executive Directors answered that they *probably* or *definitely* wanted to lead a nonprofit 6 percentage points less in 2022 (46%) than in

2019 (52%), the lowest percentage of the three surveys. White respondents continued to show less interest in the top leadership position over the past six years, with a 3 percentage point decline between 2016 and 2019 and another 5 percentage point drop between 2019 and 2022.

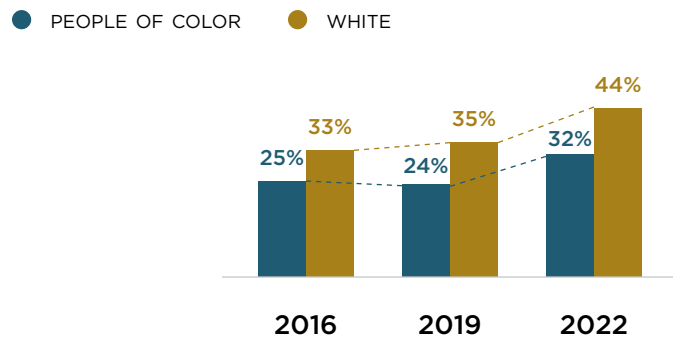
FIGURE 1 | INTERESTED IN TAKING A TOP LEADERSHIP ROLE



<sup>3</sup> The question on aspiration to lead was only asked of respondents who are not currently in the top leadership role in their organization. This is true for Figures 1, 2, and 3.

Figure 2 shows the corresponding increase in respondents who were *probably not* or *definitely not* interested in leading. A quarter of BIPOC respondents in 2016 (25%) and 2019 (24%) were not interested in becoming an Executive Director/CEO of a nonprofit. The percentage climbed to almost one-third (32%) in 2022. There was also a 9 percentage point jump in white respondents not interested in leadership between 2019 (35%) and 2022 (44%).

**FIGURE 2 | NOT INTERESTED TAKING A TOP LEADERSHIP ROLE**

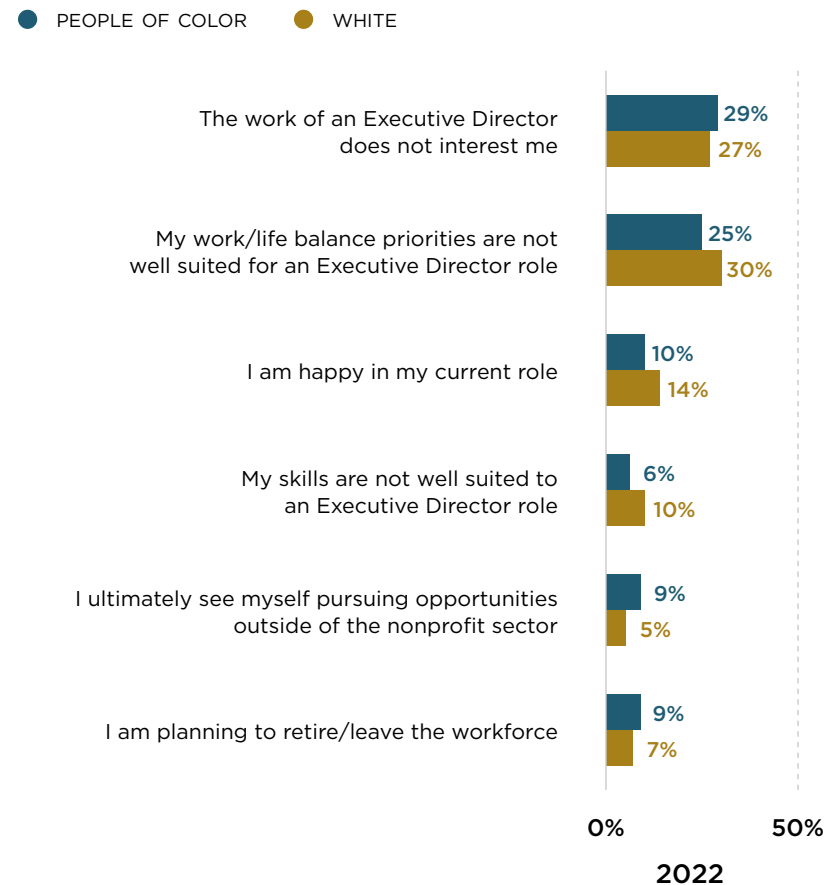


## Reasons for Not Aspiring

Figure 3 shows the 2022 data for why respondents did not aspire to lead a nonprofit; these reasons were similar to findings in the previous surveys. BIPOC respondents most often cite lack of interest in Executive Director work (29%), closely followed by the desire for work/life balance (25%). Similarly, but in reverse order, white survey-takers prize work/life balance (30%) and then reported that the top leadership work does not interest them (27%). For white respondents, the next reasons include happiness

in their current role (14%) and saying they are not well suited for the leadership job (10%). BIPOC respondents also state they are happy in their current role (10%) as their next reason, followed by wanting to pursue opportunities outside the nonprofit sector (9%) and planning to retire/leave the workforce (9%).

**FIGURE 3 | WHY RESPONDENTS DON'T ASPIRE TO TOP LEADERSHIP ROLES**



# Age and Aspiration to Lead

One question was whether the decline in leadership interest was related to the age of respondents. We expected that aspirations to lead would grow as respondents age (from their twenties to their thirties), peaking in their forties, and then declining in their fifties and sixties.

