

## Transcript for “Blocking the Backlash” Webinar

Host: Building Movement Project

Record Date: September 10, 2024

View Recording: [bit.ly/blocking-backlash-yt](https://bit.ly/blocking-backlash-yt)

Mercedes Brown (00:04:43):

Fantastic. I'm happy to get us started. Thank you Frances. And thank you to folks who've been inputting their locations and their names in the chat. I'm afraid to pull the chat up because I am projecting my screen, so I'll let it be. And thanks to Frances for shouting out folks. [00:05:00] I'm happy to get us started.

(00:05:02):

As Frances said, welcome to the Blocking the Backlash: The Positive impact of DEI in Nonprofit Organizations webinar being put on by the Building Movement Project. I'll provide a little bit of background before we get started for folks who might not be as familiar with us at the Building Movement Project and our work.

(00:05:19):

So our vision at BMP is where we imagine a world where all community members can live with dignity, power and their supported by diverse, resilient organizations, networks and [00:05:30] movements that work to eradicate the root causes of inequity and injustice.

(00:05:35):

And we go about paying it forward and contributing to that future state now in our 25th year of existence at BMP by providing insightful research, practical resources and pathways for transformative relationships that we hope support those nonprofit organizations, those networks and those movements in their work of creating that just and equitable world that we envision at BMP.

(00:06:00):

[00:06:00] And we'll share more information on our organization if you aren't familiar, but it sounds like we've got a lot of folks who, based on what you dropped in the chat, who have worked with us or who are familiar with our work. So thanks for being here and thank you for those folks who are just tuning in.

(00:06:15):

Before we get started, I want to run through a couple tech-related instructions so attendees are not visible because of the way that we're projecting for the webinar. So we ask that you, and invite you to use the Q&A feature to ask questions. We will have a [00:06:30] audience Q&A segment in this webinar. So use the Q&A feature to ask questions and we encourage you to also use the chat to send tech-related issues to BMP admin.

(00:06:41):

And then the other thing worth noting, you might've joined after this announcement went off, but this webinar is being recorded, so the recording and the slides will be available following the webinar. And lastly, we invite you, if you haven't already to connect with us on social media. We are on the platform's, Instagram, Facebook, X, and LinkedIn. [00:07:00] And we're pretty active over there, so check us out if you haven't already.

(00:07:05):

And now you told us a little bit about who you are. We have a poll for you in just a minute to get to know you more, but I'd like to take just a minute to let you know who we are. So myself, the voice that you hear, maybe the face that you also see. I'm Mercedes Brown at the Building Movement Project. I'm the director of Race Equity Assessment.

(00:07:22):

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I'm joined by my colleague Frances, who I'll give an opportunity to introduce herself and then I'll shout out our two panelists who you get an opportunity to hear [00:07:30] from later during the moderated panel discussion. Frances, do you want to hop in and introduce yourself?

Frances Kunreuther (00:07:34):

Yeah. Frances Kunreuther, co-executive director of the Building Movement Project. Happy to be here today to share the data with you and more to come.

Mercedes Brown (00:07:44):

Fantastic. Frances is our hype person. You heard getting us all started. Thank you, Frances. Thank you, Crystal, and thank you Bri. I cannot wait for the folks on the webinar to get a chance to hear about you and your incredible work shortly. Let's launch into a poll now [00:08:00] to get a chance to know who's on the line with us here and I'll move this out of the way. Sorry.

(00:08:06):

So the poll that's launched and folks are already diving in, what best describes your role? So let's just take a couple seconds. Let's see how quickly we can get this close to 100%. You all are moving really fast, so that's fantastic. A couple more seconds here. Let that come up. Hopefully it's a pretty straightforward question and you see yourself somewhere to the best of our abilities, [00:08:30] right? We're almost there. We'll keep going.

(00:08:42):

All right. And maybe we will end it. I'll give it just a couple more seconds. Okay. Share the results now. Hopefully folks are seeing the results projected. This is the part of the webinar admittedly and screen sharing that I struggle the most with, but hopefully folks are seeing results. Let me know.

(00:08:58):

Yes, I see [00:09:00] reactions flying, so I'll just call out and react to what we're seeing overwhelmingly and the responses that have come in. So current leaders of color coming in at around 28%, current white leaders coming in at around 18. Capacity builders and intermediaries of color around 14. White capacity builders around 21%. And then some aspiring both leaders of color and white leaders on the webinar.

(00:09:25):

So pretty decent representation across some of those categories that we tend to use. [00:09:30] That's really helpful to have that sense as we move into the findings. So thank you. I'll stop sharing now and we will return to some background and context. I guess we'll shift gears.

(00:09:44):

So before I hand it over to my colleague, Frances to talk us through some of the most salient findings from this most recent report, I want to provide a little background and context around what you're going to hear. If you're unfamiliar, Building Movement Project in 2016 conducted [00:10:00] our very first survey on race and nonprofit leadership.

(00:10:03):

And in large part it's because there've been rumblings and circling in the sector for years about the importance of diversity and leadership. And yet still, there was still a lack of people of color in executive leadership roles that really mirrored the levels for which our demographics were really suggesting and telling us we should see.

(00:10:25):

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So that kicked off our [00:10:30] work with the Race to Lead data series. So in 2019 we added some additional questions. So a couple years later, we went back at it, we added questions about diversity, equity, inclusion in workplace experiences. The types of questions that we were really looking to dive into in the 2019 iteration of the survey was how does a leader's race affect their workplace experience for both Black and indigenous people of color as well as white respondents.

