

# Generation Spark

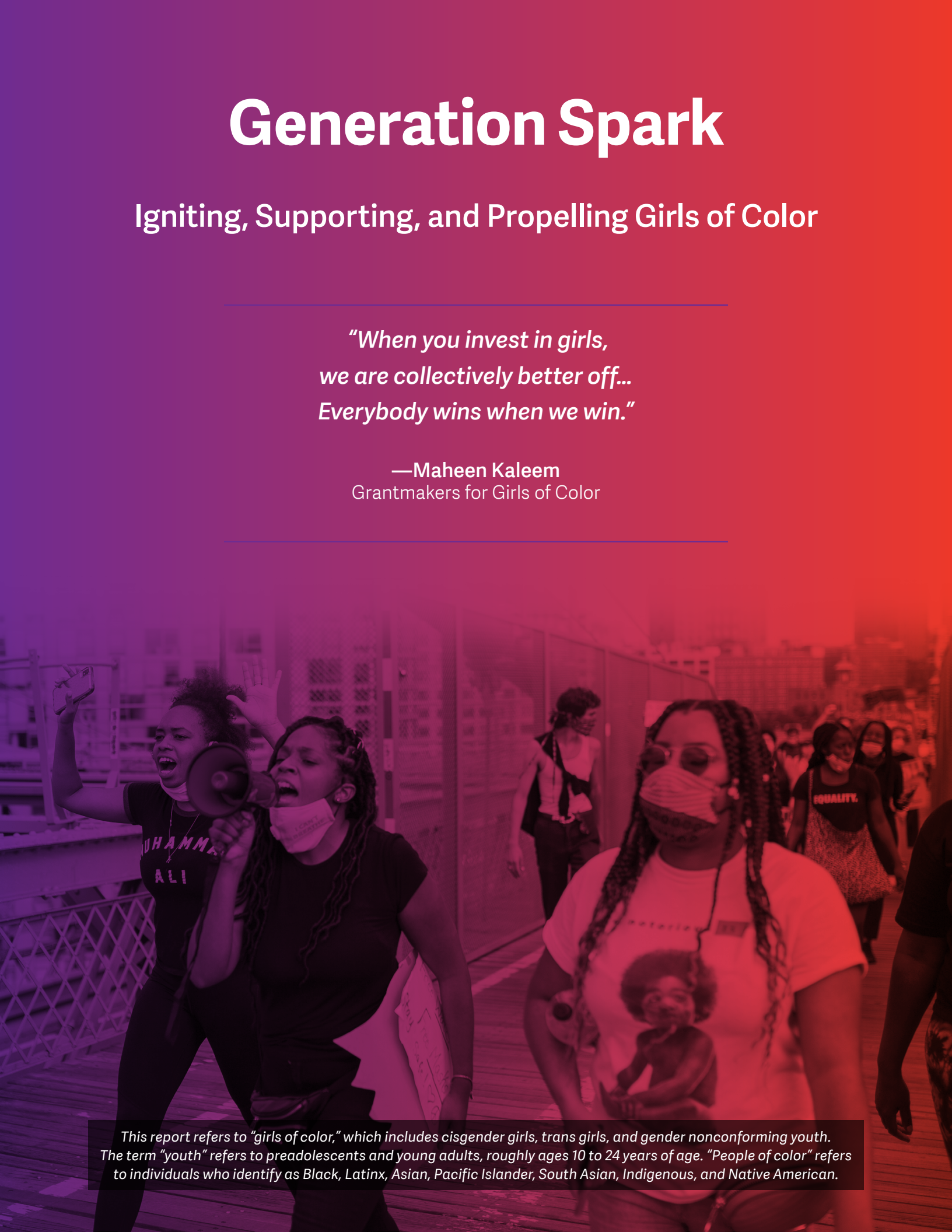
Igniting, Supporting, and Propelling Girls of Color

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*“When you invest in girls,  
we are collectively better off...  
Everybody wins when we win.”*

—Maheen Kaleem  
Grantmakers for Girls of Color

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This report refers to “girls of color,” which includes cisgender girls, trans girls, and gender nonconforming youth. The term “youth” refers to preadolescents and young adults, roughly ages 10 to 24 years of age. “People of color” refers to individuals who identify as Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, South Asian, Indigenous, and Native American.