Looking first at BIPOC respondents, Figure 4 shows aspiration to lead by age in each of the survey years. Interest in leading starts out at a similar point for BIPOC respondents in their twenties for each survey year (47% in 2016; 49% in 2019; 46% in 2023). As we had anticipated, there is an upward curve as the age of the respondents increases. In 2016, the peak begins for those BIPOC respondents in their thirties and continues through those in their forties (55% each). Aspirations to lead in 2019 also peaked for BIPOC respondents in their thirties and then began a slow decline with those in the forties. The latest survey data shows BIPOC respondents' aspirations peaked later in their career—in their forties (54%)—and interest in leading for those in their thirties

dropped 10 percentage points since 2019. Although the aspiration to lead for BIPOC respondents is lower for those in their fifties across all three surveys, it remains relatively robust.

White respondents' interest in leadership shows a different pattern. As seen in Figure 5, the 2016 survey showed a slow and steady decline in leadership aspirations as the age of the respondents increased (twenties - 49%; thirties - 44%; forties - 40%). In 2019, the percentage of white respondents interested in leadership is flatter across age groups in their twenties, thirties, and forties; then there is a steep decline when they reach their fifties. The 2022 data for white respondents looks similar to 2016. The youngest respondents' aspirations to lead are highest at 42%; interest in leading then declines for white respondents in their thirties (34%) and remains steady for those in their forties (36%). By the time white respondents are in their fifties, just under a third are interested in leading an organization, a smaller percentage than for BIPOC respondents.

FIGURE 4: | BIPOC INTEREST IN LEADERSHIP BY AGE GROUP

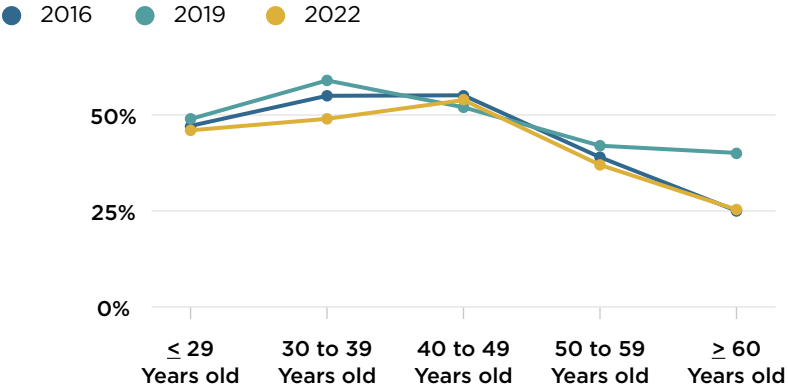
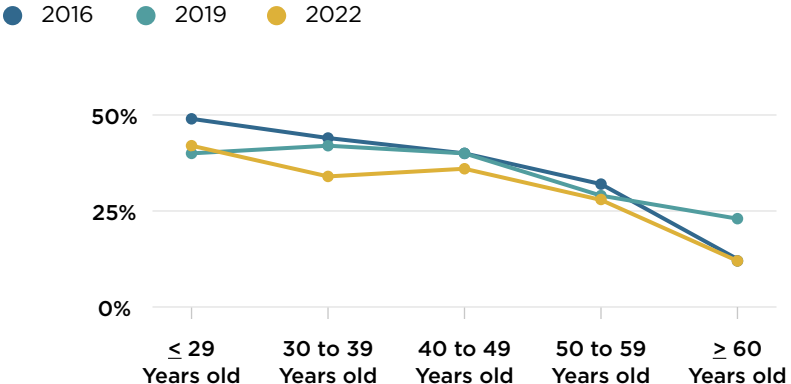


FIGURE 5: | WHITE INTEREST IN LEADERSHIP BY AGE GROUP



These findings show that younger leaders tend to come into the sector with an interest in leading organizations. When we compare BIPOC and white respondents by age in all three survey years, aspirations to lead are similar for those in their twenties. The differences between these two groups of respondents begins for those in their thirties and forties, with more interest in leading from BIPOC survey-takers than their white counterparts. By the time they are in their fifties, over half of the white respondents are definitely or probably not interested in leadership. A larger percentage of BIPOC leaders in their fifties are still considering leadership, which may reflect an opportunity gap, with BIPOC leaders finding fewer pathways to leadership earlier in their careers.

“

I've finally come to an age where I am being recognized for my achievements and expertise, not in spite of. I was a director in a former organization at a really young age, and oftentimes the youngest and only woman of color in a room full of much older white oftentimes men with similar titles, so I've sometimes felt questioned or challenged on why I am in the space with them.”

—Asian American Woman



# Leadership Pushes

Since nonprofit staffers have an interest in leading when they enter the sector, we wondered whether we could pinpoint factors associated with the desire to lead in order to identify ways to reverse the downward trend in aspirations. Though we started by looking for positive factors that could draw—or pull—people towards greater leadership in nonprofits, we found more often that people seemed pushed to assume leadership roles in order to correct negative experiences.

## The Push from Challenges and Lack of Supports

The good news in the *Race to Lead* survey findings is that, over time, a smaller percentage of respondents are experiencing challenges and a larger percentage report supports.<sup>4</sup> We expected that fewer challenges and more supports would pull people towards a desire to lead. The 2022 data shows the opposite; the more respondents experience challenges, the more they aspire to executive leadership. This finding indicates that potential leaders are pushed toward the top job based on their

negative working conditions, rather than seeing leadership as a positive step in a fulfilling work environment and career. Key supports—including trainings—had little impact on leadership interest for BIPOC respondents, but training goes hand in hand with leadership aspirations for white respondents.