(00:10:57):

So we were back at it again in 2022 and you'll [00:11:00] get a chance to hear more about that during this conversation. We added some additional questions about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning. And what was really important for us to really get our arms around is what was the difference in navigating leadership now and leading nonprofit organizations in light of those two impactful things that I know noted already, and really in large part wanted to build on it and continue to learn where we dug into in the previous iterations [00:11:30] of this survey.

(00:11:31):

So I'll swing us very quickly to highlight some trends from three rounds of surveying. So interestingly enough, over the course of the three years of '16, '19 and '22, the Race to Lead surveys have garnered over 12,000 responses. So just to put things into context, if you're unfamiliar with our Race to Lead survey and research series.

(00:11:54):

The composition though of that 12,000, so the sample surveys has been remarkably [00:12:00] similar over the years. I think there are some areas in which we saw some slight shifts over time, but by and large survey respondents, both things like race and ethnicity have remained relatively consistent over time. We've observed some shifts in a few areas like gender and mental health status, but by and large, we saw some consistency.

(00:12:21):

One of the last things I'll call out here before I hand it over to Frances is that many of the key findings from past surveys also continue to resonate with our [00:12:30] most recent data from 2022. So we can provide more information and if you dive into the report you can see a bit more context.

(00:12:39):

But we wanted to ground our conversation today by lifting up some of those key trends and providing that historical background around our Race to Lead work. I'm going to hand it over to my colleague Frances to dive right into the Blocking the Backlash findings.

Frances Kunreuther (00:12:56):

So thank you, Mercedes. It's so great to be here today. I'm just really [00:13:00] impressed by the people who have put their name, organizations and locations in the chat. Welcome, welcome, welcome. The thing I do want to say is that I'm going to go through this data very quickly. You can go to [www.buildingmovement.org](http://www.buildingmovement.org) or [www.racetolead.org](http://www.racetolead.org) to get the full reports download that and I know you'll get that in the follow-up email from the wonderful Jasmine Leeward who will follow up after the webinar with the [00:13:30] slides and the recording.

(00:13:34):

So let me just start by saying... And a shout-out to my former Co-Executive Director, Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, who was really the lead author on this report. So I'm going to start by talking about these four findings. So just so you know what they are, the first finding I'm going to go through is that more

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organizations in 2022 compared to 2019, did some sort of work, had some sort of DEI diversity, [00:14:00] equity and inclusion initiative in their organization.

[\(00:14:03\)](#):

The second finding is that BIPOC respondents actually rated DEI strategies used in the organization higher than their white counterparts. I'll show you the data on that. The third finding is that respondents were more positive about their workplace when the organization employed what we call five or more DEI strategies. In other words that there was more intensive work on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the [00:14:30] organization.

[\(00:14:31\)](#):

And finally our last finding is we understand that diversity, equity, and inclusion inclusion is not the same as racial equity. And we have some data to show how we're still facing many structural barriers in the nonprofit sector that need to be addressed.

[\(00:14:46\)](#):

So let me just say before I get started that this is not an evaluation of diversity, equity, and inclusion inclusion programs. These are really questions we asked in the 2019 and 2022 Race to Lead surveys compared to some of the other answers [00:15:00] that people gave us. But it's not a comprehensive evaluation of DEI programs in nonprofits.

[\(00:15:06\)](#):

So let's get started. The first finding is what we call the DEI boom. The organizations are increasing nearly using diversity, equity, and inclusion at least in 2022. We don't know what's happened since then in their organizations and you can see... So we're going to change slides and go to slides... Yeah, there we go. [00:15:30] You can see that in 2022, 83% of respondents to the survey said that they had some sort of DEI initiative in their organization compared to about three-quarters in 2019.

[\(00:15:49\)](#):

That green bar is 2019, that blue bar is 2022. And then you can see there's really the growth of the use of DEI is pretty equal for people [00:16:00] of color in the sector and for white people in their organizations in the sector. Remember, the survey is post-2020. So you're still seeing the impact of the uprisings after the murder of George Floyd.

[\(00:16:13\)](#):

And of course it's during COVID, which brings us to the next slide, which is a quote from somebody who says in March 2020, many organizations were faced with the reality of racism and it became a topic of conversation in the workplace. For this person their organization [00:16:30] had begun DEI work before that and it didn't feel like a knee-jerk reaction after George Floyd. But the person noted, "I do feel the work is more difficult in a distributed workplace than in an office environment." So again, the impact of COVID on doing this work in organizations.

[\(00:16:46\)](#):

In the next slide, you can see whether or not organizations had DEI initiatives. These are organizations that say they have some sort of DEI initiative in their organizations [00:17:00] by organization size. And you'll notice that there's kind of the same difference every year in every category between 2019 and 2022. There's this very equal increase. But what we really wanted to point out on this slide is that compared to organizations that have budgets of more than a million dollars, those in organizations with budgets of a million dollars or less are less likely to have a DEI initiative [00:17:30] in the organization.

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(00:17:31):

You can see three quarters of those in 2022 had some sort of DEI initiative, which leads us to think that this may be a financial issue and we need to think about supporting organizations that are smaller to do diversity, equity, and inclusion in those organizations. The reason we're so keen on that is almost a quarter, 23% of the respondents of the survey work in organizations with budgets of a million dollar or less. We know the sector is made up of mostly [00:18:00] smaller organizations.