# Introduction

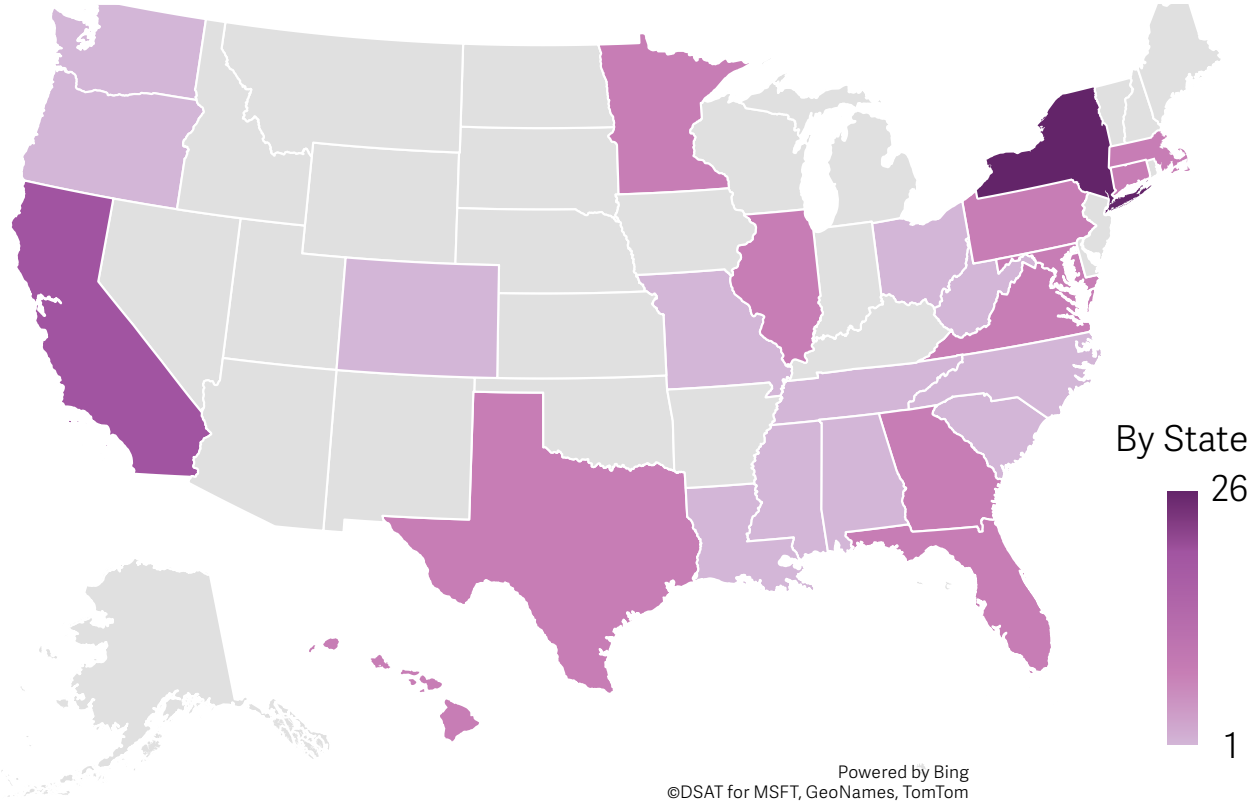
In 2020, the Ms. Foundation for Women released the groundbreaking report, [\*Pocket Change: How Women and Girls of Color Do More with Less\*](#), which provided a baseline understanding of philanthropic funding and investment in women and girls of color (WGOC) throughout the U.S and its territories. The report found that total philanthropic giving to WGOC averages out to just \$5.48 per year for each woman or girl of color in the United States.

Since then, the Foundation has continued its strategic approach to invest in WGOC through its grantmaking initiatives, including the national Girls of Color Initiative, which provides funding, leadership development and capacity building resources to support the advocacy and movement building of adolescent girls of color - centering their advocacy needs.