“

I had to coach nonprofits and faith-based organizations on how to fundraise from my own minimal experience with grant writing previously and listening to best practices I'd hear about in team meetings. Lived experience matters and goes far, but I would have appreciated more formal training to build my confidence and skillset in providing best possible technical assistance.”

—White Woman

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<sup>4</sup> See “Key Findings from *Race to Lead* Surveys” at [https://buildingmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BMP\\_RTL\\_Key-Findings.pdf](https://buildingmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BMP_RTL_Key-Findings.pdf). Since the 2016 survey, the share of respondents reporting that they often experience common challenges—such as demanding workload, inequitable salaries, etc.—decreased considerably. The reports of receiving key types of supports—such as peer support, training on management and supervision, etc.—increased.

Figure 6 shows that the more respondents reported they *often/always* experienced any of six different challenges, the more likely they were to aspire to leadership. For example, BIPOC survey-takers who reported they are *often/always* challenged by inadequate salaries are 18 percentage points more likely to aspire to leadership than those who *rarely/never* experience this as a challenge; the difference for white respondents is 5 percentage points. Fifty-one percent of BIPOC respondents who experience “*stress to push diversity, equity, and inclusion*” are interested in leading compared to 43% of those who do not experience this stress, an 8 percentage point gap also seen with white respondents to this question. Among the respondents who were *often/always* frustrated that their jobs devoted too little attention to staff wellness, 49% of BIPOC and 37% of white were interested in leading, compared to 43% of BIPOC and 32% of white respondents who *rarely or never* experienced lack of attention to well-being in their jobs. The challenge, “*few opportunities for advancement*,” a clear obstacle to leadership, shows the same pattern though less pronounced.

Questions about supports and trainings respondents received in their nonprofit careers showed a more mixed pattern, where white respondents had more pulls to lead than their BIPOC counterparts. As seen in Figure 7 (on the following page), white respondents who received training—whether on staff management, fundraising, budgeting, or communications—had an increased interest in leadership, compared to whites who did not receive training on those topics. However, BIPOC respondents reported similar levels of leadership aspiration regardless of whether or not they had received those trainings. White respondents’ aspirations to lead was also correlated with mentors inside and outside their job. For BIPOC respondents, having an

FIGURE 6 | INTEREST IN LEADERSHIP BY CHALLENGES FACED ON THE JOB

● OFTEN/ALWAYS FACED CHALLENGES ● RARELY/NEVER FACED CHALLENGES



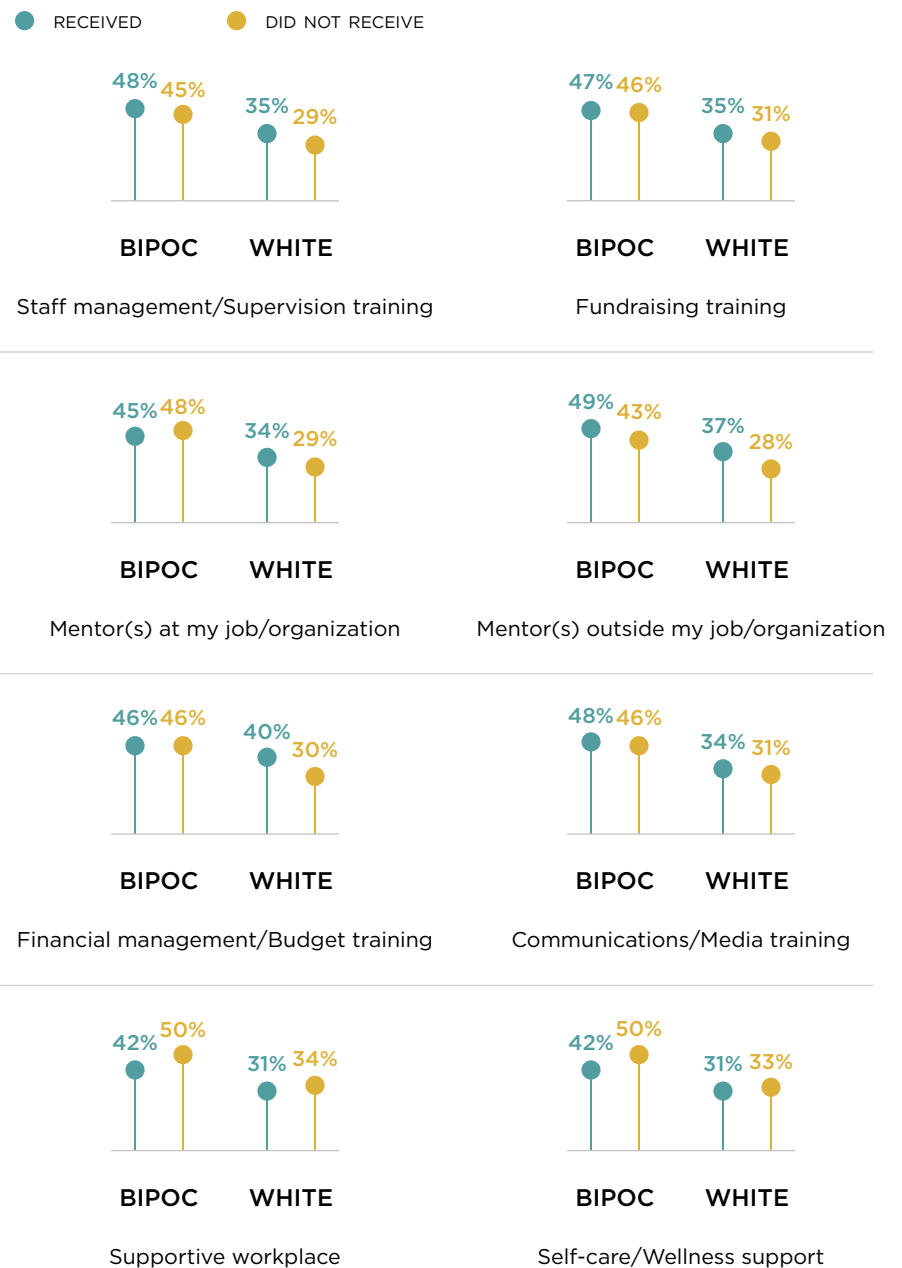
outside mentor was associated with the desire to lead; those who did not have a mentor at work were slightly more likely (by 3 percentage points) to show an interest in leading. Not having a supportive workplace or receiving self-care/wellness is more associated with wanting to lead for BIPOC respondents than white ones.