(00:18:02):

On the next slide, you can see the types of strategies that people reported their organizations were engaged in. So we listed on the left side of the slide, you're comparing 2016 to 2019, whether or not the organization provided training, whether that they included DEI and race equity in the mission of the organization. [00:18:30] You're comparing that between 2019 and 2022.

(00:18:34):

On the right side those two extra bars are just different strategies we added in 2022. What I want to point out here is that training is always the most popular and most used initiative. Now, people didn't have to choose one initiative. You might have chose three or four initiatives. The training is often a starting point into DEI.

(00:18:56):

And also, as you can note that [00:19:00] measuring and tracking DEI has also had a huge increase between 2019 and 2022, an eight percentage point increase. So we can see that there's certain areas that there's been even more increased training and tracking DEI initiatives versus other areas where there's not that much of an increase between 2022 and 2019.

(00:19:24):

So looking at the next slide, keep in mind [00:19:30] what you just saw. We're going to go back one, Mercedes. I just wanted to say that we're going to talk a new question we asked in 2022 and that's we asked people for each of those strategies of what organizations did, what sort of DEI strategy was used in their organization? We asked people how effective they thought that strategy was, from one to five.

(00:19:57):

I wanted to just let you know, very few people said [00:20:00] it was not effective at all. So what you're going to be seeing in the following three slides is people who said it was either very effective, the strategy or extremely effective. So let's then move on to the next slide, Mercedes. So you can see that people of color in organizations, the respondents from the survey were more likely in five of the strategies, the DEI strategy interventions to say that it was either very or extremely [00:20:30] effective compared to white respondents.

(00:20:33):

So, that dark blue is people of color respondents and that brown color that's white respondents. And what struck us when we noted that first of all, how big a difference there is between white respondents and people of color in these five areas is that three of those areas that you could see circled in green are related to either measuring or recruiting [00:21:00] diversity in the organization.

(00:21:02):

That top one, recruiting senior and executive leadership with diverse backgrounds. The bottom one, developing new recruitment and outreach to increase staff diversity. And then in that middle, measuring and tracking organizational diversity. So what the composition of is in the organization makes a

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difference, especially to people of color. You can see that 11 percentage point difference on that first one of the top leadership and [00:21:30] the eight percentage point differences in the other two.

[\(00:21:33\)](#):

I also wanted to point out that the two that aren't circled really have to do with how racial equity impacts the community, both the work with the community as you can see in the second one on issues of racial equity and also addressing how inequity and systemic bias really impact the work of the organization.

[\(00:21:54\)](#):

So on the next slide, the top four of these [00:22:00] responses are also interventions, diversity, equity and inclusive interventions in the organization where there wasn't that big of a difference. People of color still were more likely to rate it very or extremely effective, but there was a very... We don't see these as big differences.

[\(00:22:21\)](#):

I did want to point out in that second one where there's a green kind of circle around that that representation is where there's the biggest gap here, [00:22:30] even though there's not as big a gap as you saw on the previous slide.

[\(00:22:33\)](#):

Again, this issue of underrepresented groups this time on the board of directors and advisory committees is important to people of color respondents or more important than it is to white respondents.

[\(00:22:44\)](#):

The only area, the only initiative where white respondents rated it higher than people of color respondents was this last one circled in red, "Pursue equity and compensation." That is pay [00:23:00] equity parity, et cetera.

[\(00:23:01\)](#):

And there's a five percentage point difference, and we wonder whether that's because white respondents actually benefited from pay equity audits in their organization. Not sure, don't have the evidence, but that was just something we considered, and are curious about your own thoughts in that area.

[\(00:23:19\)](#):

So I wanted to go on to the third finding, which is the more strategies that an organization employed indicating that they were [00:23:30] going deeper into diversity, equity, and inclusion compared to somebody who just had one strategy makes a bigger difference on how people feel about the organization than those that have fewer strategies.

[\(00:23:48\)](#):

People where there are more strategies feel more positively about the organization. And what we did here is we looked at some common questions that surveys across the country use to [00:24:00] measure how people feel about the organization. So let's go to the first one that's on the next slide. A very common retention question that's used in many services, "I would be happy if I worked in this organization three years."

[\(00:24:11\)](#):

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So we borrowed that question and we asked people how they felt about that, whether they disagreed, which was number one, extremely disagree to whether they agree on a ten-point scale, extremely agree from one to 10. I want to point out two things in this slide. First, if you start with [00:24:30] the interventions, one to four DEI strategies are used in the organization, five to seven DEI strategies used in the organization or eight or more.

(00:24:39):

You can see there's a steady incline both for white and people of color respondents. A little bit more for white respondents. That's one thing. The more the interventions, the more people feel like they want to stay in that organization and want to be there three years from now.

(00:24:54):

But the second thing that's even more striking is that when there's no DEI initiative at all [00:25:00] in the organization, white people are pretty happy in those organizations compared to people of color where you could see how low that goes. It's really the lowest point for people of color respondents.

(00:25:11):

Talk about structural areas, we still need education, and understanding that for whites in organizations where there's no DEI initiative, that they think everything's okay compared to how people of color feel in those organizations. Let's go to the next slide where we could see another net promoter question, "I [00:25:30] feel I have a voice in the organization." Another measure about how people feel about their workplace.

