# LIVING WITH POCKET CHANGE

## WHAT IT MEANS TO DO MORE WITH LESS

### A CALL TO PHILANTHROPY TO MOVE BEYOND TRUST AND TOWARDS CARE

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# ACKNOW- LEDGEMENTS & POSITION STATEMENT

The writers of this report appreciate the openness, honesty, and vulnerability interviewees showed by sharing their experiences, the challenges they face, and what they need from the philanthropic sector to do their work. Without their candidness, honesty and vulnerability, this report would not be possible. We do our work in support of these women and nonbinary leaders of color, to advance their leadership, and to advocate for investment in them as the crucial resources they are. In addition to the remarkable leaders who took the time to speak with researchers, we are indebted to feminist organizers and theorists including Esther Armah, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberly Crenshaw, Leith Mullings, Cara Page, and the visionary Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective who developed the frameworks that underpinned and shaped this report.

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and small, have been indispensable. Among them, we acknowledge the dedicated efforts of Bri Barnett, Samantha Franklin, Elaine Hunt, Calondra McArthur, and Sona Smith. In addition, this report has been copyedited by consultant Tasasha Henderson and designed by artist Raquel Hazell of Saalt Press.

Lastly, we extend our gratitude to former Ms. Foundation colleagues Desiree Flores, Roz Lee, Nakisha Lewis, Aleyamma Mathew, Coya White Hat-Artichoker, and the collective wisdom of women and nonbinary people of color thinkers and intellectuals, both within and beyond the philanthropic sector, whose profound insights serve as the bedrock upon which this report is constructed.

As the authors of this report, we are women and nonbinary people of color working in philanthropy and allied, white researchers with foundation experience. We share deep experience working in and with public foundations and intermediaries, which gives us a particular vantage point on the struggles women and nonbinary leaders of color face, as we face some of the same struggles mobilizing resources from private foundations to support the work on the ground. We write as representatives of the Ms. Foundation with constructive critique of the philanthropic sector and its lack of investment in organizations led by women and nonbinary people of color. Yet, we also recognize our own roles in upholding traditional philanthropic systems and remain in principled struggle in the fight towards a more equitable and just distribution of resources. We consider ourselves both part of the philanthropic community and outside of it, and it is in this spirit that we occasionally use the word "us" in this report.

## SUGGESTED CITATION
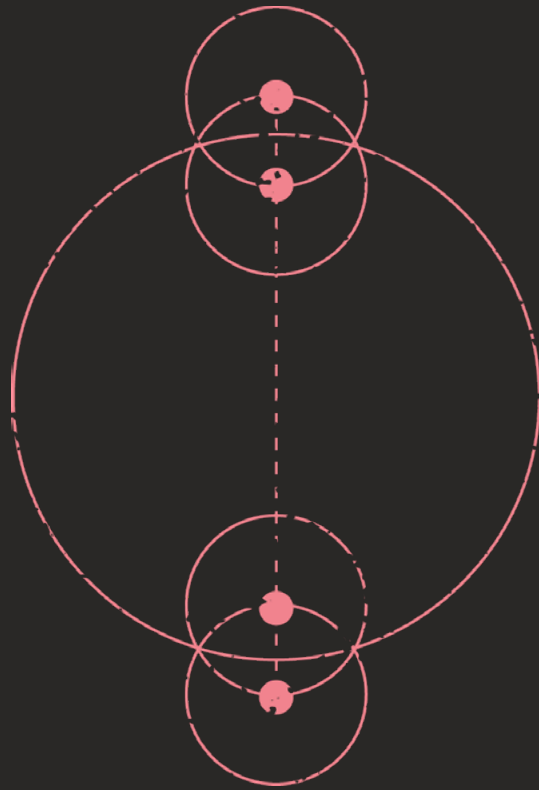
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Building from Ms. Foundation for Women's groundbreaking report, *Pocket Change: How Women and Girls of Color Do More With Less*, this latest research, *Living With Pocket Change: What It Means To Do More With Less*, examines the impact and real-life experiences of chronic philanthropic underinvestment and disinvestment in the leadership of women and nonbinary people of color, as well as underfunding of the organizations they lead, and highlights their needs, experiences, and the profound toll it takes.

In the struggle for racial and gender justice, women and nonbinary leaders of color occupy a vital and irreplaceable role as the first line of defense against a cascade of progressive backlash and threats to democracy. As our nation confronts an array of formidable challenges—including the erosion of hard-fought civil rights, women's rights, and LGBTQ+ rights; the dismantling of reproductive freedom and affirmative action; the propagation of restrictive legislation targeting transgender and gender nonconforming individuals; the relentless encroachment of climate change; assaults on democratic institutions; and systematic voter suppression—it becomes abundantly clear that these threatening developments mandate an unwavering and concerted response.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color stand at the forefront of the most urgent struggles of our times, yet as described in an April 2023 Nonprofit Quarterly piece, "we are tasked with fighting for short- and long-term goals in tandem. We are called on to hold space for grief, trauma, and despair while also uplifting hope, courage, and vision. We have to navigate the scarcity created by economic, racial, and gender inequality while tapping into an abundance mentality to demand what we need.[2]"

As the title of this report demonstrates, women and nonbinary leaders of color continue to do this necessary work despite being woefully under-resourced by philanthropy. They do this work while dealing with the pressures that come with supporting communities experiencing daily structural violence. They bear the profound responsibility of adeptly navigating the expectations of funders while simultaneously wearing the hat of educators—both within their communities and in the eyes of funding entities. They labor to provide support to their



2        Description drawn from Nonprofit Quarterly's April 2023 "The Call of Leadership Now: BIPOC Leaders in a Syndemic Era" article by Neha Mahajan and Felicia Griffin. https://nonprofitquarterly.org/the-call-of-leadership-now-bipoc-leaders-in-a-syndemic-era/

staff, all while wrestling with a myriad of unspoken burdens. Ultimately doing more with "pocket change" has impacts at all levels, from the individual leader, to the organization, to the overall efficacy, sustainability, and power of our social justice movement ecosystem. However, for women and nonbinary leaders of color, constantly doing more with less affects their health and well-being, leading to significant burnout and pushing many leaders to leave leadership positions or the sector entirely.

As one interviewee described:

> I'm coming out of a hard burnout. I'm coming out of a really, really hard burnout. I had gotten to a point where I was working from 5 a.m. 'til 2 a.m. every day for a good four months. I couldn't even have a conversation with my kids that was healthy. I'm type one diabetic, and it was December of last year that my doctor told me that I am quickly on my way out if I don't just pause. I took December off last year, and I said, "I'm just taking care of my health." That lasted for a month...Because we're structured the way we are, I have no health insurance. My kids don't have health insurance.

It's abundantly clear that women and nonbinary leaders of color cannot sustain their current working conditions. While we commend the philanthropic sector for taking steps to address racial and gender disparities, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustices by implementing trust-based philanthropy practices long advocated for by organizations, such as increasing flexible funding, streamlining application and reporting processes, expediting emergency response funding, and making transformative strides by committing more dollars toward racial justice, these efforts alone do not fully address the challenges faced by leaders and organizations on the frontlines.

The Ms. Foundation firmly believes that trust-based philanthropic practices hold the potential to revolutionize the field and benefit

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We are the
CHANGE
we've been waiting
for!

Pawf

#NotYourModelMinority    #AAPIResist

communities significantly. Trust-based philanthropy represents an excellent starting point for reshaping the unjust power dynamics between funders and nonprofit organizations, while also highlighting the need to address systemic and structural barriers that hinder nonprofits from receiving the funding necessary to create meaningful impact. It is imperative for the philanthropic sector to continue to evolve and persist in transforming the "how" of grantmaking by embracing trust-based philanthropy practices while fully aligning practices with values that center community. However, there still is a long way to go in fundamentally repositioning philanthropy and social justice organizations so that organizations on the front lines are fully able to access the resources they need and build power to win.

Furthermore, the Ms. Foundation believes there must be the integration of an ethic of care into our funder-grantee relationships alongside our trust-based philanthropic practices. What does this mean?

**CARE:**

*An effort made to do something correctly, safely, or without causing damage; things that are done to keep someone healthy, safe, etc.*

In philanthropy, care can be manifested by reframing how we think about resources—resources are not solely about the grant money funders provide, the financial stewardship, or return on the least possible investment. Rather, resources are the women and nonbinary leaders of color themselves, and the social justice organizations they have built.[3]

It is crucial for philanthropy to acknowledge that women and nonbinary leaders of color represent our most valuable resources and assets in defending and creating a more equitable and just democracy. Investing in these leaders, recognizing their significance, goes beyond merely focusing on grant outcomes, metrics, or the impact of their organizations. It means genuinely caring about and investing in their leadership, their sustainability, and their well-being. It means building authentic, equitable, and meaningful relationships with grantee partners, not short-term, transactional ones. It means actively listening, learning, and showing up with humility and respect.

Supporting, investing in, and demonstrating genuine care for these leaders is not a mere choice, it is an imperative. These leaders epitomize our most valuable resource in these ongoing battles, and our steadfast commitment to their success serves as a declaration of our solidarity and dedication to a future firmly anchored in principles of equity, justice, freedom, and liberation.

Ms. Foundation grantee partners interviewed for this report were ultimately hopeful about the possibility of cultivating positive relationships with foundation donors. They feel that foundation donors are in a unique position to help them leverage support for their work, as well as time and space to think strategically about their priorities. They also felt that foundation donors could help them connect with other women and nonbinary leaders of color, reducing isolation and building community. Ultimately, the vast majority of interviewees did not want foundation donors to "give them money and leave them alone"—they want respectful thought partners and philanthropic champions. They want to be able to be authentic and open about their needs and experiences without fear of losing support.

3     This definition is also drawn from Rusty Stahl's article, *Talent Philanthropy: Investing in Nonprofit People to Advance Nonprofit Performance*, where people are recognized as the primary driver of performance in the social sector, and yet despite their performance, they are under-supported.

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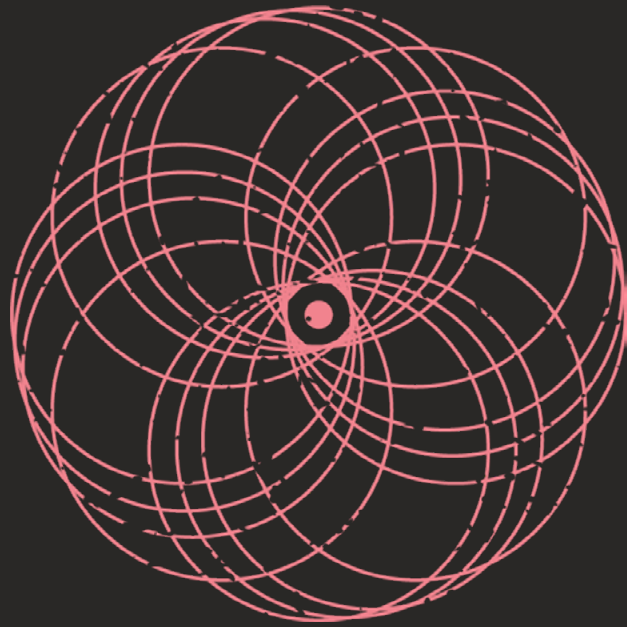
# CALL TO ACTION

*for Philanthropy*

# NO MORE POCKET CHANGE.

NO MORE DOING MORE WITH LESS.
WE CALL ON PHILANTHROPY TO NOT ONLY FULLY
INVEST IN THE LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN AND NONBINARY
LEADERS OF COLOR AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS,
BUT TO TRANSFORM INEQUITABLE PRACTICES
THAT CONTRIBUTE TO A CRISIS OF BURNOUT.

T hese seven recommendations were developed in the spirit of "we can and we must do better."

Our movements need to be boldly and generously supported to create the people power needed to create a society that is truly equitable and just for all. Share and discuss these recommendations with your staff, impress upon your board of directors that these action steps are necessary to create true impact, take action to make the shifts and changes in your foundations, and organize other funders to implement these practices within their organizations. Read the full report for explanations of why each of these action steps are important to support women and nonbinary leaders of color.

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## DEVELOP AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS WITH WOMEN AND NONBINARY LEADERS OF COLOR

- Proactively *offer support*

- *Earmark resources* for additional, unplanned, and necessary requests

- *Extend extra support* to leaders in times of transition and to women and nonbinary leaders of color in historically white-led organizations

- If capacity building is not paired with funding, *support intermediaries, public foundations and women's funds that do pair the two*
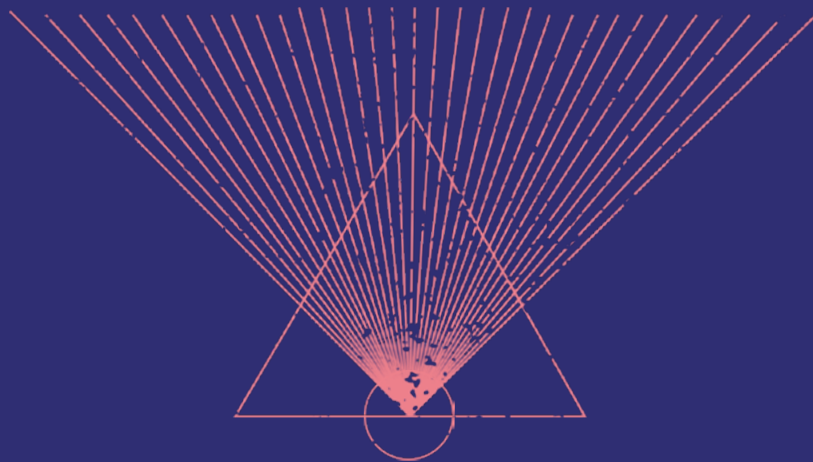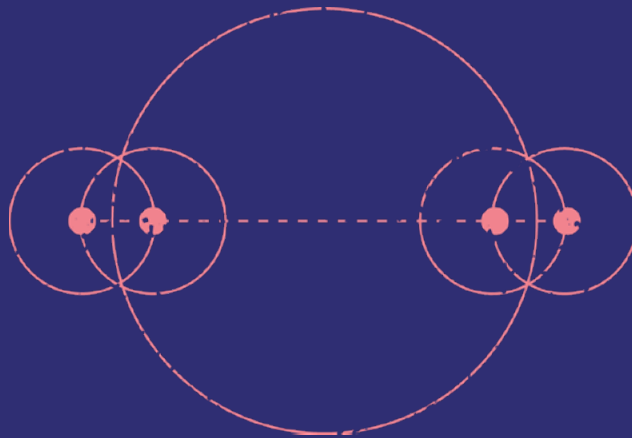


## CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY PRACTICES & ADD AN ETHIC OF CARE

- Name *intersecting oppressions* and how they impact power dynamics with funders, recognize *implicit bias*

- Minimize *emotional labor*

- Make intentional efforts to shift *power imbalances*

- Integrate *healing justice* approaches in funding

## BREAK DOWN SILOS IN PHILANTHROPY

- Fund *multi-issue, multi-strategy* work

- Proactively challenge the individualistic tendencies of philanthropy— *share strategies and information* with funders and activists, fund *collaboratively* with others

- Let go of *funder-determined outcomes*, relinquish the desire to take credit

- *Align funding opportunities* with the work on the ground

## SUPPORT THE LONG GAME

- *Fund intermediaries and public foundations with close proximity to communities*