“

Areas in which I had the ability to improve I did not get the mentoring that would have been helpful for my trajectory. Once I was able to recognize my gaps, I could seek opportunities to advocate for the training and support I needed.”

—Black Woman

FIGURE 7 | INTEREST IN LEADERSHIP BY TRAINING AND SUPPORT RECEIVED

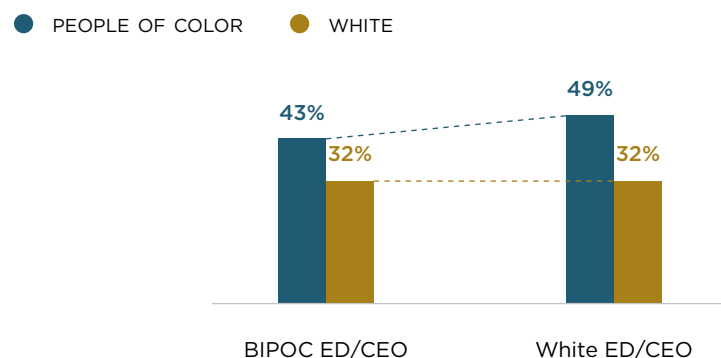


Overall, having challenges and lacking supports does not appear to deter respondents from seeking leadership, especially for BIPOC respondents, who seemed pushed towards top positions in order to correct or mitigate the challenges they have encountered.

## Race of Leadership

Another area where we saw more pushes than pulls was the race of an organization’s leadership. BIPOC staffers who worked in organizations run by leaders of color could have seen these leaders as paving the way for more BIPOC staffers in executive roles. Instead, 49% of BIPOC respondents in organizations with white leaders aspired to leadership, compared to 43% in nonprofits with BIPOC EDs (Figure 8). There was no difference in leadership aspirations for white respondents based on the race of the leaders.

FIGURE 8 | INTEREST IN LEADERSHIP BY RACE OF ED/CEO



5 See “Key Findings from *Race to Lead* Surveys” at [https://buildingmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BMP\\_RTL\\_Key-Findings.pdf](https://buildingmovement.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/BMP_RTL_Key-Findings.pdf) for the overall data showing the mean responses of BIPOC and white respondents grouped according to the leadership composition of their nonprofit workplaces for the statements “I would be happy if I worked at this organization three years from now” and “I have a voice in my organization.”

“

If I were a White woman/male working in the nonprofit sector I would have been tapped to be in upper management or an Executive Director by now. It has been increasingly clear and evident by the Executive Directors that I have worked for and know that my skills are no different than all of them. The difference is that someone has worked to ensure that most of them have an advocate working with them to ensure that they get those types of jobs.”