Girls of color don't just want to see change in their communities around these issues, they want to create it. The Girls of Color Initiative hopes to shift power back to girls of color to do just that.

With new research, surveys, and focus group participation, this appendix takes a closer look at the national landscape of programs and organizations in the U.S. Based on their experience, it directly shares from WGOC what is needed from the philanthropy community to best support girls of color and transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) youth of color in their advocacy efforts.

# National Landscape Scan



Distribution of U.S. Organizations Led by or for Girls or Transgender Nonconforming Youth of Color

Across the United States, girls of color TGNC youth of color are leading organizing efforts in the fight for social justice. Despite significant progress, these youth face specific and unique challenges in exercising leadership and advocacy. Utilizing a list of 102 organizations led by and for girls of color and TGNC youth of color, several key factors were identified to keep in mind when looking where the dollars are going.

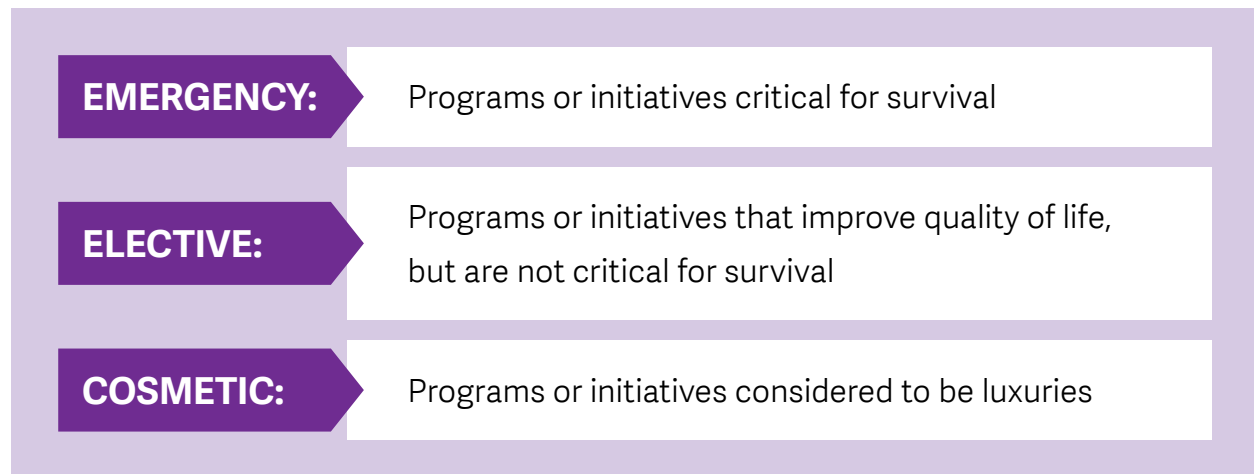
## 1. Regional Distribution

The highest concentration of organizations led by or for girls of color and TGNC youth of color were located in the West and Northeast regions of the United States. As illustrated in Figure 1, New York and California had the highest concentration (40%) of these organizations. A smaller percentage was distributed across the Southern region, while the smallest distribution was in the Midwest. Cities and

states with a higher percentage of people of color were more likely to have a higher concentration of organizations that focus on girls of color and TGNC youth of color.

## 2. Program Issue Areas

Organizations are often funded based on issue areas, strategy, and population served (Howe and Frazer 2020). The perceived urgency of the organization's programming and initiatives can be placed into three different categories:



Compared to other girl-centered organizations, organizations led by and for women and girls of color are more likely to focus on emergency programs that center issues of violence and safety (Howe and Frazer 2020). While there is a need to fund girls of color and TGNC youth of color who are dealing with traumatic experiences caused by systems of oppression, there is also a need to invest in programs that focus on nurturing their development and capacity to thrive and gain meaningful life experiences.

Of the organizations studied with budgets over \$1 million, 71% focus on what can be considered emergency programs and initiatives centered around safety and criminalization. This suggests that **funders are more likely to fund programs centered around threats to girls of color and TGNC youth of color.** Though emergency programs and initiatives require funding, philanthropy should also focus on leadership and personal development programs, those that might be considered to fall in the “elective” or “cosmetic” categories.