- Support *cross-movement solidarity* work

- Strategy is a *two-way street*—integrate the expertise of field leaders

- *Be transparent*, make data and reports available to activists

- Be *open to failure*, it's part of learning and innovation

- Be steadfast in times of transition

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## FUND SELF-DIRECTED CAPACITY BUILDING FOR WOMEN AND NONBINARY LEADERS OF COLOR AND ORGANIZATIONS

- Proactively *offer support*
- *Earmark resources* for additional, unplanned, and necessary requests
- *Extend extra support* to leaders in times of transition and to women and nonbinary leaders of color in historically white-led organizations
- If capacity building is not paired with funding, *support intermediaries, public foundations and women's funds that do pair the two*

## INVEST IN THE WELLNESS, POWER, AND INFLUENCE OF WOMEN AND NONBINARY LEADERS OF COLOR

- *Consciously build the pipeline* of new leaders
- Increase the *representation of women and nonbinary people of color* in philanthropy
- Ask for and work from a *needs-based budget*
- Support grantees in building new funder relationships and *leveraging new funding*
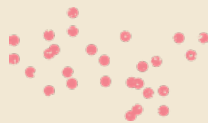
## BUILD THE EVIDENCE BASE & STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY

- Aggregate and gather more information on *organizational resources* for organizations led by women and nonbinary people of color
- *Track investments* in capacity building and leadership development
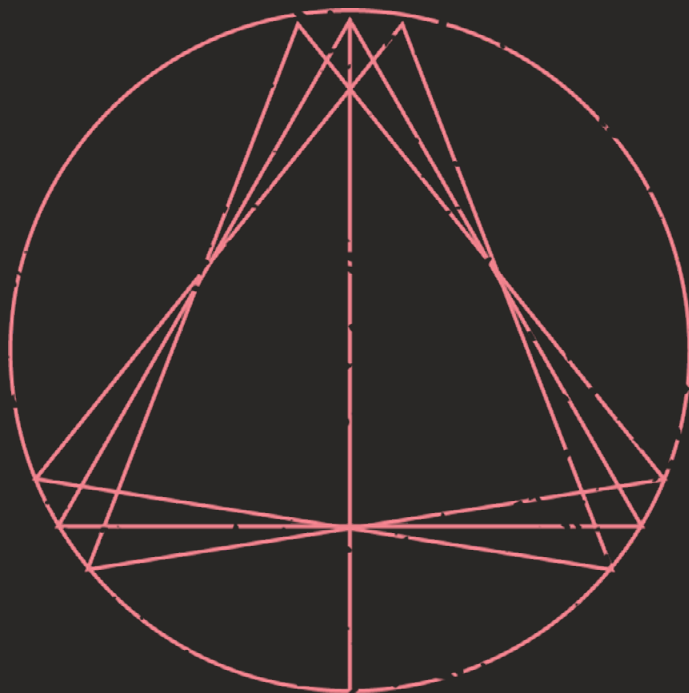
# FOREWORD

Reflecting on the social and political landscape of the past three years, 2020 proved to be a critical turning point with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed and exacerbated inequities, and the murder of George Floyd, that sparked worldwide protests for justice and a "racial reckoning" in the U.S. We experienced a fleeting moment of hope and the potential for significant change. During this period, there were several noteworthy developments: increased financial support for individuals and families, a growing acknowledgment of the systemic violence ingrained in policing, heightened awareness of the ways structural racism negatively impacts the health of women and nonbinary people of color, and a surge in commitments from philanthropic and corporate entities to confront white supremacy while uplifting leadership from women and nonbinary people of color.

However, this promise of progress is facing a fierce and unyielding backlash. A powerful opposition force has arisen, staunchly resistant to recognizing or addressing racial and gender injustice. This backlash has resulted in significant setbacks, including the erosion of reproductive freedom at the federal level and across states in the South and Midwest, the dismantling of affirmative action in higher education, attacks on voting rights, and assaults against trans and LGBTQ+ communities. These examples vividly illustrate a tumultuous upheaval that not only endangers generations of racial and feminist progress but also undermines the fundamental foundations of our democracy.

Regarding the philanthropic pledges that have been touted, despite reports suggesting commitments in the tens or even hundreds of billions to advance racial equity and racial justice, the reality is that only a fraction of these promises have been fulfilled. The Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity's findings reveal that a mere $3.4 billion in racial equity grants and $1.35 billion in racial justice grants were actually distributed.[4] To add insult to injury, 2020 also saw the retreat of the Novo Foundation's commitment to funding gender equality work both in the U.S. and abroad, accounting for 17% of domestic funding for women's rights, 37% of funding in the same category for Black women, and a striking 96% of total funding for fighting gender-based violence in the United States.[5]

In the midst of these challenges, women and nonbinary people of color continue to lead the way in our communities and nonprofit organizations, often shouldering profound burnout while negotiating a landscape riddled with resource constraints. These women and nonbinary people of color are at the forefront of the defining social justice battles of our era. They grapple with dual pressures from their communities and philanthropy to accomplish more with less, simultaneously spending significant time, energy, and emotional labor educating funders about their communities' issues and challenges. All the while, they navigate the complex power and racial dynamics between funders and organizations. Remarkably, they manage these roles while also bearing the brunt of care work in their own families and communities.

For over 50 years, the Ms. Foundation has been making previously invisible injustices visible. Our 2020 report, *Pocket Change: How Women and Girls of Color Do More with Less*, brought to light a stark reality: grantmaking to women and girls of color in 2017 amounted to just $5.48 per year for each woman or girl of color in the U.S., accounting for just 0.5% of the $66.9 billion total given by foundations. The Ms. Foundation emphasizes the urgent need for philanthropy to wholeheartedly support women of and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations. Their victories should be nurtured as a collective triumph, and their struggles recognized as challenges that impact us all.

4       Cyril, Malkia Devich, Kan, Lyle Mathew, Maulbeck, Ben Francisco and Villarosa, Lori. *Mismatched: Philanthropy's response to the call for racial justice.* Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, 2021

5       Jeehae Fischer, Kavita Mehra. "Philanthropy Is Dropping the Ball on Gender Justice. Here's What Needs to Change." *Inside Philanthropy*, 14 Mar. 2023, www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2023/3/8/philanthropy-is-dropping-the-ball-on-gender-justice-heres-what-needs-to-change.

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As you explore this report, you will gain insight into the immense burden that women and nonbinary leaders of color hold, which has been exacerbated by decades of philanthropic underinvestment, disinvestment, and neglect. We must acknowledge that women and nonbinary leaders of color provide invaluable leadership in these turbulent times.

Philanthropy must invest in and fully support these leaders, addressing their needs comprehensively and holistically. While philanthropy has made commendable progress by adopting trust-based philanthropic practices, this report highlights that more is required. What is required is a fundamental repositioning of leaders and organizations in relationship to power and resources, and a philanthropic sector rooted in an ethic of care. Care-based philanthropy is our clarion call, echoing the chorus of grassroots leaders and women and nonbinary people of color in philanthropy who passionately urge us to fund these leaders as if we truly want them to win.[6] We hope that this second *Pocket Change* report will not only illuminate the path forward but also provide concrete steps for the philanthropic sector to reshape its ethos, policies, and practices to champion the well-being, leadership, and healing of women and nonbinary leaders of color. As we move into 2024, care-based philanthropy stands as an opportunity to reimagine a philanthropic sector that genuinely nurtures the expertise and aspirations of women and nonbinary leaders of color and a stark warning about the consequences of inaction.

In loving solidarity,

6       This term is drawn from: Bhansali, Vini, and Ash-Lee Woodard-Henderson. "Season 2, Episode 3: Fund Us Like You Want Us to Win!, Part I." *Www.Whenwefightwewin. Org*, Aug. 2020, www. whenwefightwewin.com/ listen/season-2-episode-3-fund-us-like-you-want-us-to-win-part-i/. Accessed 20 Sept. 2023

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*Chief Program Officer*

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WE CAN LEARN TO WORK AND SPEAK WHEN WE ARE AFRAID IN THE SAME WAY WE HAVE LEARNED TO WORK AND SPEAK WHEN WE ARE TIRED. FOR WE HAVE BEEN SOCIALIZED TO RESPECT FEAR MORE THAN OUR OWN NEEDS FOR LANGUAGE AND DEFINITION, AND WHILE WE WAIT IN SILENCE FOR THAT FINAL LUXURY OF FEARLESSNESS, THE WEIGHT OF THAT SILENCE WILL CHOKE US.

AUDRE LOURDE [7]

7    "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." *Sister Outsider Essays and Speeches*, by Audre Lorde and Mahogany L. Browne, Penguin Books, 2020.

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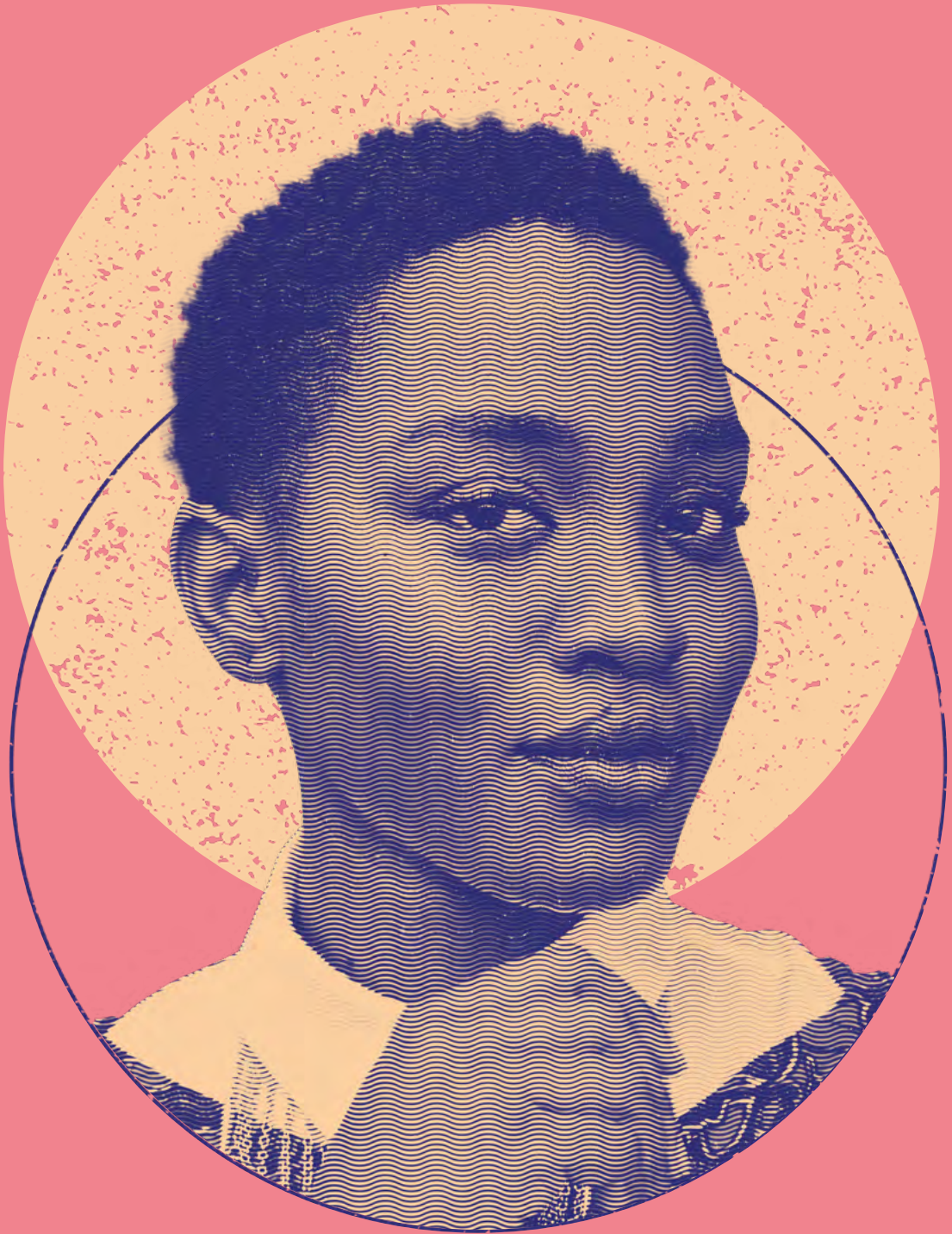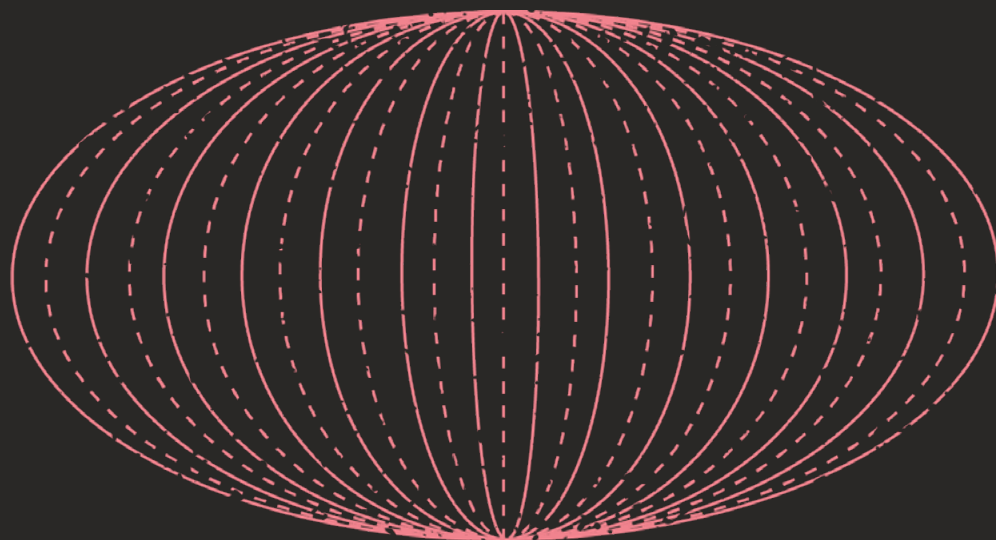
# INTRO-
# DUCTION

The Ms. Foundation for Women recognizes that women and nonbinary people of color are important organizers and leaders in social change movements. Women and nonbinary people of color have led nearly every impactful grassroots movement in United States history to preserve and expand democracy—from the abolition of slavery, suffragette movement, civil rights movements, criminal justice reform, and climate justice to fighting for farm workers' rights, fair wages for domestic workers, and the end of racial profiling.

As a public foundation centering women and nonbinary people of color in our strategy and funding, the Ms. Foundation has heard from the activists and leaders we work with about how they continue to do justice work, regardless of whether it is supported by the philanthropic sector. We hear how women and nonbinary people of color are crucial to the future of our democracy, yet they are not afforded the opportunities or support that they need to thrive. As has been true throughout history, in this moment women and nonbinary people of color are expected to do more with less. Philanthropy has the power to turn from its current practices, which may be well-intended but which can exacerbate the harm done to those who are intended to lead the work they fund. Grantmakers can mitigate some of these harms in how they interact and provide support to women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations.

Building from Ms. Foundation's seminal research, *Pocket Change: How Women and Girls of Color do More With Less*, and employing concepts of "Black feminism" and "healing justice" as guiding frameworks, this research examines the impact of chronic philanthropic underinvestment and disinvestment on organizations led by and for women and nonbinary people of color and their leaders[8] and contributes to a growing body of research highlighting the needs and experiences of women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations.