—Black Woman

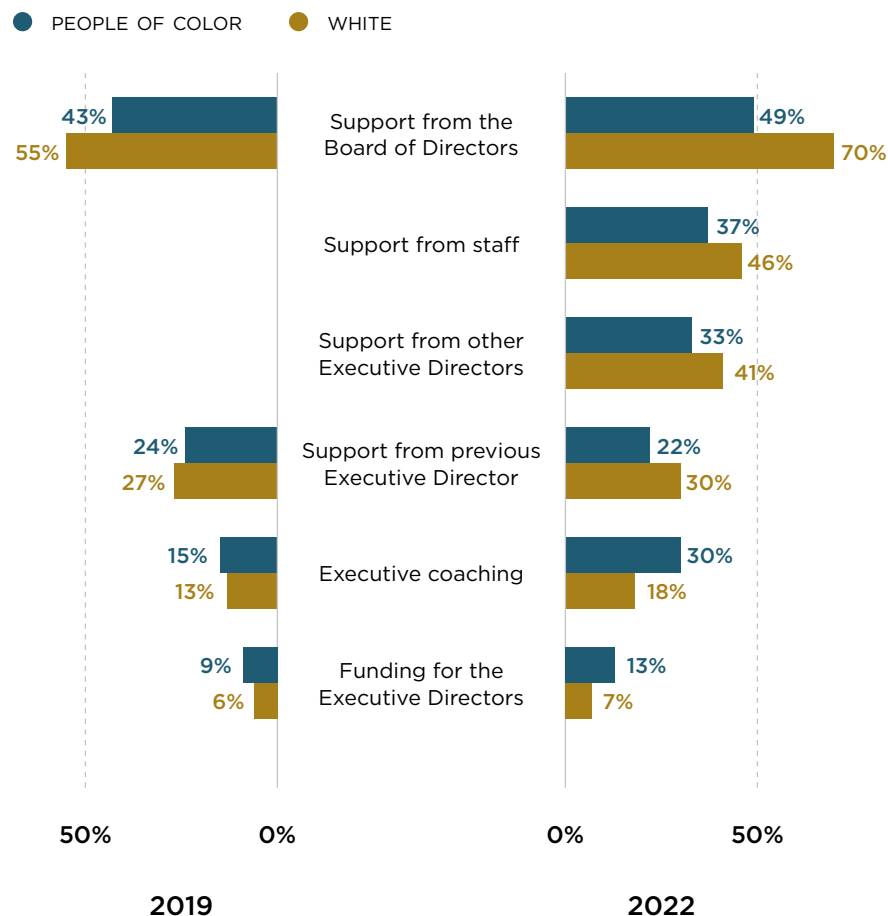
The gap is even more pronounced between respondents working in white-run organizations (75% of the board and senior leadership are white) compared to POC-led groups (50% of the board and senior leadership are BIPOC). Half (50%) of BIPOC respondents working for white-run organizations expressed interest in leading a nonprofit, while 40% of those working in POC-led groups aspired to leadership, a 10 percentage point difference. A similar percentage of white respondents aspire to lead regardless of whether they work for POC-led groups (35%) or white-run organizations (33%). Given BIPOC respondents tend to be happier in POC-led organizations,<sup>5</sup> leadership aspirations appear, once again, to be motivated by negative experiences rather than positive ones.

# The Dilemmas of BIPOC Leadership

One explanation for why BIPOC staffers in POC-led organizations are less interested in the top job, may have to do with the obstacles they see facing BIPOC leaders, several of which were outlined in our “[Trading Glass Ceilings for Glass Cliffs](#)” report. To understand the experience of BIPOC and white Executive Directors/CEOs in 2022, we looked at some key data points. BIPOC leaders still lag behind their white counterparts in supports from board and staff members and continue to exceed white leaders in their use of executive coaching. We also found leaders in the process of transitioning out of their jobs cite burnout as their top reason, with BIPOC leaders citing this far more often than their white peers.

In the 2019 and 2022 surveys, we asked leaders about the supports they received entering their organization. As seen in Figure 9, while support from the Board of Directors went up 15 percentage points for white respondents (from 55% in 2019 to 70% in 2022), it increased only 6 percentage points for BIPOC leaders (43% in 2019 and 49% in 2022). This increased the gap between white and BIPOC leaders receiving board support as they entered their job to 21 percentage points in 2022 compared to 12 percentage points in 2019. In addition, in 2022 BIPOC respondents were 8 percentage points less likely than white ones to receive support from the previous Executive Director, while in 2019 there was only a 3 percentage point difference between BIPOC and white leaders.

FIGURE 9 | TRANSITION SUPPORTS FOR INCOMING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Two new areas of transition support were asked in the 2022 survey: *support from staff* and *support from other Executive Directors*. The responses followed a similar pattern, as shown in Figure 9 (previous page). For example, 46% of white respondents reported support from staff compared to 37% of BIPOC respondents; and a third (33%) of BIPOC respondents had the support of other Executive Directors compared to 41% of white respondents. One area where BIPOC leaders reported receiving more support than white leaders was executive coaching, where 30% of BIPOC respondents had coaching during their transition into the organization, 12 percentage points more than white respondents.

Once in the position, BIPOC leaders also faced more challenges with board and staff members than their white peers, a similar finding to 2019. Although most leaders report that they receive support from their board and staff members, there was a notable gap in favor of white leaders compared to their BIPOC counterparts. White leaders report board support 10 percentage points more than BIPOC leaders and feel the board trusts them 7 percentage points more than BIPOC ones (Figure 10). White leaders are also more supported by staff and report that staff accept being held accountable more than BIPOC leaders, both by 9 percentage points (Figure 11).

FIGURE 10 | ED/CEO EXPERIENCES WITH THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