### 3. Budget Size

Forty-seven percent of respondents reported organizational budgets of less than \$500,000, with the majority of this group overseeing budgets that fell below \$300,000. Of the 27 sample organizations that reported a budget under \$500K, over half (52%) were within their first 10 years of being founded.

While organizations for women and girls receive a relatively small amount (1.6%) of philanthropic giving (Women’s Philanthropy Institute 2020), organizations led by and for women and girls of color receive an even smaller amount (0.5%) of total philanthropic funds (Howe and Frazer 2020). In comparing the revenue of the top three highest funded girl-serving organizations—which do not center girls of color—to the revenue of organizations led by and for women and girls of color, we found an extreme disparity.

Girl-Serving Organizations with Highest Revenue		Organizations led by and for Girls of Color and TGNC Youth of Color with Highest Revenue	
<b>Girl Scouts of the Unites States</b>	\$183,789,662	<b>National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health</b>	\$4,034,118
<b>Girls Incorporated</b>	\$28,604,559	<b>Ignite</b>	\$2,600,000
<b>Girls Who Code</b>	\$22,267,110	<b>Black Girls Code</b>	\$2,366,807

**Table 1.** Comparison of Girl-Serving Organizations to Organizations by and for Girls of Color and Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) Youth of Color

**Note:** Data on girl-serving organizations were pulled from organizations’ 990 forms submitted to the Internal Revenue Service. Data on organizations led by and for girls of color and TGNC youth of color were gathered from the IWPR National Landscape Survey of Organizations by and for Girls of Color and TGNC Youth of Color, 2020.

**Source:** GuideStar by Candid; IWPR National Landscape Survey of Organizations by and for Girls of Color and TGNC Youth of Color, 2020.

# Barriers to Funding

## Lack of Access to Philanthropic Networks and Opportunities

Philanthropy can be a difficult circuit to break into because race, gender, and socioeconomic status directly impacts access to social and professional networks. Thus, those with the most power and influence are more likely to determine funding. Structurally, the system of philanthropy disadvantages women of color and people without privilege (Howe and Frazer 2020).

A common theme from our interviews with leaders who work alongside girls of color and TGNC youth of color suggest that a key factor in financial success is having access to philanthropic networks and opportunities. Many of the interviewed organizations reported disconnection from funders who are able to provide financial support. This is especially true for organizations that are within their first three years and organizations in the South and Midwest.

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*“We don’t know the networks of people who are on boards of foundation and making decisions... The Twitter billionaire guy is giving away all this money. And I’m looking online for a request for proposals, but there isn’t one. How you get that money is by knowing someone in his circle who can get you a meeting.”*

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## Risk-Averse Culture in Philanthropy

Philanthropic leaders reported that they perceive philanthropy as risk-averse when it comes to funding organizations centering girls of color and TGNC youth of color. Past research shows that foundations typically consider risk from a technical perspective in which they consider: (1) the activities required for successful outcomes; (2) the likelihood of the activities going wrong; and (3) the seriousness of the damage if “wrong” happens (Smart 2018). As a result of these considerations, foundations might be unwilling to seed new organizations—including organizations that do not have a long-

track record of success, organizations that are youth-led, or organizations that are not nationally recognized.

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***“[Philanthropists] don’t want to fund things that are very much at the grassroots. They want to fund things that they think are going to get a return on their investment... These tech bros get all of these millions of dollars and then they can fail all the time, but we have to jump through hoops to get \$5K or \$10K or \$15K.”***

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## **Lack of Awareness of Intersecting Oppressions**

Findings from our interviews found that adult leaders who work alongside girls of color and TGNC youth of color indicated a lack of intersectional awareness as a major barrier to substantial funding. Foundations typically structure funding based on a single-issue system that does not consider the intersections of various identities (Howe and Frazer 2020). Thus, organizations that focus on a wide array of topics are usually forced into one category, which limits opportunities for funding.