This report demonstrates how chronic disinvestment and underinvestment in the leadership of women and nonbinary people of color, as well as underfunding of the organizations they lead, takes a profound toll on leaders. Definitions drawn from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary and applied to philanthropy include:

8    Throughout the report, when language related to "women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations" is used, women refers to trans and cis women.

## DISINVESTMENT
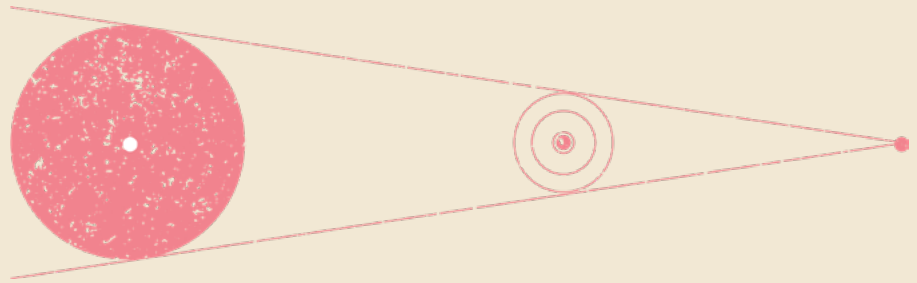
*To reduce or eliminate capital investment;
the withdrawal of investment.
In philanthropy, this manifests as support that is
provided and then withdrawn
(e.g., short-term grants not renewed).*

## UNDERINVESTMENT
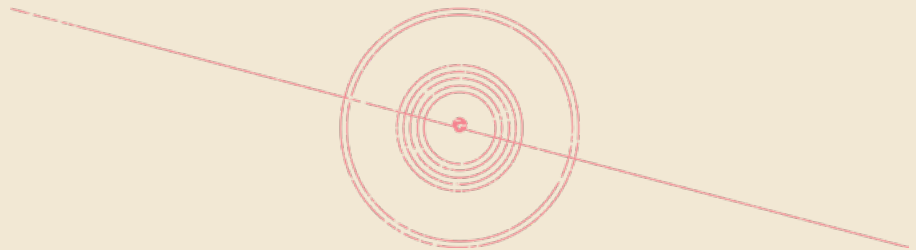
*To invest insufficient resources.
In philanthropy, this manifests as resources
that are not sufficient to meet the need.*

Disinvestment and underinvestment impact women and nonbinary leaders of color on a personal level, the work their organizations can do and how they are able to interact and shape systems of wealth and power, such as philanthropy. This disinvestment and underinvestment take the form of short-term, small and restricted grants that make it difficult for women and nonbinary leaders of color to recruit and retain skilled staff. The impacts are multiplicative and ultimately compromise their health, wellness and sustainability to continue doing the work. Women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations continue to experience consistent barriers to foundation funding, including identifying funding opportunities relevant to their communities and the work they do, as well as needing to do excessive administrative work to retain funding every year, such as submitting reports and preparing for funder site visits. Evidence from this report and others also suggests women and nonbinary leaders of color are facing a crisis of burnout and a mass exodus of movement leadership that threatens the stability of organizations, ecosystems and social movements alike.[9]

The Ms. Foundation's current and previous work in the *Pocket Change* series does not stand alone; it contributes to a growing body of literature calling on philanthropy to do better. In November of 2019, in a New York Times op-ed, Vanessa Daniel penned a desperate call to philanthropy to better support women of color leaders on the front lines of fights for social justice and equality.[10] Daniel's position as past president and founder of the Groundswell Fund, one of the largest funders of women and gender-expansive people color-led organizing in the United States, gave her unique insight into the perilous philanthropic landscape that women of color leaders navigate. "I run a national public foundation," and I see up close that the people who are

9        In this report, an **ecosystem** is a set of organizations with pre-existing relationships that work together or alongside one another in a specific geographic or issue area, or with similar or overlapping populations. A **social movement** is a group of activists, organizations and/or communities that work towards a common or shared social justice goal.

10        Daniel, Vanessa. *Philanthropists Bench Women of Color, The m.v.p.s of Social Change*, 19 Nov. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/11/19/opinion/philanthropy-black-women.html. Accessed 20 Sept. 2023.
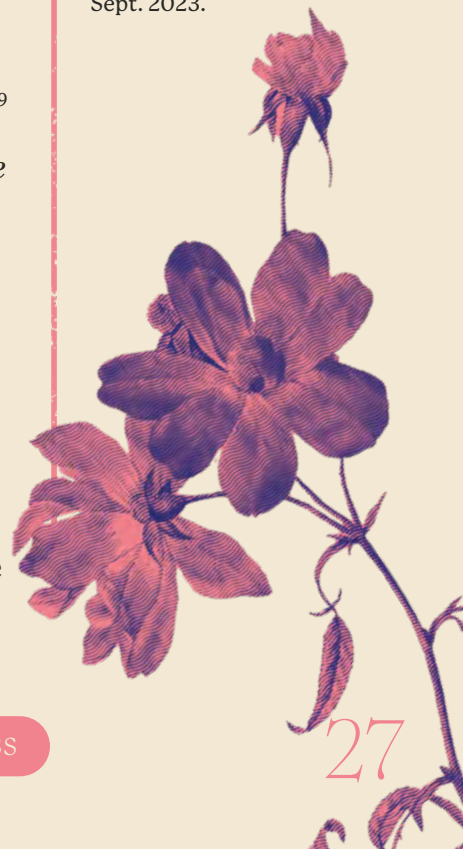
overrepresented in success at social change — women of color who lead grass-roots nonprofits — are wildly underrepresented in funding." She goes on to say,

> "Our misdirected philanthropy is costing us beyond measure. A mountain of evidence shows progressive victories are surging up from groups led by women of color, particularly Black women that build power on the ground — not trickling down from large Beltway organizations headed by white men."

Daniel's call came at a critical inflection point for our country, four months before a global pandemic befell the United States and the world, transforming our entire way of life, killing millions and decimating communities of color in particular; six months before the largest wave of social unrest in this country since the civil rights movements of the 1960s, and nearly two years before the U.S. Supreme Court overturn of *Roe vs. Wade*, the landmark 1973 decision that legalized the right to an abortion. Today, we are at another critical inflection point.

The assault on democratic institutions, the erosion of reproductive rights, the dismantling of affirmative action in higher education, and the discrimination against transgender individuals demand robust and resolute responses. As a funder that strategically prioritizes supporting women and nonbinary leaders of color, the Ms. Foundation knows that they are our society's first responders on multiple levels—for their families, communities, organizations, social movements, and the broader political ecosystem. They ensure the basic needs of their families and communities are met, provide vision and management to their organizations, nurture collaborations and partnerships across differences, lead campaigns for civic participation, and influence policies and practices on topics that impact their communities. Their experiences have inspired us to gather data to demonstrate disinvestment and underinvestment and highlight the opportunity to better resource their work.

This report ultimately seeks to call for true and full investment in women and nonbinary leaders of color. The definition drawn from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary and applied to philanthropy is,

## INVESTMENT:
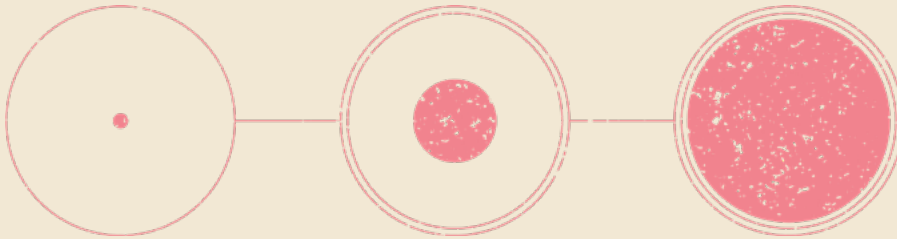
*To commit (money) in order to earn a (financial) return. In philanthropy, we would like to manifest this as fully funding leadership development and capacity building along with the multi-issue, multi-strategy work women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations do, both individually and in collaboration, with the return being greater equity and the preservation of democracy.*

Women and nonbinary leaders of color are often not able to speak candidly to foundation donors. As this report will detail, they put substantial emotional labor into maintaining relationships with program officers, even those who are generally supportive of their work. This report seeks to make audible the silences that constrain women and nonbinary leaders. It hopes to transform silence into words and words into actions that can be mobilized in support of a sector that is more responsive to the needs, experiences, and humanity of women and nonbinary leaders of color.
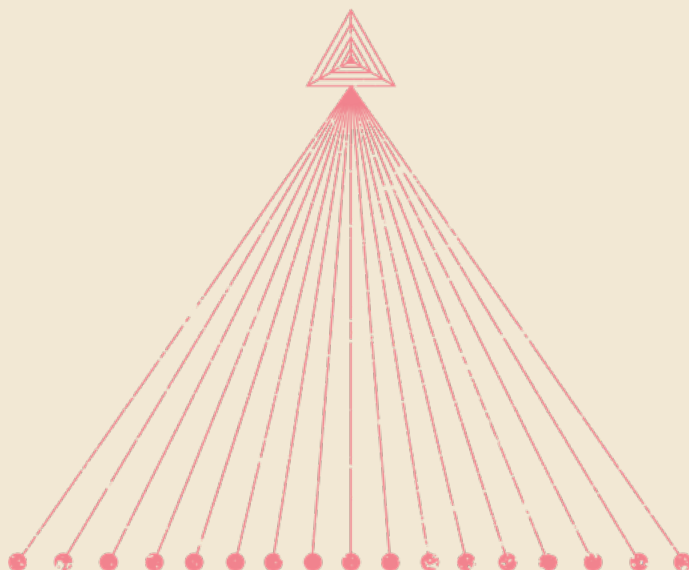
# PROBLEM STATEMENT

11    This term is drawn from: Bhansali, Vini, and Ash-Lee Woodard-Henderson. "Season 2, Episode 3: Fund Us Like You Want Us to Win!, Part I." *Www.Whenwefightwewin.Org,* Aug. 2020, www.whenwefightwewin.com/listen/season-2-episode-3-fund-us-like-you-want-us-to-win-part-i/. Accessed 20 Sept. 2023.

The philanthropic sector—that is, those who occupy the professional class of grantmakers giving funds on behalf of wealthy individuals and foundations—is failing women and nonbinary people of color and by extension, is failing us all.

Multiple societal crises add to the urgency and call for a new way of moving money. We at the Ms. Foundation respond to this inflection point and join the calls of women and nonbinary leaders of color for philanthropy to fund women and nonbinary people of color as though they want us to win.[11] This will mean that foundations must move much more funding in multi-year, flexible general operating support dollars, dismantle barriers to accessing their funding, and proudly and publicly state that there are opportunities for funding directly relevant to the communities of women and nonbinary people of color and the dynamic multi-issue movement building and organizing work they do.

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It also means decreasing the excessive administrative work necessary to apply for, receive and manage a grant.

Evidence also suggests women and nonbinary leaders of color are facing a crisis of burnout and a mass exodus of movement leadership that threatens the stability of organizations and movements alike. This study provides evidence that crisis, burnout, and movement exit are not isolated, individual events but products of systems that continue to ask women and nonbinary people of color to work for mere pocket change. This study asks for MORE than pocket change.

This research, the latest study in the Ms. Foundation *Pocket Change* series, aims to better understand the ways that the historical roots of modern U.S. philanthropy continue to shape and impact the experiences of grassroots leaders of color, especially for women and nonbinary people. It attempts to understand the underlying factors that impact women and nonbinary leaders of color's interactions with philanthropy. It also seeks to examine the multi-level impacts that current philanthropic policies and practices have on individual leaders and organizations. Finally, it explores and offers recommendations for better ways for philanthropy to serve women and nonbinary leaders of color and organizations, and by extension, to strengthen the entire social justice movement ecosystem.

The effort to understand the philanthropic landscape for women and nonbinary people of color is complicated by the fact that there are very few sources of data about organizations by and for women and nonbinary people of color that are systematic and not merely anecdotal, and the available data is often not disaggregated by race and gender. Because of the paucity of academic peer-reviewed literature related to the funding landscape for women and nonbinary leaders of color, this paper relies overwhelmingly on gray literature (non-peer reviewed white papers and reports published by organizations), especially from policy reports and white papers from philanthropic and grassroots organizations. It also draws heavily from the organizational leadership and public health literature to create a holistic understanding of the experiences that women of color leaders have with philanthropy, as well as the consequences of philanthropy's underinvestment and disinvestment.

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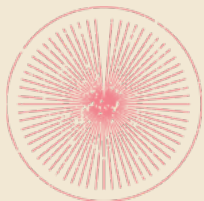
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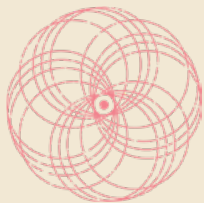
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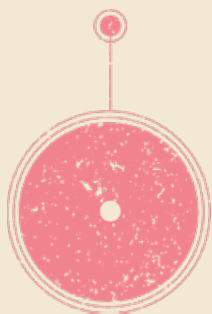
When the Ms. Foundation released *Pocket Change: How Women and Girls of Color Do More With Less* in 2020, it sought to better understand how women and nonbinary leaders of color do their work and ask critical questions of philanthropy and donors about how they support women and girls of color. It found that:

*Total philanthropic giving to women and girls of color in the United States was $356 million in 2017, which is about $5.48 per year for each woman or girl of color. This accounts for about one half of one percent of the total $66.9 billion given by foundations, according to Giving USA, 2018.*

*Many organizations serving women and girls of color address numerous issue areas simultaneously and use multiple strategies in their work—service delivery, advocacy and community organizing, among others. Organizations by and for women and girls of color address the most pressing concerns in the lives of people who have intersecting experiences of oppression, such as gender and race.*

*Foundations continue to fund in a way that does not support women and girls of color because they do not foreground women and girls of color as a priority population in their strategies and requests for proposals, and compartmentalize funding for strategies that women and girls of color integrate. Further, foundations rarely fund the key strategies, such as service provision and voter registration, that women and girls of color use in their work.*

The initial *Pocket Change* report provided a strong baseline for measuring philanthropic investment and better understanding the aggregate experiences of organizations by and for women and girls of color.

Practitioners in philanthropy have begun to respond to critiques of the impact of philanthropic structures and practices (e.g., onerous application and reporting requirements, lack of responsiveness and accountability from foundation donors, etc.). The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, a five-year initiative started in 2020, has defined six concrete grantmaking practices that can strengthen equitable giving, including multi-year, unrestricted funding, taking responsibility for getting to know prospective grantees ("do the homework"), simplifying and streamlining paperwork, communicating in a transparent and responsive way, soliciting and acting on grantee feedback and offering non-monetary support, such as leadership development and capacity building ("support beyond the check").

## FROM TRUST-BASED TO CARE-BASED PHILANTHROPY

Trust-based philanthropy practices have started an important conversation between movement leaders and donors about what kind of supports are needed to increase systemic equity, redistribute power, center relationships, embrace learning and enable two-way collaboration between donors and leaders, as well as accountability by donors (i.e., the values of trust-based philanthropy). However, as this report illustrates, these practices are necessary, but not sufficient. Women and nonbinary leaders of color need foundation donors to take additional steps to bridge the divide between the values of trust-based philanthropy and the impact of raising money on women and nonbinary leaders of color and their communities. Bridging this divide will require both individual reflection and behavior change by foundation donors, as well as a larger shift in philanthropic systems to begin to address chronic disinvestment and underinvestment in women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations.