(00:25:35):

You see same two trends here that for you can see there's very little difference when you start with one to four, five to seven or eight plus strategies. And again, an indication of how much work these organizations are doing on DEI. And people get more feeling they have some sort of voice in the organization, the more strategies they are. And then you see that gap between white... A little [00:26:00] less of a gap between white respondents and people of color respondents and organizations that have no DEI at all.

(00:26:08):

And then the third indication for this is on the next slide, whether people feel consulted before their organization makes key decisions. Again, very common questions asked about whether people feel good about their workplace. And you see the same pattern again here.

(00:26:23):

So we see both that the number of DEI interventions makes a big [00:26:30] difference in terms of how people feel about the workplace. But for white people, there's kind of like, "I'm okay in here. And then when I start, I take a dip and I come back up." Very different for people of color respondents.

(00:26:43):

Okay, so a quote about that is from one of the respondents who said, "DEI is not just training to be completed, it needs to be engraved in every process, every part of the organization. As I say to my Task Force members and everyone else, 'It's [00:27:00] not a sprint, it's a marathon.'"

(00:27:02):

So I want to give the last finding before I turn it back over to Mercedes, which is we really wanted to emphasize that we do not equate doing diversity, equity, and inclusion work as the way to achieve racial

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equity in and of itself. It's really one step towards achieving the more structural changes that we know need to happen both in the nonprofit sector and society [00:27:30] at large.

[\(00:27:31\)](#):

So we looked at some of the questions that might help us answer that. The first one was in all three surveys, you're looking at 2022 data here. But in all three surveys we asked people about whether they thought their race negatively impacted their career advancement too positively. It was a scaled answer with, my race negatively impacts and then it doesn't impact and then it positively impacts my career advancement.

[\(00:28:00\)](#):

[00:28:00] And you can see on the left side that for BIPOC respondents really the number of DEI interventions in their organization, even though we saw and makes a difference to how they feel about their own organization, really didn't make a difference. And whether they thought their race negatively impacted their career advancement, still half of the respondents felt their race was negatively impacting their career advancement. So that structural barrier doesn't go away even if they feel [00:28:30] better about their individual organization.

[\(00:28:33\)](#):

I wanted to compare that to the right side of the slide, which shows what the response of white respondents on the right side. And this is now instead of negatively impacts my career advancement, that it positively impacts my career advancement. And you can see that as there are more and more DEI strategies in the organization, again, an indication of the seriousness and depth of the DEI work [00:29:00] that white people tend to say more and more that their race has positively impacted their career advancement.

[\(00:29:07\)](#):

So the advantage for white people is they have more awareness of the positive impact their race has in their career advancement, but it doesn't take away the structural barriers that people of color face in the nonprofit sector. And then on this next slide, another indication of the structural barriers [00:29:30] that people face is a question we asked in all of the three surveys.

[\(00:29:35\)](#):

And you can see the orange is 2016, the green is 2019, the blue is 2022, where we ask people how much they agree with the statement, "Nonprofits trying to address race and race equity in their organizations often create tensions that they are not equipped to resolve." In other words, the sector as a whole is raising issues when they address [00:30:00] race and race equity that individual organizations aren't yet equipped to resolve.

[\(00:30:04\)](#):

And you can see for people of color that resistance to really dealing with race and race equity still exists, especially you can see that in 2019 and 2022. A little less so for white respondents are actually a lot less.

[\(00:30:19\)](#):

But we can still see that resistance and lack of a really ability for nonprofits as a whole to be able to address diversity, [00:30:30] equity, and inclusion in their organizations as compared to in people's individual organizations. This is looking at the sector as a whole.

[\(00:30:38\)](#):



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So with that, I want to end with one quote, which is from another respondent who says, "Nonprofits aren't creating tensions through DEI work. They're unearthing tensions that have always been there, but it wasn't safe enough for BIPOC stakeholders to bring them up, but when they are brought up, these organizations are [00:31:00] often ill-equipped to handle those issues, especially in historically white-led organizations." And with that, Mercedes, let me turn it back over to you.

Mercedes Brown ([00:31:10](#)):

Perfect. Thank you, Frances. Hopefully I will come back on camera here. Not sure what happened in my video? Okay, now and I'm back. Fantastic. Thank you, Frances. Those were a lot of findings to move through. I am actually going to shift us to our [00:31:30] moderated panel discussion to make sure we have enough time to hear from Bri and Crystal.

([00:31:35](#)):

So I'll stop sharing my screen. We'll get spotlighted thanks in advance, Jess for working your magic and getting everyone pulled up on the screen. And we'll move into the conversation about what you're seeing, how what Frances has just shared as resonating with your experience.

([00:32:00](#)):

[00:32:00] Perfect. Okay, so this first question here, actually Jess, are we all set to go? Sorry, I just want to make sure we got the right folks on the screen here. Okay, I will move us ahead. So I'll reintroduce folks to our two incredible panelists who've joined us. So you'll be hearing from Bri Carpenter who is the director of employee experience and culture at Avalon [00:32:30] Housing out of the Midwest and in our Michigan. Thank you for being here, Bri.

([00:32:34](#)):

And you'll also have an opportunity here from Crystal Coache who is the vice president of diversity, equity, and inclusion and belonging with the National Women's Law Center out of Washington, DC. Thank you for being here, Crystal. I will start us off with a question, a common question to both of you and maybe perhaps we'll start with you Bri, if you don't mind. So it'll just be the two of us here.