An awareness of the issues impacting the lives of girls of color and TGNC youth of color is critical in foundations’ decision to fund organizations led by and for girls of color and TGNC youth of color (Gilmer et al. 2019). Work focusing on girls of color and TGNC youth of color requires an intersectional approach to truly understand how race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and class converge to impact their lives. Most, if not all, of the organizations that we surveyed and interviewed utilized an intersectional lens when developing programs and approaches to addressing key issues.

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***“Foundations don’t always see us because of their lack of understanding of [the Latina experience]...And their lack of understanding of immigration within Latin America. So when we say that we’re a Latina American and Caribbean organization... They don’t know where to put us.”***

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## Partnerships Lack Equity

In addition to a lack of representation, organizational leaders from our interviews also report being urged to share stories of personal trauma in order to validate the importance of their work. In recent years, nonprofit organizational leaders have begun to question the risk related to traumatic storytelling—as it relates to race, gender, and other identifiers—in order to increase the chances of foundation funding (Costello and Boswell 2019).

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***“[Even] just the exploitative, ‘Tell us your story.’ All of this sort of stuff that we have to do in order to convince people that we’re worthy... It’s just a lot.”***

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Our respondents also reported that philanthropy does not consider the time and labor it takes to meet the grant requirements. Because the standards, demands, and norms within philanthropy are rooted in white, wealthy, and upper-class standards, women and TGNC people of color engaging in this work are at an inherent disadvantage. A majority of leaders from our interviews reported coming from the grassroots level, without formal education or training on running a nonprofit. Despite informal training, they still reported achieving successful program and campaign outcomes while balancing tasks such as applying for grants, completing paperwork once the funds are received, and completing a report once the grant is complete

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***“Someone sent us \$500 and sent me a grant report [to] complete for the \$500. There’s a lot of time that we spend, especially as executive leadership, on onerous paperwork when we really would like to be spending time innovating or resting so that we can stay in the fight.”***

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## Limited Resources and Increased Likelihood of Burnout

Findings from the interviews conducted for this study show that the aforementioned funding process has a significant impact on the mental health of nonprofit leaders. The culmination of underfunding, lack of capacity, and unpaid labor—in addition to working alongside impacted communities—often leads to adverse mental health outcomes for organizational leaders.

As reported in the survey data, organizations within their first 10 years, who are underfunded, are more likely to have unpaid, part-time staff. The staff who are paid, typically executive directors, often work multiple jobs in order to achieve some form of financial stability. Philanthropy often demands more than they compensate, which reinforces unpaid labor of women and TGNC people of color.

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*“A lot of us really just need a break. That’s really what I think would change the vigor of our work is if we had an opportunity to step back, and we typically don’t... There needs to be more unrestricted funds towards mental health and wellness.”*

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## Recommendations for Philanthropy

Based on our national landscape scan, as well as interviews and focus groups with girls of color and TGNC youth of color and the leaders who work alongside them, we developed several recommendations for the philanthropic sector.

### **Philanthropy should provide unrestricted sustainable funding.**

As indicated in our survey data, as well as by our conversations with organizational leaders, philanthropy should provide organizations focused on girls of color and TGNC youth with sustainable unrestricted funding that can be used to build organizational infrastructure or operations. This funding might allow organizations to break out of the turbulent funding process and gain financial stability. In time, this stability will allow

organizational leaders to continue to work alongside girls of color and youth in their community and impact social change.

In addition, philanthropy should increase their multi-year commitments to newer organizations. Smaller grants allow organizations to make progress, but that progress is quickly halted when executive directors have to tend to financial instability as evidenced by interviews and surveys with organizational leaders. Increased funding will help remove barriers such as burnout and negative mental health outcomes for executive leaders, providing them with more capacity to meet the needs of girls rather than the demands of philanthropy.

### **Philanthropy should fund girls of color and TGNC youth of color who are not involved in formally established organizations.**

Our research focused on girls of color and TGNC youth of color who are part of formal 501(c)(3) organizations. The young people we interviewed typically joined their organizations through encouragement from family and mentors or through an intervention from the community. However, there is a vast array of girls who are engaging in this important work within their community without being a member of a formal organization (Mama Cash and FRIDA 2018). Philanthropy should be more innovative in reaching out to young people who are not a part of their current funding stream. This might include providing scholarships and small grants directly to individual youth leaders—or girl-serving organizations that are not 501(c)(3)s—to help with hardships, provide emergency assistance, or manage medical distress.