Women and nonbinary people of color interviewees in this study spoke openly about how they would like to interact with foundation donors—they spoke about relationships that extend beyond trust and towards care. The definition drawn from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary and applied to philanthropy is:

**CARE**



*An effort made to do something correctly, safely, or without causing damage; things that are done to keep someone healthy, safe, etc.*

In philanthropy, this can be manifested by reframing how we think about resources—resources are not solely about financial stewardship or return on the least possible investment—they are the women and nonbinary leaders of color and the organizations they have built.[12]

By reimagining philanthropy through a lens of care, we acknowledge the need to go beyond trust-based practices and prioritize the well-being of those at the heart of social justice movements. Care requires us to consider the unique needs and experiences of historically excluded communities, particularly women and nonbinary people of color, who bear the brunt of systemic racial and gendered oppression. It means

12      This definition is also drawn from Rusty Stahl's article, *Talent Philanthropy: Investing in Nonprofit People to Advance Nonprofit Performance*, where people are recognized as the primary driver of performance in the social sector, and yet despite their performance, they are under-supported.

investing in their healing, well-being, safety and survival. It also means recognizing that their strategic vision, and lived experiences are invaluable resources for social change. As we strive for transformation, care demands that we confront the historical harm caused by philanthropy and commit to redressing it. The first step in this process is recognizing the ways philanthropy has not adequately invested in the leadership of women and nonbinary people of color, as well as the potential consequences of not doing so.

## CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Black feminism has a long tradition of demonstrating the ways in which identities and experiences such as gender, race, class, ability, and sexual orientation not only affect experiences of oppression as individual categories or subject positions, but also work in combination (Crenshaw, 1989, Collins, 2000). While early examples focused on how legal constructs fail to understand this intersection (Crenshaw, 1989), further research has shown that intersectionality is a flexible theory useful for analyzing lived experience in many realms of life. Intersectional experiences are also evident in how women and nonbinary people of color experience relationships with philanthropy. Intersectional disparities in pay for women and nonbinary leaders of color and barriers to funding for women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations have been demonstrated by empirical studies (Howe & Frazer 2019; Biu 2019; Dorsey 2020; Daniel 2019).

Other research suggests that not only do women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations receive fewer grants, they also receive smaller grants. The Ms. Foundation's previous entry into this series, *Pocket Change: How Women of Color Do More with Less* examined the breadth of the disparities for women and girls of color, finding that of the $66.9 billion given by foundations in 2017, only 0.5% went to organizations by and for women of girls of color, averaging to about $5.48 per woman and girl of color in the U.S or just half of cent for every philanthropic dollar given. About a quarter (26.2%) of those organizations had very small budgets (less than $50,000), about 5% of

those organizations had no revenue at all, and many of these organizations had no paid staff (Howe & Frazer 2019).

Similarly, in a study examining the funding experiences of their grantee partners, Echoing Green (Dorsey 2020) found funding disparities by race and gender, noting that on average the revenues of the Black-led organizations are 24% smaller than the revenues of their white-led counterparts. When it comes to unrestricted funding, which is considered the holy grail of financial support, the picture is even bleaker, with unrestricted support for Black-led organizations 76% smaller than their white-led counterparts. The stark disparity in unrestricted assets, they note, is particularly telling as this type of funding often represents a proxy for trust. The study found that Black women leaders in the organization's grantee portfolio consistently receive significantly less philanthropic support than either Black men or white women.

Further compounding the problem, people of color-led organizations more broadly, are more likely to serve the most challenged groups with the least amount of resources, often had smaller budgets and few cash reserves (ABFE 2019, Howe & Frazer 2019, Walker & Walker 2016), were smaller in terms of staff and volunteers, and had less access to social networks. Several studies describe a culture of mistrust and even disrespect that often permeates interactions between people of color-led organizations and institutional philanthropy. Research suggests that both implicit and explicit bias against organizations led by people of color have contributed to false narratives in funding spaces about their effectiveness and worthiness for contributions. These organizations are often met with greater skepticism and scrutiny than their white counterparts when applying for funding. This mistrust manifests in the grantmaking practices of institutional funders. These include: restrictive eligibility requirements that stipulate budget size, years of operation, presence of third-party evaluations, matching fund requirements, relationships with elected officials; the requiring of extra due diligence efforts including additional documentation requirements, multiple interviews and/or site visits during the proposal review process.

It is worth noting, at least briefly, that data on the intersectional oppression experienced by women and nonbinary leaders of color at the

individual level mirror those found at the organizational level. Studies about the experiences of women of color in the nonprofit sector found that women of color report a variety of barriers to success and advancement related to race and gender (Kunreuther 2017, Biu 2019). In particular, studies found that women of color who are in the "executive director/CEO role have remained under 20% for the past 15 years." The report suggests that though women of color have similar qualifications to white respondents and are more likely to aspire to nonprofit leadership positions, both subtle and blatant bias caused them to be passed over for jobs or promotions in favor of white women, white men, and men of color with comparable or even inferior credentials.

The consequences of this lack of investment are not benign and the impacts are both significant and far-reaching. Negative outcomes can be seen for both organizations and movements as well as at the individual level for leaders of organizations. At the organizational level the fallout is significant. For example, in the Echoing Green study, the disparities across the U.S. applicant pool alone add up to a roughly $20 million racial funding gap. These disparities exist across the organizational life cycle, locking organizations into a perpetual cycle of underfunding and contributing to weak organizational infrastructure. One of the most critical elements to success is strong reserves, but that is something that organizations led by people of color rarely have. It becomes a classic "chicken or the egg" dilemma. Whereas traditionally it has been difficult for organizations with low reserves to attract new funders, that inability to attract new funders keeps reserves low. Organizations without sufficient reserves are often unable to invest in generating the evidence or conducting the type of evaluation funders want to see to show programming is making a difference. Consequently, that can make it difficult for these organizations to build track records that excite donors, further exacerbating the problem.

Intersectionality theory also offers an analysis of how women and people of color build movements. Collins (2000) suggests that one of the powerful offerings of experiences of intersectionality is the enhanced ability to work with others who also experience multiple, intersecting forms of oppression. The first *Pocket Change* report (and this one) demonstrate what this looks like in practice, as women and nonbinary

people of color work on multiple, interrelated issues and organize with many different kinds of communities than funders seem to imagine in their siloed and single-issued calls for proposals.

Intersectional oppression also manifests at the individual level, as evidenced by the high levels of chronic stress experienced by women and nonbinary people of color due to their identities and circumstances, resulting in poorer health outcomes. Leith Mullings's (2002) concept of Sojourner Syndrome serves as a multifaceted framework that not only describes the unique challenges faced by women of color, particularly Black women, but also underscores the intentional interventions and acts of resistance undertaken by them to support their communities in navigating systemic injustice, violence, and oppression.

Within this framework, Sojourner Syndrome highlights the resilience and strength of women of color as they confront and adapt to systemic oppression and chronic stress throughout their lives. It acknowledges the tenacious coping mechanisms and strategies these leaders employ to not only survive but also thrive in the face of adversity. Simultaneously, it acknowledges the profound toll that structural racism, coupled with the activism and caregiving responsibilities women of color shoulder within their families and communities, exacts on their well-being —a phenomenon we now understand as "weathering." Geronimus (1992) defines weathering as "a physiological process that accelerates aging and increases health vulnerability. It is spurred by chronic toxic stress exposures over the life course and the persistent high-effort coping that families and communities engage in to survive them, if not prevail" (DeVita-Raeburn, 2018).

At the individual level, women and nonbinary leaders of color grapple with a cascade of negative impacts stemming from philanthropic disinvestment in their organizations. These consequences include economic insecurity, adverse physical and mental health outcomes, and burnout. Black women and nonbinary people adapt to experiences of oppression through mechanisms often seen as both expressions of their strength and resilience but also potential precursors to health risks—a process known as "adaptive coping." This includes practices such as working extensively beyond the standard 40-hour workweek or working while unwell, which may yield short-term benefits but

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negatively affect their health and the well-being of the organizations they lead (Lekan, 2009).

If theoretical frameworks like intersectionality and Sojourner Syndrome help to provide a lens to understand the problem, emotional justice and healing justice provide frameworks for hope and change. Emotional justice, a framework developed by Esther Armah suggests that,"This emotional connection to your value as historically defined by labor was about how much you do, how much more you can do, how much you have done, how much more you are willing to do, and how valuable you are because you do it. Enduring, exhausting, unending labor. . . " is part of an emotional economy where women and people of color are treated as conduits rather than valuable ends in and of themselves. In this economy, power circulates through the language and articulation of whiteness, which when internalized by women and nonbinary people of color, in combination with untreated trauma, shapes leadership styles that elevate, celebrate and demand over-work. Armah's work calls on philanthropy to institutionalize wellness by resourcing care and rejecting expectations for a resilient character that requires individuals to do more within a landscape of increased demands and insufficient resources (Armah, 2023).

Armah's work speaks to a long tradition of Black feminist understanding of the importance of care work in Black women's lives (e.g. Collins, 2000, Nash, 2019).[13] Increasingly, this also includes a celebration and uplift of self-care practices, and healing justice modalities suggest some ways to do this in practice. Emphasizing the importance of trauma-informed care, accountability, and self-determination in the healing process, the Kindred Healing Justice Collective (2020) suggests that by addressing the root causes of harm, individuals can experience a transformative vision of care. By supporting rest, resilience, wellness, safety, and security, healing justice intervenes in structural racism and supports the necessary work of organizing and building movements (Page, 2023; Mullings, 2020). Healing justice is a critique – but not only a critique – of the ways capitalism, heterosexism, ableism, religion, white supremacy, and dispossession have informed and created the privatization of wellness and the decentralization of resources from communities.

13      White feminists and other non-Black feminists have also written extensively about care work; however, their work speaks less directly to this work and will not be reviewed here.
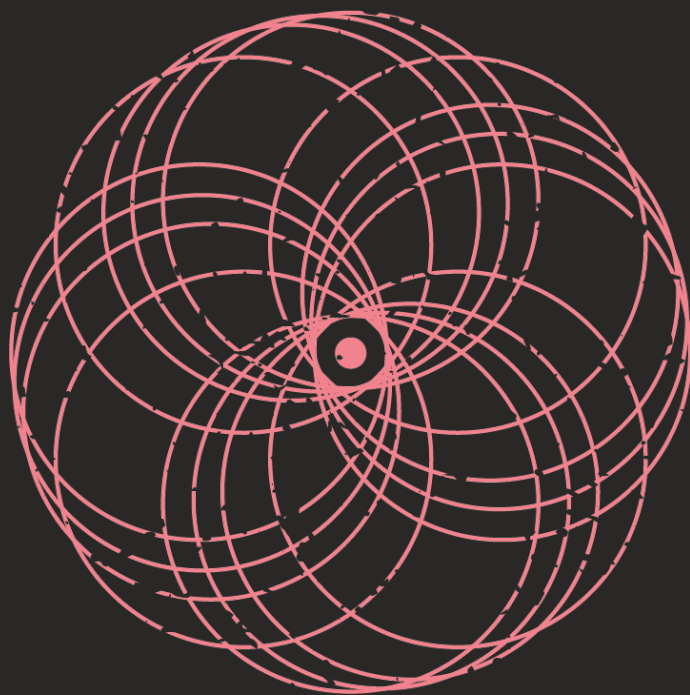
# METHOD-OLOGY

The current study employs a qualitative methods approach to examine the philanthropic needs and experiences of a national sample of leaders of organizations by and for women and nonbinary people of color. For the purpose of this research, we define "women and nonbinary leaders of color" as transgender, cisgender and nonbinary people, who experience multiple layers of marginalization based on race and ethnicity including: Indigenous, Latinx, Black, Arab, and Asian-American and Pacific Islander people.study is drawn from 15 one-on-one interviews with Ms. Foundation grantee partners across the U.S. who identify as women and nonbinary people of color. As much as possible, researchers sought diversity with regard to region, demographic characteristics of individual leaders, and issues areas represented. Ms. Foundation grantee partners often represent emerging grassroots organizations with budgets under $2M. Participants were recruited through the recommendation of program officers and were compensated $250 for their time.

The interviews lasted 75 minutes and were conducted via Zoom. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol and addressed the following topics: how organizations discuss their work with donors, what they highlight and don't mention about their work when speaking with foundation donors, as well as how they have been doing personally and in their role as a leader in the last year. Interviewees were also invited to speak to their own experiences of burnout. Interviews were coded, transcribed and analyzed using open coding with qualitative analysis software.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*What are the underlying factors that impact the interactions between women and nonbinary leaders of color and philanthropy?*

*What are the facilitators and barriers to receiving philanthropic support from foundation donors for organizations led by and for women and nonbinary people of color?*

*What are the consequences of philanthropic disinvestment in leaders of organizations, programs and initiatives that are led by and support women and nonbinary people of color at both the individual and organizational levels?*

*How can philanthropy better support women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations?*
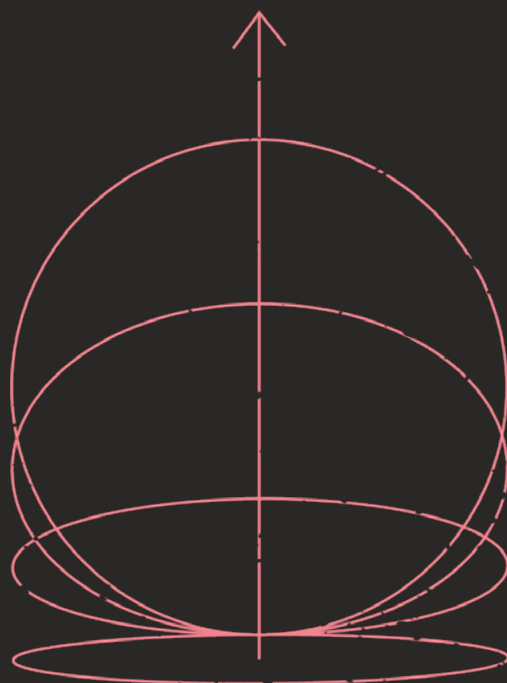
# FINDINGS

# THE WORK IS PERSONAL FOR WOMEN AND NONBINARY LEADERS OF COLOR

Women and nonbinary leaders of color reported feeling a personal drive and connection to the work they do, because the people impacted share identities and/or experiences with them or the people they love. These are unsurprising findings given the long literature on the extent of Black women's work as caregivers and protectors (e.g. Nash, 2019).

Black women and nonbinary people also uniquely see the consequences of oppression in the communities where they live and work. One interviewee spoke about her relationship to her fellow community members, and how an "us and them" mentality was not present in her

work, as she could see her own loved ones in the incarcerated women she works with,

> These are not just numbers because they are—women who are incarcerated are mothers, wives, daughters, aunts. They're a part of our community, and so we have to really look at this in a way that [recognizes] the reality of what families are struggling with...I think what's interesting about that is it's not us and them. It is all us. It is all family. I use sometimes my family...we have cousins who are in the women's prison. Really, really, it is all us. The stories are about how we are family and we have to take care of one another. If it is about strong kids, strong families, strong communities, we are all part of the solution. We have to operate in that way.