([00:32:58](#)):

So Bri, this question [00:33:00] is, as an organization that was an early adopter of building movement projects, research-inspired, actually Race to Lead research inspired the race equity assessment building blocks for change. What structural and cultural shifts has your organization, Avalon made to move from really beyond the commitment to addressing inequity within the workplace to taking more concrete steps to advancing real culture shifts and change in service of ensuring that Avalon is really an inclusive place [00:33:30] for your nonprofit employees, especially employees of color?

Bri Carpenter ([00:33:34](#)):

Yes. Thank you so much for having me. So in response to this question, one of the quotes that was presented earlier about DEI work not being a checkbox or something that we're done wiping our hands clean, we've really worked to continue to make our DEI work and our focus on equity and inclusion, something that is embedded within all levels of the agency.

([00:33:58](#)):

And so, that looks like [00:34:00] including DEI-focused work in our strategic plan and our strategic goals that are attached to that plan. Equity is also one of our formal agency values. And so that exists on our website. We have a vision for equity posted there. And also from my role, I have really worked to make DEI work part of the full employee life cycle.

([00:34:22](#)):

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And so we are asking DEI-focused questions in every interview that we have for potential staff member and [00:34:30] a red flag within those questions is enough to not move forward with a candidate, even if they have all of the on paper credentials and experience. Doing mission-based work and including DEI work within our mission and within our values, people need to be aligned with that in order to effectively promote change that we seek within our community on a broader level.

(00:34:53):

We also, we're guilty of that checkbox nature with our internal DEI trainings. [00:35:00] We moved from having optional trainings to required trainings, and now instead we are including aspects of our DEI training, which at our agency we call [inaudible 00:35:13] Committing to Anti-Racism and Anti-Bias in our onboarding process within our new hire orientation. Moving conversations around equity there allow us to reach employees right when they're entering the door, right when they're getting acclimated to the environment.

(00:35:29):

So [00:35:30] if it wasn't fully recognized during the interview process, which it should have been, it's also continued and built upon right when they're having their first conversations with their colleagues. It allows folks to build authentic relationships there and to talk about issues that many are uncomfortable talking about and to essentially get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

(00:35:53):

Another thing that we've done recently is employed a full-time DEI manager [00:36:00] role. I believe that they're on this call. So within my team of employee experience, we have Murphy who is our full-time DEI manager. They lead our internal equity committee. They also provide consulting to leaders and any staff that are interested throughout the organization, and inform and coach and provide support to our internal affinity groups.

(00:36:22):

They were also the one that brought the initial equity conversations into the orientation [00:36:30] period so that we are no longer saying, "Okay, you've been at the agency for six months, let's talk about DEI." We're saying that right away. And then we're building upon that with annual refresher sessions and conversations. So in summary, DEI conversations become a part of the culture and the process before folks enter the door and then continue on throughout the employee lifecycle.

(00:36:53):

We continue to have staff surveys around DEI topics. We gather ongoing [00:37:00] feedback in that way and all the way up until someone has made the decision to leave the agency, we have them assess and inform their experience with our DEI work while they were employed during their exit interviews. So from entry interview all the way to exit interview folks are addressing these topics from all levels of the organization.

Mercedes Brown (00:37:22):

Thank you, Bri. I really appreciate the breadth of your response and really this continuum of... through the organization's efforts [00:37:30] to, as you said, from start to finish, live into that commitment. So thank you for that. I'll actually shift gears and bring in Crystal. And ask Crystal, you a similar question if you don't mind.

(00:37:44):

As National Women's Law Center was actually one of our earlier beta test organizations, as early adopters of our race equity assessment Building Blocks for Change, what types of structural shifts and

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cultural shifts would you like to lift [00:38:00] up that National Women's Law Center has been able to make over the years?

Crystal Coache ([00:38:04](#)):

Yeah, thank you so much for asking this question. And it was really nice to reflect on some of the work that the Law Center has been doing and that my team has been doing. To start, I want to say that I joined the Law Center at a really exciting time while we were... and the Law Center was finishing its first collective bargaining agreement. And so we are a unionized Law Center.

([00:38:28](#)):

And I think it's really important [00:38:30] to lift that up because baked into the collective bargaining agreement, there was a significant focus on data collection and transparency and analysis, a significant focus on training on anti-racism for staff and leaders. A significant focus on recruitment and strong and equitable wages and benefits.

([00:38:51](#)):

And so, I was really set up to embed DEI work throughout the organization [00:39:00] from the very beginning. And the first thing that I noticed was that I was not just hired, but I also was resourced to be able to bring on staff. So DEI at our organization includes an internal data and research person, a director for that.

([00:39:21](#)):

We also have somebody focused on learning and belonging events inspired to create [00:39:30] connection and belonging. And all of these things have led to some really strong initial beginnings to this work. I totally agree with what Bri said. It is something that will take time and iteration. And I agree with the quote in the presentation, "It's a marathon, not a sprint."

([00:39:53](#)):

But some of the early progress that we've had is we have been able to pilot some [00:40:00] really strong feedback and just feedback processes through a 360. We have been able to host what we are calling Thirdlies, which are all staff gatherings where we collectively examine some of our data, especially our hiring data and general people data for that third of the year.