### **Philanthropy should increase equity in partnerships.**

Philanthropic foundations should closely examine their policies, practices, and norms through a racial and gender equity lens. The disparity in funding for organizations led by and for girls of color and TGNC youth of color is harmful because it suggests a partial acknowledgement of the issues impacting their lives, but an unwillingness to commit to real solutions to create societal change. It is also important to consider the ways that foundations function as monoculturally white. Several practices, policies, qualifications, and requirements disadvantage those who are not well connected, do not have formal training on managing a profit, or lack experience in the grantmaking process.

Below are areas in which philanthropy should continue to push for equity:

- Reduce criteria related to applying for grants and completing reports
- Provide funding to organizations that serve girls of color and TGNC youth of color while being mindful of the potential of retraumatization in asking for participants life stories
- Develop, nourish, and sustain relationships with nonprofits led by and for girls of color and TGNC youth of color
- Intentionally fund organizations that serve girls of color and TGNC of color in some of the most marginalized or left-behind areas, like the southern and midwestern parts of the U.S. states, as well as smaller, local organizations

### **Philanthropy should utilize an intersectional framework when making funding decisions.**

It is imperative that philanthropy adopts an intersectional framework throughout the entirety of the grantmaking process. Addressing societal issues with a monolithic lens does not address intersecting oppressed identities. Organizations focused on girls of color and TGNC youth of color are at a funding disadvantage because of philanthropy's deep mistrust of women and girls of color and current siloed approach to funding communities and causes. Because they are deeply impacted by every system of oppression, supporting girls of color and TGNC folks of color who are working to dismantle these systems benefits all of society.

## Conclusion

Girls of color and transgender nonconforming (TGNC) youth of color are powerful leaders and experts in their own lived experiences. For philanthropy to best support organizations led by and for girls of color and TGNC youth of color, the current grantmaking process needs a sweeping transformation. To fully and effectively invest in girls of color and TGNC youth of color working at the frontlines of change, the philanthropy sector must address deeply embedded issues of inequity related to funding partnerships, access to networks and opportunities, and representation of women and TGNC people of color in the sector, especially at the leadership level. In addition, grantmaking foundations must apply an intersectional lens to current norms and practices to ensure fair, equitable policies and standards for all grant recipients, including and especially organizations that serve girls of color and TGNC youth of color. This report's findings affirm the critical need for increased investment in organizations led by and for girls of color and TGNC youth of color. Further investment in these organizations would help build their long-term economic stability, allowing leaders in these spaces to advance critical social justice issues affecting their communities and spark change for the next generation. We invite grantmaking organizations of all sizes and shapes to be bold and to re-imagine philanthropy as a tool to unlock the potential of today's youth—with the needs of girls of color and TGNC youth of color at the very center.

To motivate, support, and propel the organizing efforts of girls of color and TGNC youth of color, stakeholders must develop a better understanding of their assets and achievements in addition to the current challenges they face. This understanding requires an intersectional framework that takes into account the simultaneous impact of race, gender, sexuality, age, and socioeconomic status on their lived experiences. This includes uplifting and centering the experiences of girls of color and TGNC youth of color, including those who have been involved in the justice system.

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## Limitations

While this paper sheds light on the current state of organizations led by and for girls of color and TGNC youth of color, we focus solely on established 501(c)(3) organizations. To be clear, we recognize the severe gap in data and information on girls of color and TGNC youth of color leaders who are not a part of formal organizations or who are affiliated with organizations that are not registered nonprofits. The interview and survey data included herein is also limited on organizations in the Midwest and the South; as our data only includes Midwestern and southern organizations in Chicago, Mississippi, Florida, and Virginia. This reflects a clear need for additional research and data collection on girls of color and TGNC youth of color's organizing efforts throughout the United States.

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