She saw her work as contributing to kids, families and communities that are strong. This interviewee and others felt like they had no option but to do the work to address injustice. Another interviewee echoed feeling compelled to work on behalf of her community, in this case trans women of color,

> I have to say that we just tough it out as a community [speaking about trans women of color]. A lot of times, the work, people don't really get a chance to see the real work or really understand why I'm so compassionate because they're not up at 2, 3, 4 in the morning, ripping and running the streets, checking things out, putting out fires. Trying to book hotel rooms, trying to get people to safe ground. Trying to get people food and all this stuff. They don't get a chance to see the behind the scenes.

This interviewee spoke about how those who aren't a part of this community may not see or understand her drive to help her peers, as

well as her patience and compassion for those who are struggling. This interviewee also highlighted the personal sacrifices and risks she takes to do the work—losing sleep and spending time on the streets. Another interviewee spoke about how the staff of her organization have common experiences related to economic hardship with those they serve,

> We have a lot of experience of people who have had to stare [economic hardships and discrimination] in the face every day and figure out how to survive, and so there's a certain power and knowledge that comes with that that allows us to be so strong on what we do.

She described feeling a sense of confidence in the work she does, as a result of witnessing her own and other's struggles, as well as surviving similar situations. However, even though personal connections and experiences enhanced how women and nonbinary leaders of color approached their work, they also described the toll that working on issues that impact themselves and people they love had on them. One interviewee said,

> I'm just really tired, and I'm really scared. It's exhausting. It's so exhausting. The things we read about and things we talk about and the things that we are pushing for, it's not just stuff on paper...it's us too. All those statistics, all those numbers, that's us. We talk about all the things that are happening— those are our communities. You know I'm saying? Those are us. That's my son.

This interviewee describes how difficult it is to gain distance from the oppression she sees in her work; she cannot forget how the clients of her organization and their adverse experiences could easily be those of her own son. Another interviewee shared how organizing events and compiling statistics for her advocacy work reminded her of her own heightened risk,

I might not have a tangible ask at the end of the day in addition to the support we're already receiving, just bearing witness to what we have at stake here. When I sit here and do presentations [org name omitted], or we hold these really beautiful vigils and things like that, they have to know that they are hearing from someone who's 10 times more likely to be murdered than the next person. You know? They have to actually personify and see that we are the embodiment of the issues that we're talking about. It's very real.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color experience deep personal connections to the work they do. It inspires them to sacrifice their own health and well-being to work harder and seek justice for those in their communities. The line between community members' struggles and their own is a fine one, and they consistently identify with their clients. This work impacts women and nonbinary leaders of color in profound ways—it makes them aware of their own heightened risk and can lead to exhaustion due to repeated exposure to the consequences of oppression. This is Sojourner Syndrome in action.

## CROSS-COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY WORK

If intersectionality theory suggests that women and nonbinary leaders of color do cross-community work with a unique lens of experience, this project revealed multiple examples of *how* they are working to do this. Several interviewees gave examples of confronting anti-Blackness expressed by their staff, board and communities who are of color but are not Black, while others discussed how queer and Black identities intersect.

One leader said: "I'm going to sit down. I'm going to talk to the ladies, and I'm going to be like, 'Let's talk about anti-Blackness within the Latinx community.' It's easier said than done because...they're [not] just going to share...They're scared. Sometimes they'll [say], 'Oh, yeah. We understand that Black lives matter,' but do they really?"

Other interviewees spoke about how they have developed their own abilities to speak consistently about allied issues, such as queerness in communities of color. One interviewee spoke about how although the ability to speak about her own queer identity in Black spaces has been valuable for social movements that seek to build solidarity, it can also feel tokenizing,

> I have been doing the organizing work for a long time. I've worked with many of the folks who were doing the significant work, but the way that I was used in many of those instances was more like when we've got to pull out a faith leader who's queer, unapologetic, and can articulate a point. Then you become the go-to person when they need somebody in Washington or they need somebody here, especially as a woman of color and somebody who understands the Black church.

Fellow organizers and activists depend on this interviewee for her willingness to speak about the intersection of her Black and queer identities, particularly given her credibility in faith communities. Another interviewee shared about how she worked to include conversations about gender fluidity in the Indigenous communities where she works,

> My work at [organization name omitted] and the gender justice program has been to articulate that gender fluidity is a part of our cultures and Indigenous world views. We are, as far as I know, the only organization that is trying to create that narrative right now with partners, and it's very, very hard. When I say we get pushback, I mean that I had people counter-protest my events and had to have security and police at them because people are like, 'That is not a part of Indigenous ways.'

This interviewee described the emotional work to confront biases and stereotypes about gender in the communities where she works. She went on to describe events she and others organized for Pride month on topics such as queer masculinity, where she made space for others to share their experiences and the risk they faced as a result of speaking out,

> We have these beautiful events. Like I could report on Pride Month. We had five, six events in that month, and it was absolutely beautiful. They all looked fun and gorgeous, and the graphics were amazing. They were really unique events like [a] queer masculinities discussion. I mean, that stuff is cool, but…it was really hard to do…It took a lot of people's emotional energy and vulnerability, and that it's a real risk sometimes in a world [where] we actually face so much more violence just by being who we are.

Often cross-community solidarity work is done without explicit recognition from staff, the board or donors, but is manifested in the clear and direct actions of women and nonbinary leaders of color. It is frequently, but not always connected to changes in an organization's programming and/or investments in social justice training for staff and/or the board. Women and nonbinary leaders of color are committed to doing this work, even when it's hard and places them at the intersection of multiple identities, such as being people of color and being queer. This work is critical to social movements in that it builds bridges where divides may have existed before, yet it is often not recognized or funded.

## VISIONS FOR CHANGE

Women and nonbinary leaders of color have long-term visions for the change they would like to see at multiple levels—sustainability and growth for their organizations and increased capacity for their staff. Specific examples of what they would like to see include: owning physical space to do their work, additional resources for staff to develop the

skills they need to meet community needs, and support for the holistic wellbeing of women and nonbinary leaders of color, both current and emerging. In many cases, their visions exceed the support available to them. One interviewee spoke about how her concerns about cash flow impacted her ability to think strategically,

> I'm...trying to run an organization always at an eighth of the tank full. I can never [stay at] half a tank. I'm never at three-quarters, and the tank is never full. Right? How do you say, 'I'm gonna take a road trip, and I'm only ever going to be on an eighth of a tank?' It makes it so you've always have to stop [and] figure out how you're gonna fill the gas tank up. That in and of itself takes so much capacity that it actually limits you from doing the work because you're always in a money crunch.

This interviewee spoke about the time and energy it takes her to always be worrying about whether she will have enough funding to complete the work she has started. This effort in and of itself compromises her vision. A number of other women and nonbinary leaders of color spoke about their broader vision for what their organization could accomplish if it was sufficiently resourced. One interviewee spoke about the stability owning land would add to justice work—not having to worry about paying rent or being evicted and truly being able to settle into doing their work in a place that is theirs,

> ...when you have property—we don't own the building yet, but you have to own stuff...There's something to be said about owning things. There's something to be said about when you own the building, when you own the land. I think that that's important.

This interviewee went on to speak about how having space ties directly to her ability to fulfill her organization's mission, including to pass the lessons she's learning on to others and to develop a replicable model,

> I would get the resources to do that and do it in such a way that it could be replicated, not just by the [organization name omitted] but by other groups, have it as a model. It would be tied to physical space... in a way that we could bring programming into the space...as it relates to direct services, but bigger than that, we could have a safe space for people to think, for them to imagine, for them to be resourced.

The resources to do the work extended beyond physical space to include staff capacity to organize, develop strategy, and do their work in ways that are accessible to communities. Another leader spoke about how she would like to ensure her staff have the skills and support they need to best do the work,

> I'm thinking about the transformation of our organizers and our members; I would say folks developing more skills. We like to see folks who are comfortable facilitating meetings, are comfortable having one-on-one conversations where they have to agitate. Have you mastered or have expert skills in [a new area]?...Have you moved from where you were before? You started off here this year. In the next year, have you gained additional skill sets? Is that what we're seeing?

Another leader took this a step further to speak about the deep advocacy and organizing strategy she could pursue if she had the funding to increase her organization's reach,

> What I'd like to be able to do is hire—we have put together a map and an outline that's cities in the [state omitted] that are saturated with Black folks that actually have the ability to push the needle differently. I want to hire and train leadership in each of those cities that are resourced—utilizing our overall strategy.

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This interviewee describes how she would be able to better organize for substantive wins if she were able to hire and support staff to carry out the vision and mission of her organization. She is ready to do this work, but she lacks the resources to implement her vision. Women and nonbinary leaders of color also had a vision for how they could better reach community members. In many communities of color, particularly Latinx and Asian communities, language justice came up as a frequent example. Community members speak many different languages, and as a result, staff need to be able to hold meetings and create materials that meet that need. One interviewee said,

> Our members are trilingual. We have trilingual meetings, and it's beautiful, and it is so painful. It is Spanish, Creole and English all at the same time. We would want to have our members know the basics in all three languages.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color know what their communities need and what it takes to make progress in their work. They have clear visions for how to get there, but frequently lack the resources to make progress. Yet despite these gaps, women and nonbinary people of color continue to do the work without resources. One leader described her organization's commitment to doing abolition work, despite the challenges in raising funds to support it,

> ...some of our work is funded and there's a big chunk that isn't, and we're committed to the work that's not funded because we believe that the paid work or the resource opportunities for our youth pave the way to do the more impactful work that we know is necessary and that's not getting funded by anybody, and that to us, would be the abolitionist work and really developing that abolitionist vision following the leadership of Black organizers, Black organizing networks, that legacy, learning from those examples.

The juxtaposition between the visions of women and nonbinary leaders of color and the resources they have to do their work is a significant one. In many cases project grants or small general operating support grants are not sufficient to support these broader visions. Yet in an environment of constrained resources, women and nonbinary leaders of color continue to envision and articulate the changes they would like to see in the world and what they will need to make those changes. These visions are a gift that the philanthropic community has the opportunity to consider how to receive and support going forward; a process that starts with recognizing the disjunct between current funding streams and the visions articulated by women and nonbinary leaders of color.

## HISTORICAL DIS/UNDERINVESTMENT IMPACTS LEADERSHIP

Women and nonbinary leaders of color described their own experiences of disinvestment or underinvestment and how this has impacted their confidence in the work they are able to do. Disinvestment occurs both in opportunities to build their skills and capacities, as well as the racism and discrimination that deprives them of connections to people and institutions with access to resources and power. This underinvestment was separate from their actual skills or abilities, but instead centered on their self-assessment of how prepared they are for leadership.[14]

Dis/underinvestment was particularly acute in the areas of social connections with powerful people, including program officers at foundations, as well as in fundraising. One interviewee said,

> I'm a younger, new [executive director]—I'm also a Black immigrant. The networks weren't necessarily in place, and so I started leading without the formal introductions to funders, getting to know them at conferences. It was weird trying to have funding conversations with [people] that you never met with before...We all know that in-person is better, and so

14    This description of disinvestment and underinvestment builds on the work done by Ofronama Biu in Race to Lead: Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector, which highlights racial bias as a barrier to advancement, along with a lack of education and training and experiences of neglect or intense scrutiny in nonprofit work environments.

that was what was daunting. I wanted folks to get to know me, get to know the organization, and Zoom just wasn't doing it for me.

This interviewee spoke about how when she took on the role of executive director, she struggled to make connections with foundation program officers virtually. She didn't receive introductions to program officers in a way they would know who she is and take her seriously. Another newer executive director had a similar experience, describing how it was difficult for her to get larger, more sustainable grants for several years after she took on her leadership role,

...the learning curve has been how to make—how to put ourselves out there in these spaces because... just developing and cultivating relationships has been really hard in the first five years [since] our inception. We haven't actually been able to get resources, bigger resources, until this last year for some of our work...

Several interviewees spoke about how no one taught them how to make an ask for resources. One interviewee spoke about how she advanced to a leadership role because of her passion for and connection to the work, not because she had any training or experience in fundraising,

To be honest, I had to learn how to make an 'ask.' For many of the women of color that I know, and myself included, I just started doing the work because it was the right thing to do...we didn't have the connections and relationships, number one, and number two, we had never been groomed for that.

Another woman of color leader described how before she took on a leadership role, she was not included in discussions about how to frame their work for fundraising,

I've participated in other settings and other organizations and grant writing, but in terms of the actual

> mechanics... [I] was never taught how to do that... ideas were taken from me. Somebody else took them and translated them.

When this leader took on fundraising responsibilities, she had never been taught the language preferred by funders—someone else had done the translation. While this may have been appropriate when fundraising was not part of her job, it made the transition to raising money independently a difficult one, as she did not have any examples from which to work.

Interviewees also expressed similar feelings about their own trepidation about asking for larger grants or grants that would support living wages for their staff. One interviewee spoke about how lost she felt preparing to make an ask for a larger grant,

> Nobody had ever really talked to us about how to ask for $100,000. How do you ask for $250,000? How do you raise a million dollars, and what does that need to look like? Then you get into all the other head stuff. Can I manage $100,000? Can I manage a million? How do I recruit staff?

Another interviewee spoke about how difficult she found raising money for her organization's actual operating needs,

> ...being charged as a woman of color, being a first-generation woman, and leader...the discomfort of money is an automatic shutdown in my brain. I've had to really push myself in the last two years to dive into the discomfort of moving numbers or advocating for even decent wages for us. Things like that have been a big learning curve. I think that there are conversations to be had in our community about the trauma that comes with money and poverty and for those of us who are coming from communities... that we want to serve and if we're talking about

equity and having those folks lead who've been most impacted.

For this interviewee, the feeling of being unprepared to ask for the resources her organization needed came from a deep-seeded place of trauma around talking about money and what resources are actually needed to do the work.

While many new nonprofit executive directors receive investments in both their fundraising skills and connections, women and nonbinary leaders of color frequently do not receive these investments and/or they only receive them years after taking on leadership roles. In addition, available training programs may not address the unique needs of women and nonbinary leaders of color, including how their identities and experiences will be received by donors or their own experiences of trauma related to money. This dis/underinvestment in women and nonbinary leaders of color impacts their ability to grow and serve their communities.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color also recounted how they see this cycle repeating itself with their women and nonbinary staff of color who are growing into leadership,

> Trying to bring young people with me, like my co-founder, youth co-founder that I work with, I try to bring her in these spaces, recognizing that I didn't get trained in these ways and that the way to learn is by doing, and modeling [for] her that we learn together and that we are going to make mistakes, but we're going grow together in how to speak to funders about our work in ways that feel rooted in our values and that feel authentic to us, too.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color invest significant time in building the capacities, connections and experiences of younger peers. Yet, many have felt ill-equipped for this role, in that they are also just learning for themselves. This interviewee described trying to bring a younger co-leader along in the process of making the case for resources to support their work, while maintaining a strong connection to their personal

and organizational values. Another leader described her own feelings of imposter syndrome and how this has impacted how she mentors others for leadership roles,

> I think that sometimes when I'm in spaces, a lot of people are like, 'Oh, my God. You come across as arrogant. You think you're all that.' [But] 'I have to. I really, really have to because you don't see a band of cheerleaders out here saying, '[name omitted], you can do it. You're a good executive director.' The opposite, right? The imposter syndrome—I can go down a spiral, 'Why did I take this role? I'm not fit, I'm not qualified. I don't understand all these budget things... I have to believe that I can do it, and then as I start bringing more people on board, coach them to think that they have a voice.