([00:40:29](#)):

We've [00:40:30] developed a professional development program that people are really grateful for, excited about and utilizing. We significantly contributed to that very hard debate around how to bring people back in office at what cadence in a way that I'm really excited about and has met a variety of needs of our organization.

([00:40:54](#)):

And we've really increased the number of people of color on our board. Over [00:41:00] the last five years our board has grown from 33% people of color to 75% people of color. And much, much more. But those are some earlier wins that we've had and are continuing to build upon as we keep on keeping on with our DEI work.

Mercedes Brown ([00:41:23](#)):

Appreciate that, Crystal. I see the reactions coming in. Appreciate both the structural more infrastructure shifts that the National [00:41:30] Women's Law Center has been able to put in place. As well as not losing sight of the opportunities to shift culture and climate in the feeling that employees have within the organization.

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(00:41:41):

So hearing some of those soft shifts that the organization has made is really remarkable here. Thank you for lifting those up. The flip of that, and this is to both of you where you have an opportunity to reflect on where you've seen those positive shifts in the organization. I know they didn't come without some challenges.

(00:41:59):

And so [00:42:00] in sticking with the theme of really today's conversation, I'd love to dive into a question with the both of you as well around how your organization has dealt with the emerging resistance to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and efforts given your very public stance and internal commitment.

(00:42:20):

And I'd love to maybe, while since we have you up, Crystal, if you're okay taking this one back to back. I'd really curious about your response from your perspective.

Crystal Coache (00:42:30):

[00:42:30] Very happy to. I think our response, it's pretty... at the risk of sounding really simple is to continue doing the work. So I am a huge Toni Morrison fan and one of my favorite quotes from Toni Morrison is about the very serious function of racism being distraction and how it keeps you from doing your work, you keep explaining over and over your right to exist.

(00:42:59):

And [00:43:00] I really subscribe to that. I believe that over prioritizing the attacks on DEI is a distraction from actually doing DEI, and it could be a full-time job in and of itself to respond to every attack to give each attack credence. And so my response is to do the work and to do it really well.

(00:43:29):

I think about, [00:43:30] there's a report that came out from Democracy Forward recently around what remains legal in the DEI realm. Shout out to a former colleague, Zunu for sending it to me. I think she's on this call. Lots remains legal in DEI despite the ruling on a affirmative action. And there's just a lot of fear around it and fear mongering around it.

(00:43:54):

And so it really behooves us to ensure that we are not [00:44:00] over emphasizing these attacks, that we are knowledgeable and know that many of them are baseless and don't have a leg to stand on. And so my response is for us to continue to do the work and do it well.

(00:44:18):

That said, I do understand that we need to be smart and strategic with our funders and make sure that what we're doing is explainable and understood. And so [00:44:30] I do think through that with my team. I do think through how we're measuring what we're setting out to do in our organization, but by and large my response is, do the work.

Mercedes Brown (00:44:43):

Well said. Well said, Crystal. I'm curious, Bri, how that hits you and then if you too can do it, I think Crystal so eloquently did, which is layer on what would you share, what insights would you share with organizations, funders and supporters around how to best respond around DEI's initiatives, [00:45:00] effectiveness and response to resistance against it?

Bri Carpenter (00:45:05):

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Yes, I completely agree. I think the main response is to keep going. There has to be a level of resilience in this work. Discrimination runs rampant, it takes different forms and responding to anti-racism efforts with racism is to be expected. And so I would say keep doing the work. And also similar to what Crystal is touching on is be prepared to explain [00:45:30] the why.

(00:45:31):

And so leaning into both qualitative and quantitative data, either metrics, surveying staff, surveying community partners that we work with about the benefits of the work that we're doing. And then also framing the work.

(00:45:45):

And so DEI efforts can impact all levels of the agency and all of the experiences of those who work for us and those that we serve. And so DEI can be framed as a staff retention strategy and that can be built upon in the way that [00:46:00] that would impact finances within an institution.

(00:46:03):

There's also myth busting. And so when folks do come with misinformation, asking questions similar to how my favorite way of interrupting forms of discrimination is to keep asking, "Why?" Or, "What do you mean by that?" So what exactly is it that folks are resisting? Sometimes folks are resisting buzzwords that they've heard framed in a negative context that they don't completely understand.

(00:46:28):

So the ability to both [00:46:30] explain what we're doing, explain how we're doing it and explain how we're measuring the impact of what we're doing is the best way to keep going and to keep gaining support and maybe shifting some opinions along the way.

Mercedes Brown (00:46:48):

Fantastic, Bri. Pretty appreciative of that addition and could not agree more. I like the general sentiment of keep on keeping on and the only way through it is through it, right? And so just want to name that and appreciate [00:47:00] your response. I know that we've now reached the time where we can take on some additional audience questions and there've been a fair number of questions that have come into the chat or through the Q&A.

(00:47:14):

Thank you folks for using the Q&A feature. You've been lighting it up and it's very well appreciated and I will bring on now will Crystal, Bri and also perhaps even Frances to see whether or not we might be able to respond to some of these questions in the time that we have left. So if you all [00:47:30] can come on to the camera, that would be incredible and we'll just take some of the questions that have come in from the top if that works.

(00:47:41):

So the first question I'll grab it said, "How do we get our non-BIPOC staff to understand that equity isn't just a takeaway for them?" We hear this often and let me make sure I read that correctly. Hopefully I did. So is there anyone who would like to perhaps hop in and really [00:48:00] speak to this? This is a question that I think many of us can identify with.