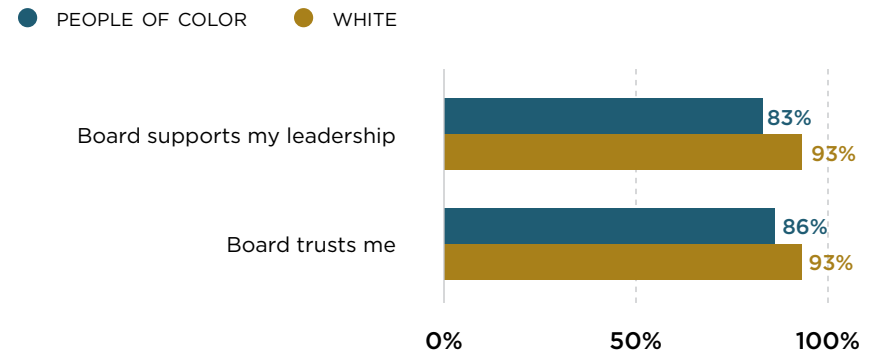
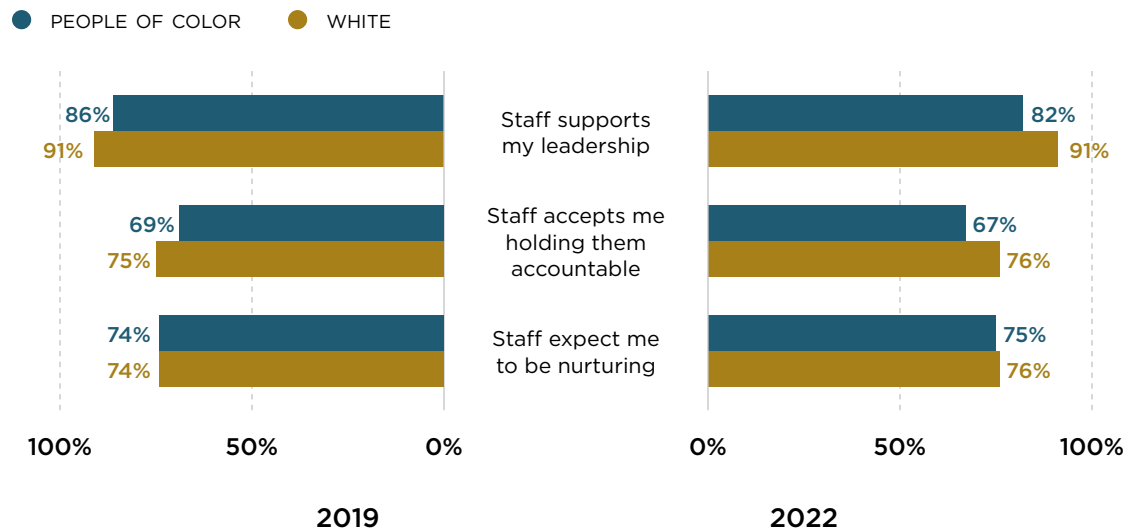
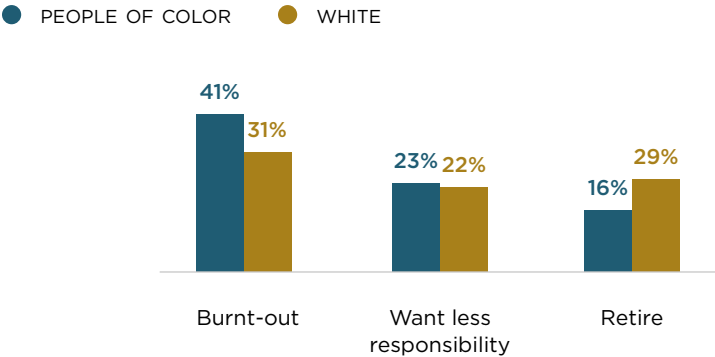


FIGURE 11 | ED/CEO EXPERIENCES WITH STAFF



If BIPOC leaders are more likely to be pushed into leadership by negative forces, they should be receiving more support from staff and board, not less than their white counterparts. The fact that the data suggests otherwise may be the reason that 41% of BIPOC leaders who are not planning to stay in their current role list burnout as the reason compared to 31% of white Executive Directors/CEOs, as shown in Figure 12.

FIGURE 12 | TOP REASONS EDS/CEOS ARE CONSIDERING TRANSITIONING



## Leadership and External Climate

The push into leadership because of inequities and the consequences may contribute to BIPOC leaders' burnout. In 2022, we asked Executive Directors/CEOs how the current sociopolitical climate has shaped their role. We found that BIPOC respondents were energized by the possibilities that the events of 2020 opened up, especially to address the racism faced by their communities. But they also talked about the exhaustion they were already experiencing.

White leaders talked about their commitment to (and challenges with) addressing race/racism in their organizations. Several were also struggling with the need or desire for the organization to maintain neutrality in the post-2020 environment.

The energy felt by BIPOC leaders to have an opening where they can make a difference continues to be challenged by the attacks and backlash especially on issues of race including the U.S. Supreme Court affirmative action decision and the funding cliff they now face as foundations and government pull back on their support.

“

I have been inspired to lead, mainly as a role model for emerging leaders of color wanting to be in executive roles.”

—Black Woman ED/CEO

I am the right person to provide leadership right now and I am keenly aware that a huge function of my role is not what my job description says: it’s to ensure our team is well and our work is meaningful and values-aligned. The pandemic changed my views of leadership and I believe that’s had positive impact on our organization. And, it’s unlikely I’ll continue working in this sector in the coming years.”

—Black Woman ED/CEO

It feels like we are asking more things out of a workplace than we ever have before at precisely the moment in time people and women of color are being called to lead. The bar was never this high for my predecessors.”

—AAMENA Woman ED/CEO

“

Prior to the social justice issues that arose during the last couple of years, we rarely discussed DEIB issues as they pertained to us internally. We have a multicultural staff and felt we were doing well in this area. However, it’s apparent now that there is work to be done.”

—White Woman ED/CEO

Wanting to maintain political neutrality and acknowledging the breadth of opinions in our network while supporting racial and social justice efforts.”

—White Woman ED/CEO

It has challenged me to grow in my understanding of the impact of structural racism inside our organization and in the work we are doing.”