This interviewee's comments also signal the deeper impact of historical dis/underinvestment—a lack of confidence that diminishes their energy and drive and ultimately detracts from the time and energy they have to focus on the work of their organizations.

## PRESSURE FROM ALL SIDES

Women and nonbinary leaders of color also described the expectations they feel from their staff, community members and boards, as well as their best efforts to live their values while running nonprofit organizations in a post-capitalist world.[15] In some cases, women and nonbinary leaders of color also describe putting unrealistic expectations on themselves. Overall, the pressure of unrealistic, and at times, competing, expectations resulted in a profound feeling of isolation for women and nonbinary leaders of color. Specific challenges mentioned by interviewees include staff who are not performing, recruiting and maintaining skilled staff in an environment with scarce resources, and lack of resources and support for capacity building. One leader spoke about the pressure they feel to act as a caregiver and role model for their staff and also in their communities,

15    This finding echoes work done by Rebecca Epstein and Mistinguette Smith in Paving a Better Way: What's Driving Progressive Organizations Apart and How to Win by Coming Together, which describes the cycle of disconnection between staff and leaders that ultimately impacts the effectiveness of the work.

I'm seen as the healer, the helper, the caregiver, the go-to crisis person, the go-to transformative justice, community accountability person, and so it's been really difficult to shoulder this burden of knowing that not a lot of people have the same resources or skill sets as me, but also knowing that it's really extracting a lot from me, and just that it's impacted the way that I relate to the work. It's impacted the way that I feel like I'm kind of forever attached to this—again, this caregiver role, and I'm still working on what does it look like to have boundaries, to step into my role as a leader, as someone who is wanted for multiple things, but also just realizing and recognizing that my identity shouldn't be swept up in what I have to offer to the world. I'm a lot more than that, and I shouldn't have to be bound to producing a whole lot, and so I'm trying to be the leader, and my hope is to get to this place where I feel like I am taking care of myself just as much as I'm taking care of everybody around me.

This leader speaks about how her community depends on her to mediate conflict and hold people accountable, recognizing that few others have the credibility and skills that she has in this area. Yet, at the same time, she is pushing back against this, asserting that she shouldn't have to always serve when needed to be of value and aspiring to also be able to take care of herself. Another interviewee echoed the difficulty of balancing relationships with her staff and funders, detailing how representing the work of her staff and organization to funders took its toll on her, while at the same time introduced a divide between her and her staff,

It's taking a toll on my spirit, always having to be on. It also creates a hard dynamic with my team because there's a power in being with funders and being a

speaker and being a public face, and so, because I have to do it so much, that becomes what people see as the work, as the aspirational place to be. It's not, for me. I know other people, it is the dream. It is not [for me].

Another interviewee echoed this sentiment, sharing how she felt divided from colleagues when she took on a leadership role,

I'm in a good relationship with my directors... where I was peers with them before and now I'm their manager, that became isolating very quickly. That was really hard on me as well to not feel like I had people that I could check in with like that... If something was really frustrating with a grant or something like that, I don't feel like I can make that comment anymore as their supervisor. It just changed things a lot. That was really hard for me as well to be further isolated than I already was in leadership positions.

This leader speaks about how she feels pressure to maintain a both positive and professional face with colleagues she could vent to before she took on her current role. As a result, she has felt isolated in her work, even though she recognizes the importance of changing her behavior.

Leaders also spoke about the dissonance they feel between living in a capitalist society where things need to get done and the care and flexibility they would like to provide to staff in the work. One interviewee said,

I think a lot of women of color EDs have sort of felt the squeeze between the increasing expectation of staff about what we need to do for them and the realities of our community and what our community needs from us as well as the reality that...we still

function in a capitalist philanthropic, nonprofit sector...—this is not a family. You have to work. We have to meet our goals. That's just reality, right?...This shouldn't be all on me, that I don't have to carry the brunt of it alone.

This leader describes her experience of trying to hold staff accountable for getting work done and points out that when her staff don't meet their goals, she has felt like she is left to carry the burden of delivering for communities and donors on her own. Another interviewee took this thought a step further, sharing her own experience of working in an organization where she felt that members of her team may have lacked accountability for their work,

It's that piece where you're trying to make sure that the rhetoric and the reality align...We talk a lot about transformative justice...Jobs that have integrity and see you as a whole person...Dismantling this idea of what professionalism is because so much of it is rooted in white-supremacist respectability politics and so on and so forth. The rhetoric is there, but if you are not working with folks who have a system of accountability, who are operating within some shared values around what integrity looks like, who understand the balance between resilience, self-care and accountability, then what you can end up with are people who are really well-paid who feel like they're at a free-for-all.

This leader recounts her own challenges in wanting to dismantle oppressive systems, while also encouraging the best possible contributions from her team, and her own realization that some team members may be taking advantage of her and the organization. At the same time, women and nonbinary leaders of color describe their efforts to be vulnerable and lead in ways that differ from the examples they've seen. One leader said,

The other thing I think for me, as a leader, is just being vulnerable. I've heard so many EDs [say], 'Oh, my God. You never cry in front of your staff. You never tell them that you're tired or that you're burnt out,' and I was like, 'No. My staff needs to know that I'm human.' My staff needs to know that I have feelings, I break down, this work is hard for me, too. I think that leading with vulnerability and empathy is going to make me better off.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color also spoke about challenges they have faced from their boards, about salaries and hiring and how that has impacted their ability to do their work. One interviewee shared,

...we set our salary ranges so that we can actually bring in somebody with the right capacity rather than bringing somebody who's doing this job for the first time. The board pushed back and said no. I, basically, was like, 'Okay, well, I feel like you're putting me in an impossible situation...you're telling me that I can't have what I need in order to do my job well, and so I'm not going [to] do this job.'...I said, 'I cannot. This isn't about...the fact that I need to make more money, but I need to bring in somebody at that level, and if you say you cannot help me do that, then I cannot do this job. It's impossible.' They gave it to me. I know...the board [may] feel like I strong-armed them into the decision, but I feel like I didn't have a choice.

This leader is speaking about the importance of being able to offer competitive salaries to attract candidates with the right skillset to do the work and the opposition she faced from the board to doing that. In this case, the board initially did not trust her judgment about what

was needed for the organization. Although an executive leadership role inherently comes with competing pressures, women and nonbinary leaders of color experience heightened pressure when their boards don't trust their leadership.

Finally, women and nonbinary leaders of color also spoke about the challenges of recruiting staff with skills and capacity and how this connects to the disinvestment in women and nonbinary people of color's skills and leadership in the social justice sector. One leader said,

> There has been a lack of investment in women of color especially, especially in our field, like most—I guess to stereotype, most [group omitted] young women are not thinking that they want to grow up and be an organizer. They don't just see a lot of models doing this. The few that there are do really, really well, and they go work for big unions, large organizations, and I try to poach a few, and it's like, 'Oh, no, they're making $50,000, $60,000 more than what we can afford to pay.'

Recruiting talented staff and also the strain of training staff without skills who ultimately are drawn to work for larger, frequently white-led organizations that can pay better, is another challenge women and nonbinary leaders of color face in their work. This leader went on to speak about the support she needs to provide to staff so they can do their jobs effectively, not for any fault of their own, but more because of the cumulative disinvestment in women and nonbinary people of color,

> I would say our senior team needs a lot of support. Many of them are doing this job, doing their job for the first time, both at the senior level and at mid-level management positions and director levels. We invest in our own staff, and so they're usually doing whatever job they're doing for the first time because we've given them the opportunity to, but it requires a lot of support, wraparound support. Last year we

spent over [$X] on coaching for at least [X] people. We have to do that because, otherwise, people can't do their jobs.

Several women and nonbinary leaders of color spoke about making significant investments in building the capacity of their staff—investments that are often not adequately supported by donors. Such capacity gaps place more strain on women and nonbinary leaders of color. Women and nonbinary leaders of color need capacity building support and adequate salaries to ensure they have skilled staff to do the work. At the same time, they need coaching and peer support to aid with isolation and help them determine how to hold staff accountable in new and less oppressive ways. Sensitizing boards to these challenges and equipping them with the resources and skills to support women and nonbinary leaders of color is one proactive step that could be taken to reduce the organizational pressure on women and nonbinary leaders of color, making more space for them to focus their time and energy externally.

## EDUCATING DONORS AND NAVIGATING FUNDING TRENDS

Interviewees describe doing a lot of work to educate donors about what's needed in their communities, as well as correct misinformation and stereotypes about communities of color.
One interviewee said,

> I know we often talk about—and the reality is that the work of educating does not fall on the shoulders of Black women of my community; however, somebody has to do some educating. We just do or else it's just not going to happen. I don't mind having those conversations [with donors]. I don't mind being in that space to try to think about it like this.

This interviewee speaks about the responsibility she feels for helping donors understand her community and the work her organization is trying to do. She also acknowledges how the labor of educating

well-meaning outsiders often falls on women of color, and in her case, Black women. Another interviewee echoed this experience, sharing the work she does to make the case to donors about the need in her community, using both stories and numbers,

> We talk about these numbers, helping folks understand that there is a clear [disparity between] white girls, Black girls, white boys, Black boys, and even Black girls and Black boys. Looking at how community and everybody responds to Black girls and really looking at like, how do we shift the culture? How do we shift things?

This leader's words also imply her frustration with educating donors about disparities when her work is about shifting culture, a concept that may not easily align with some donors' strategies.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color also described trying to get the attention of foundation donors prior to 2020, and feeling ignored, yet now they are being approached by more donors in response to racial justice uprisings. Across racial groups, interviewees spoke about what they feel is an "of the moment" interest from donors,

> All of a sudden those who are looking to assuage any kind of white guilt, folks who are suddenly tapping into their inner-wokeness. You know? When all of a sudden, when we've been saying for the last 10 years, 'Believe Black women, say her name;' and now all of a sudden people are looking some place to put their dollars and they want to feel a part of stuff, we were right at the top of that...It's fleeting because Americans love trends, so we've moved on to something else now. It's like, 'Black Lives Matter, I guess?'...

> Then foundations that are now coming back to me are—it's similar. They act like I never reached out to

them before. There's no acknowledgement of the fact that I've been trying to reach out and educate folks. I do think when I first started out this work, there was a lot of very blatant [comments] like—Asians make more money than anybody else. People would say stuff like that to me in funder meetings. They would say things like, 'Well, but Asians are doing so much better than all the other racial groups. Asians all go to Ivy League school and are engineers and lawyers.'

The first interviewee quoted here, a Black woman, speaks about donors wanting to assuage white guilt and also feel like they are contributing to the movement for Black lives. She also acknowledges that this interest may be fleeting and difficult to sustain, yet her work continues. The second interviewee quoted here spoke about how she is getting an influx of interest from donors after racial justice uprisings in the United States, but that when she tried to approach these donors before, she faced assumptions about Asian people's access to power and education that don't apply across her community. She had to do a lot of work to combat these incorrect assumptions. Both these inter-viewees and others cited fears about donors losing interest in what is deep, long-term and transformational work.

While women and nonbinary leaders of color went to great lengths to educate donors, translating their work in ways that would resonate for different foundations and align with their strategies, some interview-ees also found ways to resist. One interviewee spoke about how she reminds foundations about the source of their resources and connects their grantmaking to the idea of reparations, or what communities deserve as a result of how they have been exploited,

...I elect to not use some maybe more diplomatic language. I say that to say that when I am pitching to foundations, I am also usually very upfront about the fact that most of the foundation money is coming

from endowments; it's coming from money that is somehow tied to the oppression and/or displacement of the enslavement of African bodies and the displacement of Indigenous people, and the theft of land. Foundations really should be making it as easy as possible because they should be looking at their work now as not charitable, but as reparations.

## DONOR METRICS DON'T REFLECT THE WORK ON THE GROUND

Women and nonbinary leaders of color described how traditional evaluation metrics often do not reflect the deep, long-term work they're doing in their communities. For example, in the areas of civic engagement and voter registration, women and nonbinary leaders of color felt that metrics like the number of people registered to vote did not capture the ongoing presence their organizations need to have in people's lives, not only just before an election, but daily or weekly. These challenges were amplified when communities face economic stress and need other types of services from nonprofit organizations, such as benefits navigation or food or cash assistance. Women and nonbinary people of color interviewees spoke about being asked for quantitative metrics as the measure of whether their work was a worthwhile investment. One interviewee said,

> Because we know that foundations, they love statistics...Oh, if you got the data, you got the data. No, we don't want our people to be statistics. We want our people to actually have their quality of life improved. What does that look like?

This interviewee specifically addresses how traditional metrics may not reflect improvements in the quality of life in communities, which is how women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations often measure their own success. Another interviewee spoke about how this push for metrics impacted the mutual aid work her organization does,

...[foundations] want to see the metrics, what geography, all that kind of stuff [for our mutual aid work]. They start asking you for percentages. So much of these grant requests, these applications feel like so much math work that I have to do because that's how funders are still trying to figure out what the impacts are.

In this case, the interviewee felt confident that the mutual aid work she's doing in her community is having an impact, but that funders may not understand that impact without quantitative data. Another interviewee felt similarly, describing how donors ask her for this data at the application stage,

When you're doing the sales pitch, they actually want the data. They want to know what they're investing in, and how—what impact it's going to have, right. They want to know that their money is going to something where there's a gap, where it's going to make a significant difference... I mean, I think if I told them a story about an auntie whose life was transformed by our work, it'd be like, that's great, but that's one person. Especially when it comes to civic engagement work, a lot of funders are very much focused on data.

This interviewee spoke about how in her interactions with donors, qualitative stories have not been sufficient to gain support for her work. Another interviewee recounted how she felt some donors are very focused on quantitative results,

I think that we've worked really hard, and it's been—until pretty recently, it's sometimes been a struggle to talk about how this is slow, painful work. So much of the funding environment is focused on results, concrete results, quantitative when possible, and if

not, qualitative. Our work is not fast, and it builds. It really builds.

This interviewee felt that her organization's work was cumulative and relied on deep relationships in communities. While this work is ultimately what drives election results as well as policy and practice changes, it takes time to build, and these relationships may not be visible using traditional metrics. Another interviewee echoed how the relational work her organization does is not well-reflected in metrics,

How do you account for when you see [community members'] guards come down? That's a part of the transformation? Where someone would never speak out in public and they're giving speeches, they're telling their stories in front of the commissions office? What does it mean for us to have folks who are undocumented also stand up for their rights? Those are the transformative points in people's lives [that differ] from just the outputs. It's different from, did you pass a policy? Did you pass an ordinance? It's the small steps along the way that allow for folks to step into their full leadership as workers, as tenants, as everyday human beings. I'm interested at that point as well.

While in many cases, women and nonbinary leaders of color have elected to use traditional evaluation metrics in their work, as well as investing time and staff capacity in ensuring the necessary data are collected, this is not without cost. One interviewee described a deep frustration with the reporting requirements that come with even very small grants,

[Funders are] like, 'I need to be able to measure the impact. I need to know that you were able to feed 300 people, and 15% of them said in your evaluation that feeding them increased their health by this amount,

and that they've learned at least one new eating habit....,' and that all of this shit that just contributes to, you know, this narrative that funders have that in order to fund Black women and Black femmes and Black children, we've got to consistently be putting our pathology on display. Then we've got to turn around and tell you, 'Look at the ways in which I dismantled that pathology,' which is really nonsensical and asinine because it took us 300 years to get here. 'Do you think my $300,000 budget, with my four staff members, are going to undo all of that in a year with your $45,000 grant?'