Bri Carpenter (00:48:16):

I think, if I may-

Mercedes Brown (00:48:16):

Yes.

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Bri Carpenter (00:48:16):

I think that there is research out there similar to what was shared today about the way that equity benefits everyone. It gives us all what we need in order to thrive. And so leaning into the benefit [00:48:30] and leaning into the research around the benefit is a way that I would address that.

Mercedes Brown (00:48:38):

Fantastic, Bri, there is a very specific question that's coming for you. If you are off mute and you don't mind, someone asks, "Bri, please expound on what DEI red flag would be during the interview process. Curious about how substantive that is versus a person who hasn't had much exposure/training [00:49:00] saying the wrong phrase during the interview and hiring process." So I think that's a great question if you wouldn't mind taking it.

Bri Carpenter (00:49:06):

Yes, absolutely. So one thing that we're looking for when asking these questions is openness. And so when I sit on panels or when I train folks on the hiring process, folks don't have to know everything. They don't have to be able to recite a lot of keywords or acronyms. They need to display an openness to DEI work.

(00:49:25):

So even if someone is to answer the question, "I'm not really familiar with this terminology." [00:49:30] Or, "I haven't had experience in DEI work, but I'm excited to learn." We're looking for that willingness versus resistance and rigidity. I know that another question that was asked as an example and one of our questions that we ask is simply, "What is your understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion?" And so a red flag there would be someone saying that, "It's not important." Or, "It's fake." Or, "It's something that we don't need to worry about."

(00:49:56):

Whereas someone not being able to give all the answers [00:50:00] and give a ton of insight but stating, "This is something I'm really wanting to build my skills around." That's a green flag and we would be able to move forward. It's the willingness and openness. None of us know it all and it's a continuous process. We want people who are willing to join us wherever they are on that journey as long as they're willing to be on a journey.

Mercedes Brown (00:50:23):

I see. Thank you, Bri. Popping around in some of the questions and I see the reactions coming in from folks. I love how active folks [00:50:30] are being in the Q&A chat and using the reactions. Let's grab this other question that's come in, "I'm also wondering if the drop..." And perhaps Frances can hop in on this one. "I'm also wondering if the drop in one to four responses has to do with a half-hearted implementation or a check the box approach. Definitely could see white defensiveness too." Frances, I'm curious if you want to maybe speak to that question.

Frances Kunreuther (00:50:59):

Well, I'm curious what Bri [00:51:00] and Crystal will have to say because I just have what the data says. I don't have really the lived experience. I think it's both things. I think that as white people don't have to deal with DEI, they're happy, "I don't have to talk about them. Nothing's wrong. What's the problem?"

(00:51:17):

And then suddenly they're thrust into a training or something. And actually there's some evidence is a lot of articles in Harvard Business Review of all places that show that the minutes of training starts, the

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white defensiveness begins. [00:51:30] And so what I really love about that line graph is that, but the more interventions are actually, it really changes people. They move from that stance.

(00:51:39):

But I also agree with Julia that it also could be that there's just a training and then that's it, and then it doesn't really change. We don't know whether it changes or not. We just know the number of interventions and the impact it has. But Bri and Crystal, any experience you've had with that is always welcome.

Mercedes Brown (00:52:00):

[00:52:00] Maybe you want to jump in, Crystal?

Crystal Coache (00:52:06):

I think pontificating here, but I think the person who wrote it called out defensiveness and I think that is a strong call-out, and I don't want to overlook that part of it. I also do think that this work is continuous and sometimes that can feel really unsatisfying, [00:52:30] especially for cultural groups that check boxes and to get a thing done. So those are some of my early thoughts, but I think even embedded in your question is one of your answers.

Mercedes Brown (00:52:49):

Perfect. Let's see if... We've got a lot of questions coming in. We have the time. Let's hop back in and see if we can get some responses to some of the others that have come in. Was one... Thank you [00:53:00] to my colleagues who are resolving them. They're disappearing before my eyes.

(00:53:04):

Okay. Let's see. I'll plug this one. We got a comment and question that has come in from Andy, "Can you share any successful approaches to the inequity built into compensation structures?" Wondering if someone would like to tackle that question and there's more robust explanation too, but I'll just, I think- Crystal Coache (00:53:25):

I can jump in.

Mercedes Brown (00:53:27):

... [inaudible 00:53:28] that would be fantastic.

Crystal Coache (00:53:27):

Yeah. I really love [00:53:30] compensation and think it is a foundational part of equity work. And I think it begins with coming up with your own philosophy around compensation and what you believe about it. And that needs to be independent of the market. We know the marketplace is flawed. It is especially flawed when it comes to gender. We know that when women enter a profession, that profession ends up getting paid less.

(00:53:56):

So it really begins with establishing your own set of values [00:54:00] around compensation. For example, "My workers will be paid a living wage." And then building a structure based on those values and those philosophies. I don't mean to say that you can completely ignore the market because you can't. It is a part of that strategy, but it should not be the whole thing.

(00:54:20):

And so what I would start with is really contemplating your philosophy around compensation. If you have the ability and resources, contract [00:54:30] with an equity-based firm that does this work and design a system that reflects your values and considers the market but isn't completely market dependent.

