

Beyond The Glass Cliff

Women of color lead the work. Philanthropy underinvests in what sustains them.

New research reveals how philanthropic funding often supports the work itself while underinvesting in the conditions that sustain women of color leadership over time.

THE PROBLEM

Women of color lead an estimated 18% of U.S. nonprofits — yet they face disproportionate burnout, chronic underfunding, and early exits from leadership. This isn't a pipeline problem. It's a structural one: philanthropy routinely funds the work of these organizations while underinvesting in the conditions — infrastructure, governance support, and long-term capital — that allow leadership to endure.

THE THREE PILLARS OF LEADERSHIP SUSTAINABILITY

Leadership sustainability depends on investment across three interconnected dimensions.

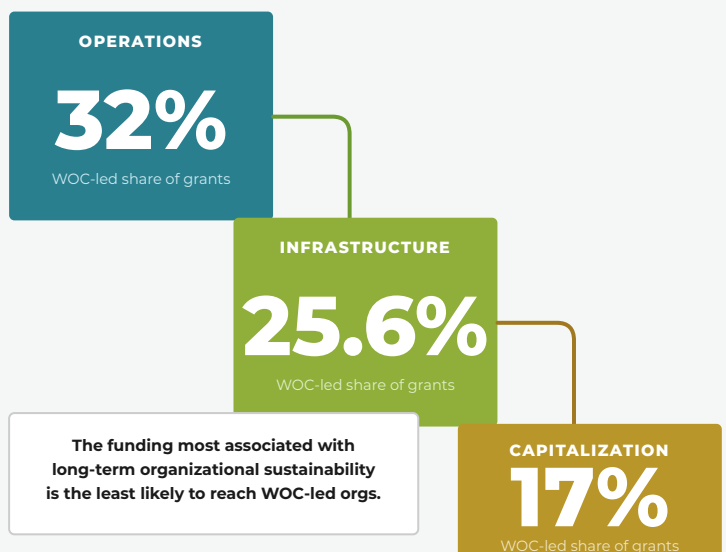


Leadership sustainability requires all three pillars, yet 81% of philanthropic funding is concentrated in operations, with only 11% supporting infrastructure and 8% supporting capitalization.

THE LEADERSHIP CAPITAL GAP

The more durable the funding, the less likely WOC-led organizations are to receive it.

WOC-led organizations receive a roughly proportional share of operational grants — but their representation falls sharply as funding becomes more durable. The types of grants most associated with long-term organizational stability are the least likely to reach them. Among grants with an explicit asset-building component, WOC-led organizations received just 8% of those dollars.



The findings suggest that the challenge is not simply whether women of color-led organizations receive funding, but whether they receive the forms of funding most associated with long-term organizational stability. Philanthropy currently invests most heavily in sustaining organizational activity, while underinvesting in the infrastructure and long-term capital that help leadership endure over time. Addressing this gap will require changes not only in how much funding is provided, but how funding itself is structured.

WHAT FUNDERS CAN DO

Operations

Make multi-year, unrestricted grants the baseline

General operating support with multi-year commitments gives leaders the flexibility to plan, retain staff, and invest in stability — not just survival.

Infrastructure

Fund infrastructure and governance directly

Invest in leadership development, board capacity, peer networks, and executive coaching as core grantmaking — not afterthoughts.

Capitalization

Build reserves and long-term assets

Support endowments, reserve funds, and capital campaigns for WOC-led organizations. Organizations shouldn't have to demonstrate financial strength before receiving capital — they need it to build that strength.

Cross-cutting

Reduce barriers and track who receives what

Streamline applications, use intermediaries to reach under-resourced organizations, and build data systems to track funding type — not just funding amount — by leadership identity.

READ THE FULL REPORT AT

buildingmovement.org/reports/beyond-the-glass-cliff