This interviewee spoke about how metrics can feel condescending in the face of the multi-faceted struggles her community members face—for example the metric to develop one new habit places personal responsibility on community members for structural oppression. This interviewee felt that reporting on these types of statistics further stigmatizes historically marginalized people, while at the same time putting pressure on organizations to collect data that does not reflect the complex context in which oppression happens.

Another women of color interviewee spoke about the consequences she experienced from not using traditional metrics in her work,

...it was really degrading how [a prospective foundation donor] discussed our work, how they told us that we were thinking and moving. That was the only time that, in leadership in a funding space, had made us feel so low. I was listening to them, and I'm like, 'I hear what you're saying, and I hear why you're saying it. It's because the people who are giving you the resources to grant out need that quantitative data. They need to know that these are the numbers. These are the touchpoints. These are the targets. We just don't have that because the way we do our

Ms. FOUNDATION
FOR WOMEN

work is a little bit different.'...We don't move like [a mainstream civic engagement organization]. If we keep utilizing that structure, we're going to lose more and more and more civic participants because it's not working for us.

Another interviewee took this a step further to say that traditional metrics for civic engagement and voter registration that are utilized by mainstream and white-led organizations have not been delivering results in recent years, and as a result, she questioned their usefulness,

...[My organization and a partner organization] are going to take things into our own hands and really demand some space to lead in the coalition, and we brought young people of color from our communities to lobby their own representatives, and we flipped eight votes. Whereas [larger more mainstream organizations] are like, they send their lobbyist down to [city omitted], and they hope for the best. No. You do not hope for the best, and you don't have permanent friends in this game. You need to push people. You look at what's happening in [states omitted] with new voices and the number of Black women that are organizing and turning out to vote. They're the ones having impact. It's not the old—like the old white groups who think they're going to do the same old, same old.

In this case, the organization was successful at delivering election results, but many of their activities were not captured by traditional evaluation metrics.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color are expected to use traditional evaluation metrics to gain support for and report on their work to donors. However, these metrics often do not reflect the deep and relational work they're doing in communities. While many organiza-

tions have elected to collect this data, even when they're not reflective of their work, women and nonbinary leaders of color experience the burden of reporting in this way on the work they can do. At the same time, for those who are not able or choose not to collect quantitative data, there are consequences for the support they can get from donors. Several women and nonbinary leaders of color also spoke about how success in specific quantitative metrics related to civic engagement and voter registration may not be good indicators for election results.

## PERSUADING FOUNDATION DONORS TO UNDERSTAND RELATIONAL WORK

Women and nonbinary leaders of color describe the relational work they do in communities, including political education, social support, the provision of health services, assistance in times of crisis and personal relationship building. This work often requires a holistic and multi-issue approach and is a precursor to what donors may actually be interested in, such as changing policies, laws or practices. Interviewees described this relational work as undervalued or not well understood by foundation donors. Yet women and nonbinary leaders of color remain committed to doing this work, even though they do not receive adequate recognition or financial support.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color describe the needs and expectations they feel from their communities to approach them as people with complex lives and needs. One leader spoke about her work registering youth to vote and the push back she received when she tried to do this work without developing deep relationships,

A lot of our youth program folks [say], 'You call me when you want my vote, you call me when there's a bad bill at the [legislature] and you want me to go lobby...,—but, Where were you when my dad lost his job? Where were you when my mom got COVID? Did you call? Did you even care? Were you even aware?'... I think that as an organization—especially myself in this role—I feel like I need to start experimenting

with a lot of things, and I need to start telling funders the real story of what does it entail and what the funding should be for if we're going be doing organizing right. I think that a lot of people are all worked up with a van and the campaigns that we do, but it's just not efficient. I think that it's time that we figure something else out together.

This interviewee speaks to a different type of organizing that's needed in the communities where she works—one that takes the time to get to know her constituents holistically and doesn't only call on them when support is needed to change a law or policy. She alludes to a form of organizing that is rooted in care, but that she has been unable to describe to the foundation donors that support her work who are more focused on traditional campaigns and organizing strategies.

Other leaders spoke about what it means to work with historically excluded people—both the need to make space for trauma they have experienced, but also to meet their basic needs. One interviewee spoke about how her staff, who come from the communities they serve, experiences providing these services, and how it has been difficult for them to draw boundaries in the face of dire need,

Our teams, [are] mostly [people that have been] directly impacted. It's not a job. It's that people will not stop. People are working 70 hours a week nonstop, and, on the weekends, they're outside of the prison, and they're picking people up in the streets, so not knowing how to support the team to—you know, there's foundations—I won't say names because we love them—[saying], 'Oh, you guys should just work a four [day] work week…That must be nice, and how much do you guys make per year?' We have teams, like homeless staff, who are working 70 hours a week because it's their families and communities that are [in need of these services]…

This interviewee has been encouraged by foundation donors to work less and to enable her staff to work less, but she feels like this is not possible given their relationships in community and their personal commitment to address the need they see. Another interviewed echoed this sentiment, explaining how she is not able to do her work without addressing the social and economic needs faced by trans women of color,

> I can't organize trans women of color and not also deal with the high rates of homelessness...It doesn't mean that I essentially do that work, but it does mean that that work impacts my work, that those conditions impact us. What you find is, we had to craft a narrative that helped people understand the vastness of the work we were proposing to do, and that in order to do it, we felt we needed to do the work from the inside out versus from the outside in.

This leader is grappling with how to develop a narrative of the relational work she does in her communities to support folks whose basic needs are not met. Another leader spoke about navigating trauma in her community and how she works to create a space where healing might be possible,

> ...we do a woman's circle once a month on Thursday, which is more of a healing and peer support space. I would invest significantly in that space. Oh, yeah, the trauma that folks have experienced—we...are just surface healing. Let's breathe together. Let's talk about issues. I would definitely want folks to give folks the opportunity to do the deep work.

In addition to community needs and expectations, women and nonbinary leaders of color describe the disconnect they feel from foundation donors expecting specific activities or outcomes with the relational work they need to do on the ground to achieve those outcomes. Women and nonbinary leaders of color describe a focus by some foundation

donors on concrete outcomes like policy change and voter registration, with less understanding of the personal transformation process needed for individuals to start engaging in community organizing and identifying with social justice struggles. One interviewee spoke about her own observations on this disconnect,

> I feel like I'm so trained in, we register voters, we stop bad legislation...we know that that's what gets funded, but...what I've come to realize—at least this year—is that we don't get funded to support our community members. I feel like with my—my youth group...They're going through it. Their mental health is in shambles. One of them almost got committed. There's just so much going on, and I feel like such a hypocrite when I'm like, 'Let's talk about redistricting.' It's so important when I know firsthand that they're depressed, that they're having second thoughts.

This leader felt disingenuous encouraging her youth group to focus on political issues when members were facing mental health struggles. She felt pressure to only speak about the organizing wins donors were interested in, while being left with the profound support needed by the young people who are her constituents. Another leader had a similar experience, perceiving that donors were uninterested in the personal transformation process she sees as critical to interest and sustain young people in activist work, that foundation donors are only interested in specific campaigns,

> I think that the last thing I want to say about that is we've been trying to articulate [the relational work we do] to funders, the importance of it, and it is a difficult thing for us too because our experience is that funders want campaigns. Funders want meat. 'Look at these girls that are in their power, and they

did a group,' and not to diminish that because that's important too, but it is a process that's the most important, the process of transformation. At least, that's what we've seen, and that's what allows us to shut down juvenile hall and pass these laws. We know that those are incremental parts of the change, but, if we want to really reimagine something else... how do we get there long-term and at scale? It's through these slow processes.

This interviewee also made the point that foundation donors may not understand all the steps that go into a successful campaign and that the process may have a much longer arc than they imagine. Another woman of color leader went further to say that some foundation donors may not understand community organizing and all the intermediate steps it requires. She struggles to articulate what community organizing work looks like to donors, while meeting their expectations around outputs and outcomes,

I would also say, with funders who are not as familiar with organizing, it continues to be a struggle. They continue to want to...push you to do things that are specific activities...They can't quite grasp that organizing is long-term work. It's transformative work, that wins look different than outputs in terms of service delivery. I find myself [saying] we don't necessarily do that kind of work—reframing the work in ways that they can understand it...

Another leader spoke about how a lack of understanding of community mobilization processes has resulted in insufficient funding to reach her community, one that speaks many different languages,

We can't just run our organization in English and Spanish and then everybody's covered, right? We can't just do Korean. We can't just speak Chinese.

That's something that I'm interested in, but most funders are not. They want to fund the impact in the community, but they don't necessarily want to invest in the proper depth of funding. It's going to require us to do the work well to get there.

She has found that some donors are interested in economizing their investment in community mobilization, only funding the bare minimum needed to achieve policy change. She feels this is short-sighted given the importance of building a strong base that is ready to both proactively and reactively take on organizing campaigns as they emerge.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color describe their efforts at communicating with foundation donors about their multi-issue, multi-strategy work and the holistic approach they take to working with communities. They describe the response from some foundation donors as pro forma, they are interested in the outcomes, but not in the process to get there. One interviewee spoke about how she continues to tell foundation donors about how interrelated her programs are and how that is the best approach to work in her community, yet program officers frequently steer her back to the issue that reflects their strategy,

When we do meet with funders, we try to holistically let them know about all of our programs. Of course, they might just steer right back to climate or environmental or whatnot. We do try to grow that awareness of how they're holistic and interrelated, and that we actually can't have justice in one without the other.

Another interviewee had a similar experience, while she is not able to separate the issues that impact her community, she has found that some foundation donors have not fully understood what that means. This leaves her with a feeling that her work is being fractured into distinct parts instead of being seen holistically,

When I talk about the work, I talk about it from a cumulative space. You can't talk—how can I talk about a woman's centered issue and not talk about healthcare, climate, environment, reproductive healthcare...I don't separate those. I think it's all in how you tell the story. They [foundations] get to pick and choose what they say. It's more pronounced to them. I'm not—we are not fractured. We are not fractions. At the end of the day, if we're people centered, we're centering just what's bothering us.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color juggle expectations from their communities about how they would like to be seen as whole people before they're willing to dedicate time and energy to social justice struggles. They have also found that it is difficult for people without access to resources to engage in political struggles without having their basic needs met and/or addressing their very real experiences of trauma. These dynamics are especially acute for leaders and staff who work in their own communities.

Yet interviewees describe interactions with foundation donors where they remain focused on specific outcomes, such as policy change or voter registration, without recognizing the other activities it takes to make that work happen. In addition, women and nonbinary leaders of color have tailored their programming to reflect the multitude of issues their communities experience. While many have shared this approach with foundation donors, they have not been met with a response that reflects an understanding of their communities' needs and funding support for the relational work they do. One interviewee spoke about the importance of being rooted in faith and hope, and cultivating radical joy in the work, and while she hasn't been met with opposition from foundation donors, she questions whether foundation donors really understand,

...understanding that none of us can do this work of organizing, or policy change, of subverting these

systems, right, of direct services, if we're not rooted in faith and in hope. That comes from being able to cultivate radical joy. Therefore radical joy, in and of itself, for Black people, particularly for Black women and femmes, is radical. I think all the funders are like, [clapping] 'Yay!' I don't know if they all believe that...'

# UNDERINVESTMENT HAS IMPACT AT MULTIPLE LEVELS–INDIVIDUAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, ECOSYSTEM AND DEMOCRACY.
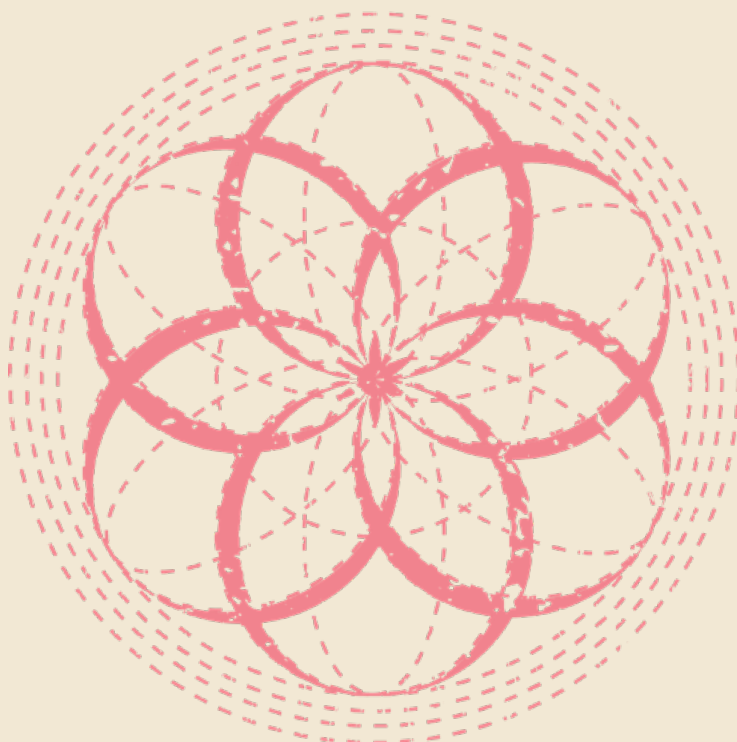
## DEDICATING LIMITED FUNDS TO OTHERS

Women and nonbinary leaders of color also describe making difficult decisions with limited funds, including hard decisions between paying themselves and others, as well as paying staff and paying for programs and services. Some describe compromising their own earnings to better compensate staff or community members, while others feel guilt and sadness for not being able to fairly compensate staff or community volunteers. The structure of philanthropic disinvestment and under-investment in women and nonbinary leaders of color impacts them on a personal level, introducing chronic stress by making it difficult for leaders to do the work in a way that aligns with the way they would like to value themselves and their staff. Despite this, women and nonbinary leaders of color also expressed a strong desire to provide a good working environment for staff, which they acknowledge goes beyond compensation. One interviewee said,

> To me, I think what I gained from it is how important leadership is and not just in the way of let's make sure we have a budget and everybody has everything they need to work, but how important it is for my staff to feel that they're cared about and that this is not a nonprofit where we just care about what we produce, but we care about the people that we work with.

This interviewee speaks about how important caring about workers is to the social change they would like to see in the world. Yet, leaders also recognized that the inability to pay staff fairly for their work also impacts who they're able to hire, as well as the well-being of their current staff. One interviewee described how she has kept her own wages low in order to better compensate those who work alongside her,

> I still coincidentally happen to be the lowest-paid person on staff so that we can give our staff members, who oftentimes have to weather, you know, being paid late if a grant has not come in correctly.

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This interviewee also points out how a dependence on grant funding that sometimes arrives late leads to her being unable to pay her staff on time. Leaders also described challenges raising sufficient funds to pay staff adequately,

> We talk about economic inequity, and I say that that's at the top [of my priorities]...and then I'm not paying the Black women that are working with us their value, their worth because I don't have it, but they're doing the work as if they were being paid the value of their work. That's hard. Yeah, that part is really hard and not being able to bring people on that I know are incredible. I've lost some incredible people. [organization name] would be a completely different organization if I had the ability to hire the staff that I need to hire. It would be completely out of the stratosphere.