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Mercedes Brown (00:54:46):

I'd say I think we have. We'll take one more question. And in fact, this question relates to one of three implications that the BMP team lifted up in the report itself, which is around the need to invest [00:55:00] in DEI initiatives as small nonprofit organizations and not allowing costs to be a barrier to organizations having access to the resources and the specialized skill sets needed to shift culture and service of equity and nonprofits.

(00:55:14):

And so, Bri, I might swing over to you. I mean Avalon is a bit of a mid-size organization. But I'm curious if you can think of and lift up any ideas for organizations who don't have robust budgets about ways in which they might incorporate DEI initiatives [00:55:30] into their work.

Bri Carpenter (00:55:31):

Yes. I think it starts with making space for conversations. And so both receiving training as leaders in the organization around how to lead DEI conversations, a lot of that information and trainings are available for free on the internet. And so, giving yourself the skillset to be able to create those forums and create a sense of safety.

(00:55:53):

And then it can be as simple as reading a shared article and having a conversation, having a book club. [00:56:00] It doesn't have to always look like a large expensive project. I know that within our agency, that is how it started. It started as optional conversations of staff coming together and working through a DEI workbook.

(00:56:14):

And then from there we built on additional trainings and staff who were more interested or more expertise in certain areas were able to lead small trainings within the agency. So it doesn't always have to be expensive. It can start with [00:56:30] gauging interest and sharing the reasoning behind having these conversations. And it can be as simple as a book club or a podcast discussion.

Mercedes Brown (00:56:39):

I appreciate that, Bri. I think that's a really solid point that it doesn't always have to be tied to budget. Even though it is the recommendation, right? It is an implication that we lifted up around the importance of making investments and DEI initiatives, especially at small nonprofits.

(00:56:59):

I actually think [00:57:00] I was a little more conservative around time. I think we can actually take one more question, and I know there are lots of great questions that have come into the chat. I appreciate folks all, I think we'll try to capture these questions and see if we can't get some follow up responses if that works.

(00:57:14):

But Crystal, perhaps I have one final question for you that relates to another question I was hoping you might respond to, given your role as a DEI professional who is a part of a national DEI network.

(00:57:27):

There was a question that came in from, [00:57:30] I believe Lori, Lori Ken, if you can get eyes on it around their observation that funders are perhaps pulling back from making investments in Black organizations if their mission values or grant state that they prioritize Black participants.

(00:57:52):



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And so I'm wondering if you might want to add to, just based on, it would be really insightful to hear what you're hearing in your networks and in your [00:58:00] circles amongst folks who lead DEI work across the country.

Crystal Coache ([00:58:05](#)):

I'm so glad you lifted that one up. I was trying to type a response.

Mercedes Brown ([00:58:08](#)):

Yes.

Crystal Coache ([00:58:09](#)):

And what I would say is I'm not 100% sure because there sounds like there's an acute need and acute issue but some ideas. One is I know that there are more and more subgrantees and subgranting organizations that are sometimes better about funding [00:58:30] Black-led organizations. And I would continue to try to get in front of subgrantees in addition to the typical foundations.

([00:58:41](#)):

And then another piece is just, is there a way to have some of your funding come from grantees, but some funding come in other ways? Diversifying how your organization is funded is another [00:59:00] big thought. But I really wanted to address the humanity of that question. It is really hard to be housing insecure while trying to move forward a mission.

([00:59:14](#)):

And I think it also behooves bigger organizations to make the case and continue to make the case, and organizations like BMP doing reports like [00:59:30] this and analyses like this to clear some brush for smaller organizations.

Mercedes Brown ([00:59:39](#)):

Fantastic. Thank, you Crystal. Bri, just curious if you want to add anything on. If not, I'm happy to close us out.

Bri Carpenter ([00:59:47](#)):

I absolutely agree. I have nothing add.

Mercedes Brown ([00:59:51](#)):

Fantastic. Thank you all. So appreciative of everyone who's taken time out of their morning, afternoon, depending on where you are in the world [01:00:00] to be a part of this really important conversation. And I know that the findings though, interesting to us folks who really love data can be dense, but they're important and impactful findings.

([01:00:11](#)):

And certainly appreciate having the conversation with Crystal and Bri and hearing about your experience and communities as well as folks who took the time to drop some questions and reactions and thoughts and comments into the chat.

([01:00:24](#)):

So I'd like to with that, thank everyone again for your time and [01:00:30] remind folks that we will share in a little bit over a week the recording and all of the materials in case we were trying to take copious notes during the presentation.

([01:00:40](#)):

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So you'll get the recording, you'll get the slides and the link back to the full report if you haven't had an opportunity to read it. And we hope that you will continue to be a part of this conversation, this very important conversation.

[\(01:00:52\)](#):

I think everyone lift up and ditto a comment made by Crystal, which is that while we must be mindful and strategic [01:01:00] around our responses, we must acknowledge what the data told us in taking it together. Which is that these initiatives work, they do work in organizations, they're a starting place. They aren't the end all be all, but they are leading to shifts in organizations.

[\(01:01:13\)](#):

You heard about the work of National Women's Law Center and Avalon. So I just want to encourage us to keep on keeping on and my saying was, the only way through it is through it. So how to respond to those inevitable tensions and trigger points that will inevitably emerge in organizations amongst certain [01:01:30] employees. We have to move through it. So thank you all and can't wait to be on the next webinar with you. Take care.