—White Woman ED/CEO



# Addressing the Pushes, Finding the Pulls

The data shows how potential leaders may be pushed towards top positions in order to address inequities and other challenges, and may then be pushed out of leadership by burnout and lack of support from staff and board members. Leadership pushes—to correct and address negative work environments—take their toll on leaders. This cycle disproportionately affects BIPOC respondents and likely contributes to less aspiration on the part of people of color who are not yet in leadership roles.

What appeared to be absent, especially for BIPOC survey-takers, were pulls that make leading attractive and rewarding. One leadership pull is meaningful work and the desire to have an impact for their communities, especially during this current moment. We turned to the data to see where we could look for clues.

## The Pull of 2020s Impact

The latest *Race to Lead* survey asked respondents about the impact the 2020 pandemic and uprisings had on the importance of several different factors, such as the “*mission of the organization*” and “*personal fulfillment and purpose*.”

Answers ranged from whether the issues were “*significantly less important*” to “*significantly more important*” in the current moment than before 2020.

We wondered if the level of importance of these issues would show a pull towards leadership, which we identified as ranking issues “*significantly more important*” since 2020 compared to “*equally important*.”<sup>6</sup> For both BIPOC and white respondents, those who rated the work issues we asked about as significantly more important since 2020 were also more interested in leadership. Conversely, those who ranked the issue areas equally as important were less interested in leadership. The differences were more notable for BIPOC respondents.

Figure 13 (on the following page) has two sides, one for BIPOC respondents and the other for white respondents. Each side compares the percentage of respondents who both rated work issues significantly more important since 2020 and aspired to nonprofit leadership (in blue) with those who rated work issues equally important and aspired to leadership (in green). As we reported earlier, 46% of BIPOC respondents were interested in leading an organization, compared to 32% of white aspiring leaders in 2022.

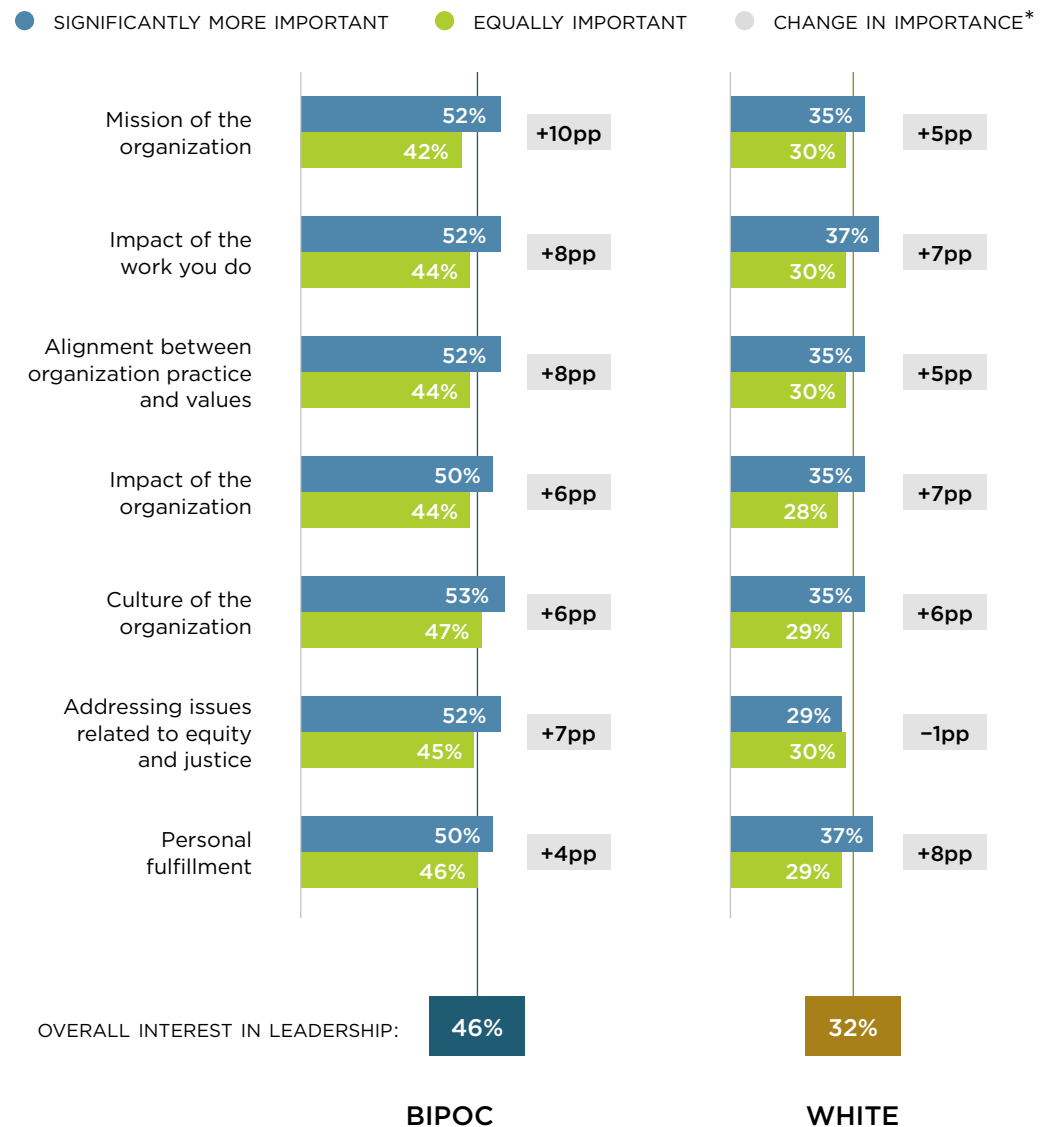
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<sup>6</sup> Few respondents answered that any of the issues were less important since 2020.

As seen on the left side of Figure 13, we found there was a higher percentage of aspiring BIPOC leaders among those who selected *significantly more important* compared to those who selected *equally important* in all the topic areas asked in the survey. The greatest differences were in the areas: “mission of the organization” with a 10 percentage point difference (52% *significantly more important* since 2020 vs. 42% *equally important*); and both the “impact of the work you do” and “alignment between organizational practice and values” both with 8 percentage point differences. Other areas that have considerable percentage point differences include: “impact of the organization” (50% *significantly more* vs. 44% *equally important*), “culture of the organization” (53% *significantly more* vs. 47% *equally important*), and “addressing issues related to equity and justice” (52% *significantly more* vs. 45% *equally important*). Interestingly, the area of personal fulfillment was less correlated with leadership aspiration (50% *significantly more* vs. 46% *equally important*).

The right side of Figure 13 also shows more aspiration to lead among white respondents who answered work issues were *significantly more important*, compared to those who answered *equally important*. There were two areas where white respondents differed from BIPOC respondents. The first was “personal fulfillment,” where there was an 8 percentage point difference for white respondents compared to a 4 percentage point difference for BIPOC respondents. Second, there was almost no difference for white respondents on “addressing issues related to equity and justice” (29% *significantly more* vs. 30% *equally important*).

FIGURE 13 | INTEREST IN LEADERSHIP BY IMPORTANCE OF ISSUES SINCE 2020



\*Note: “pp” stands for percentage point

# What We Need To Do

The nonprofit sector is going through the transition of leadership that was first predicted in the early 2000s.<sup>7</sup> At that time, there was growing concern that the aging Baby Boom population would soon be leaving their leadership roles and the younger generations would not be interested or large enough to fill the gap. That mass transition did not happen for a variety of reasons ranging from the 2008 recession to the fact that older leaders were living longer and healthier and did not want to leave positions that were rewarding, meaningful, and core to their identities. In the last few years, we have started to see an acceleration of leadership transitions. There are several contributing factors ranging from aging Baby Boomers stepping out of long-term leadership roles, to newer leaders who are more comfortable with shorter tenures, to leaders who report burnout from the demands of the position.

What makes this period of increasing transitions particularly concerning is respondents in the 2022 survey show a decreased

interest in leadership compared with 2016 and 2019, even though BIPOC survey-takers still aspire to lead more than their white counterparts. The data indicates interest in leadership is more often associated with negative rather than positive work experiences. Too frequently respondents, especially survey-takers of color, appear to be pushed into leadership to address and correct the challenges they face and the lack of supports they receive. For aspiring BIPOC leaders, having internal mentors or working at BIPOC-led organizations doesn't seem to be a strong pull, perhaps because they observe the obstacles leaders of color confront.

There were also pulls towards leadership such as mentors outside their job, and the culture and impact of the organization. And across all three surveys there is a remarkably consistent level of interest in leading among respondents in their twenties indicating that starting early to encourage sector leadership might help stem the decline of interest in the top job.

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7 See BMP's book, "Working Across Generations: Defining the Future of Nonprofit Leadership" at <https://buildingmovement.org/reports/working-across-generations-defining-the-future-of-nonprofit-leadership/>.

This is the time to focus on cultivating pulls into leadership by developing the positive aspects of the position, especially for BIPOC nonprofit staffers who already express more interest in leading but seem motivated by negative experiences. From our data we suggest:

- A doable job including the funds to hire staff that can help address internal structures and external threats.
- Support from the exiting leader and from other executive directors to offer new leaders the networks they need to get the job done.
- Early intervention by existing mentors and leaders, especially those not in the organization, who can show the benefits of leading.
- Openness to new leadership models ranging from co-directors to stronger board/leader partnerships. Our data found that co-directorships are on the rise, an indication that sharing the leadership is a new way of supporting those in the top role.<sup>8</sup>

There could be the crisis in leadership predicted two decades ago or we can step up to change how we operate, fund, and support organizational leaders to succeed. There is not a shortage of people working in the sector who could be leaders, just a lack of imagination of what is possible.

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Our Board, staff, funders, and allied organizations seem to understand the value of a co-leadership model. I think because work-life balance and wellness has become more important and well-talked about, that the idea of sharing power and spreading executive responsibilities across more than one person makes sense.”

—Biracial Woman ED/CEO

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<sup>8</sup> Between 2019 and 2022, there was a slight increase in co-directorships—two or more top leaders—from 7% to 11%. The percentage of BIPOC co-directorships, where at least one of the co-directors is a person of color, doubled (6% in 2019 vs. 12% in 2022), all white co-directors increased 3 percentage points (4% in 2019 vs. 7% in 2022). Out of all the co-directorships reported in 2022, 20% had all BIPOC leaders, 36% were a combination of BIPOC and white leaders, and 44% had all white leaders.



Building Movement Project

For more information, please visit The Building Movement Project at [www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org) or contact us at [info@buildingmovement.org](mailto:info@buildingmovement.org)