This interviewee feels dissonance in her ability to live her values when she can't pay staff a dignified wage. At the same time, she recognizes how low pay has prevented her from hiring staff with the skills and capacities she needs and how this has impacted her organization. Another interviewee spoke about how she has been forced to hire contract workers instead of staff with benefits because of budget constraints,

> If I'm honest, even having this conversation is a little bit rough, though, because—right now, I don't have the resources to pay staff. I have the resources to pay contract work, but not long-term staff because I'm not going to offer up a job if I know it's not going to be resourced, and I just can't promise anything.

This interviewee describes not having the resources to hire full-time staff with benefits as a challenge, but also the inability to plan for her organization in a sustainable way. However, women and nonbinary leaders of color also describe how they're able to advocate for resourc-

es. One interviewee spoke about her own journey requesting resources for staff from donors,

> I've had to really push myself in the last two years to dive into the discomfort of moving numbers or advocating for even decent wages for us. Things like that have been a big learning curve. I think that there are conversations to be had in our community about the trauma that comes with money and poverty and for those of us who are coming from communities— from the communities that we want to serve and if we're talking about equity and having those folks lead who've been most impacted.

This leader described her own struggle asking for the funding she needs to support her team, including the impact of making do with little or no resources on historically marginalized communities. Another leader recognized that philanthropy is built on oppressive structures and assumptions and may not be the source of liberation for those working for justice,

> I'm supporting someone else, a mentee 10 years younger than me...I've even had very blunt conversations with her about this project because, again, because we understand it's a nonprofit industrial complex. We can't expect our oppressors or the systems that be to fund the things that are going to be about our liberation. I have these conversations with her and I tell her, I'm scared about mentoring her into a life of being broke because I've been broke forever. It's not like there is any safety or security in the type of work that we want to do... For the first five years...I didn't pay myself. I paid everybody else, and so this was heart work. This was not something that was paying my bills.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color expressed frustration with not having the necessary resources to support the staff they need to do the work. Short-term, restricted grants have resulted in an inability to recruit and retain skilled staff. Women and nonbinary leaders of color also describe compromising themselves in order to compensate their staff. While they continue to advocate for the resources they need, some recognize the need for systemic change in the nonprofit sector.

## SYSTEMIC RACISM IN PHILANTHROPY

Women and nonbinary leaders of color describe their experiences of systemic racism in their philanthropic relationships, such as the need to mask their true feelings or reactions to make foundation staff more comfortable and/or to not jeopardize funding for their work. Although many white foundation staff may be working towards allyship, working across power dynamics in funding relationships can create an environment where attitudes of white saviorism or behavior that exemplifies white fragility may go unaddressed. Navigating this complicated terrain puts an added strain on women and nonbinary leaders of color, who frequently describe feeling drained after interacting with foundation donors.

Interviewees describe the need to put a face on for donors to raise money to support their work. At times, they feel their interactions with donors are transactional, and they cannot be their authentic selves. One interviewee said,

> I think that's part of the issue that we deal with in people who are seeking dollars is we have to mask. The work is about disrobing and unmasking. I don't want to have to come mask up, because then that means that I am not being authentic or true to the work.

This interviewee spoke about "masking" in her interactions with donors, and how she felt that this ultimately prevented her from being true and authentic to the work. In some cases interviewees described emphasizing areas of the work they thought would be of interest to
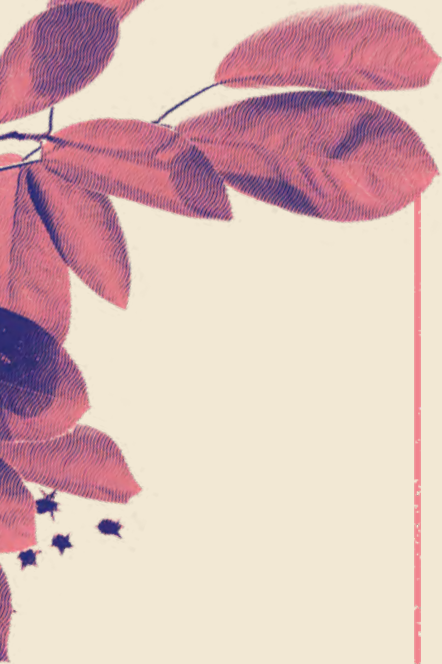
donors, while de-emphasizing others they felt were critical to the work. In other cases, women and nonbinary leaders of color described playing down or omitting challenges they face in their work as they were afraid donors would reduce or withdraw support. One interviewee described the face she uses to interact with donors as a way to protect the community members she works with from the donor gaze,

> I have to keep that persona up because I have to protect the women that we're working with. I have to protect anybody that jumps on board. I've got to protect myself. I've got to protect my kids... I'm watching Black women that are pushing the envelope, and are not able to be safe and to sit there and have to beg—because it is so degrading.

She experienced the masking process as degrading, feeling that she was put in a position of begging for resources, both for herself and for others. Another interviewee echoed this sentiment of performing for resources,

> If I could just be the most transparent, I think—I don't know why it's making me emotional. I'm sorry. My skill is a hustler. That's how I survived on the streets. I sold dope. I sold my body. I know how to put on a show. I know how to move people to do what I want to do, and I'm not saying I'm inauthentic, but, in my core, I'm that awkward, don't know how to make new friends, 'don't actually have that many friends' person. It's been easy for me, once I was able to get over my fear of people with money, but I had to orient myself to 'This is a game.' Not literally these are tricks, but like this is what you have to do for your folks. As we've gotten bigger, our budget was $500,000 the year I started, $6.6 million right now.

In this case, the interviewee had experienced the donor-grantee relationship as transactional—that it feels like a game she is playing,

as opposed to garnering genuine and authentic support for her work.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color also describe their concern with and sensitivity to how donors approach them. They spoke about sensing a white saviorism about the work—that donors were supporting them not from a place of equity or justice, but from a place driven by the desire to "rescue" others or to feel good about themselves. One interviewee said,

> Then there are those funders who they—let me just be honest. They come in with their white saviorism. They're very transactional. They're extractive. It makes it very difficult to do the work. It's a hindrance to the work. It's also—it's not a good place to be.

This interviewee spoke about how white saviorism by donors actually compromises her ability to do the work in a good way—when she has to put energy into masking and performing, it also threatens her ability to develop authentic relationships with community members.

Interviewees also described the emotional labor they put into working to manage donor feelings, including the sense that their personal relationships with program officers impacted whether or not they were funded, as much or more than the quality of their work,

> White fragility is partially about how people get overwhelmed so easily. Learning how much funding is about people's feelings. That's the part that infuriates me. That in the process of saying, 'Hey. We need our own space to do our own work,' and during the fundraising part it takes me—as the main person who does that for our group—it takes me out of that safety that I am trying to create to hold for my community. I have to go back. Not to dehumanize anybody, but like I'm in the lion's den [laughter] all the time. Just knowing that it's based on whether people like you or not. Black women are put on trial

all the time; people focus on our personalities rather than our work; whether we give them the warm fuzzies or not.

In this case, the interviewee, a Black woman, felt that her personality was being judged by donors. Like the previous interviewee, she experienced this as dehumanizing in a way that impacted how she is able to do her work.

The consequences of transactional relationships with funders went beyond compromising women and nonbinary leaders of color's ability to do the work. One interviewee described how she felt the need to perform for donors also impacted the social justice work her organization could do in the world,

> When it's transactional, it then blocks the ability to achieve real social change, or to have people feel like they have ownership and power, or that they're even trusting. It lands this big blob of community trauma that people find themselves wallowing in when you have a funder who only wants to direct the traffic and not know the people. People are tired of that.

Donors' desires to "direct traffic" and not truly "know the people" may not be something program officers can immediately relate to in their own relationships with their grantees, but it's a critical element to pay attention to given the emotional toll it takes on women and nonbinary leaders of color. Another interviewee spoke about the time and effort she has put into learning the language of donors, a skill she felt she had to develop over time as it was not intuitive,

> I think that's been the bigger thing is I think it doesn't feel like I can be this raw or authentic. I also don't want to put myself in a situation where I'm tokenizing myself. That's not it either...as a woman of color in this position, I do recognize that the barriers that I experience trying to learn these systems

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> or navigate this role comes with added pressure because of my positionality in the world, and because I'm also trying to navigate COVID just like everyone else.

Ultimately, women and nonbinary leaders of color feel they have to put on a face for donors that is not authentic to themselves or the work they do. They also spend time learning the language of donors that will gain them support for their work, as well as putting in emotional labor into their relationships with donors, including expressing gratitude and overlooking microaggressions. These dynamics are often hidden from program officer-grantee relationships and ultimately have consequences for the health and wellbeing of women and nonbinary leaders of color, as well as the justice work they can do in the world. It is critical that donors become aware of these dynamics and actively work to mitigate them.

## FOUNDATION RELATIONSHIPS REQUIRE EMOTIONAL LABOR

Women and nonbinary leaders of color describe the toll of navigating philanthropic landscapes that are permeated with distrust, where their competence and authority are often questioned.

Women and nonbinary people of color interviewees describe putting emotional labor into securing resources to support their work, and some feel that their efforts do not result in commensurate financial support from foundation donors. One significant source of stress that women and nonbinary leaders of color experience in their work is figuring out how to pitch their work to foundation donors; several describe being left with the impression that foundation donors do not understand their work or take them seriously. One interviewee spoke about a complex process she underwent to get a small grant and the time and effort it took from her and her team,

> Then there were some grants that we actively went after and won, and actually did like a whole pitch presentation for $12,500...That takes a lot of capacity

to get that together, to get your team together, to put together a [slide] deck...Then this particular pitch, they were very, very, very, transparent about the fact that they were going to be rigid about time. You've got 10 minutes to tell us this; and then we're going to have 5 minutes of asking questions...'We will cut you off at that time whether you're finished or not.' It was for $12,500 that they were disbursing in two disbursements. This is not unusual for us though. We've often been made to jump through these types of hoops for less than $100,000. We prepare for these things. We take them all very seriously.

This interviewee spoke about an inflexible interaction with a foundation donor, where she had to carefully plan everything she would say in the time allotted. While she is willing to do this in order to gain support for her work, her recounting of the situation reveals how she felt her own dignity was compromised in this situation, for what would result in a very small amount of support. Another interviewee described a similar experience preparing pitches, where she works painstakingly to prepare and streamline the content,

We're all about trauma to transformation, and the question about how we pitch our work—it is, to some extent, really complicated. It is complex, and I really strive to streamline what that pitch is... I try to simplify that in a way that makes sense, and using charts and—I don't know. I don't know. It's [an] opportunity because you have to really hustle, so it's my job to do a lot of that stuff.

While this interviewee understands it's part of her job to raise money, whatever that entails, she also alludes to the fact that pitching her work can feel compromising to herself and the communities where she works. She wants to uphold the dignity of community members, while also recognizing foundation donors' desire for a story that reveals their prob-

lems and personal transformations as a result of their funding, which in reality may not be a linear process. Another leader added to this point in describing her own experience of being a member of a community that lacks sufficient resources and the stakes of fundraising when it also impacts your own livelihood and those of the people you love,

> That has been one of the toughest parts on the job... having to worry about how [the pitch to a foundation donor] is going to land; knowing that you're talking to folks who don't know what it's like to be in your shoes...I had to learn how to, while being stressed out and just struggling—not having a salary, doing this work while I'm not having my own personal amusement. I felt the need to not convey how dire my own situation was...Then having responsibility for finding resources not just for myself but also my collaborators. You can't say—I won't say, 'can't.' There is a huge risk in letting people know, 'By the way, while we're doing this life-saving work, I'm fighting for my own life right now.' Because you don't want a guilt grant. Not really.

Another interviewee spoke about how she feels traumatized by the experience of fundraising from foundation donors,

> I named being traumatized and obviously it didn't get glazed over a little bit, but I want to underscore that it has been traumatic. It's been traumatic trying to get funded.

Despite the stress interviewees experienced when pitching their work to foundation donors, interviewees spoke about how they're working to be honest with foundations, speaking truth to power even when it could jeopardize their funding. One interviewee said,

> I'll be honest, I approach conversations with philanthropy in two ways. One, very honest and

true. Secondly, accountability. Because how can philanthropy be held accountable if [I] diminish my conversation. I'm not quick to pounce on funders. In those meetings if the opportunity arises, I will speak to the lack of [candid conversation], and why we can't speak about certain things.

Once relationships with foundation donors are established, interviewees described the time and energy they put into maintaining those relationships, including mitigating harmful things donors have done that have impacted their work. Women and nonbinary leaders of color described the labor they put into how they have conversations with foundation donors, deliberately asking for what they need, while also recognizing the history of disinvestment,

This isn't a simple just 'give them more money.' It's so systemic in terms of the damage done for women of color, in particular. So damaging. The place we're in now, I know it's a lot of what I do, definitely. I am much more unapologetic about my ask. I'm more unapologetic because I know too much now. I know more.

This interviewee speaks about how she knows more about the foundation sector and its impact on women of color and historically excluded people. She describes the strain of maintaining relationships with program officers at foundations in this context. Another interviewee described her own and colleagues' experiences tailoring language for foundation donors, something they have to do during the initial pitch, but also throughout the relationship,

We talk about our larger vision...what is relevant to [our] campaign, based on who we're talking to. Is it research? Is it a funder that's super interested in what we're going to win in the next two years [then we emphasize that]? We just have a lot of conversations [within our organization] about code-

switching more broadly, and folks on our team all have different experiences with it. Most folks are really good at [code switching in conversations with foundation program staff].

Another leader described a situation where she has been less successful recruiting and maintaining relationships with foundation donors,

[I] sometimes feeling so defeated after certain conversations, I would ask why have them. It's me trying to negotiate how I'm feeling, and how much of me do I have to expose to constantly just receive small amounts, or [be] told, 'Well, we really support it, but not right now.' Then you don't support it. The seed of the conversation is fine, but if you just plant a seed on dry ground, it just blows away...

This interviewee has felt that foundation donors are interested in talking to her, but the energy she has put into those conversations, often revealing personal information about herself, have ultimately not resulted in funding. When she shares personal information about herself and her community, the rejection of not receiving support, financial or otherwise, takes a particular emotional toll. Experiencing this dynamic repeatedly with funders has been especially draining for her in her work.

## FOUNDATION ACTIONS CAN HARM ORGANIZATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

Women and nonbinary people of color interviewees also describe emotional labor that resulted from the actions of foundation donors in their sector and/or with peer organizations in their ecosystem. While harmful impacts of foundation donor actions are often unintended, they have resulted in women and nonbinary leaders of color putting in additional emotional labor to resolve a situation created by donor actions or funding choices. One interviewee described an ecosystem assessment undertaken by a foundation donor,

> [One foundation was] investing in a process to understand what the needs of the ecosystem were, but then not following through with funds. That was very frustrating because everyone that participated was under the impression that there was a firm commitment that there were going to be funds, but at one point, it seemed like, 'Oh, thank you for participating in this two-year or three-year process. We're going to think about it. We're going to discuss.' Yeah. That was really hard.

This interviewee invested a lot of time in helping the foundation understand the landscape of her work, yet that did not result in a funding commitment for her organization or for others doing similar work. Another interviewee described her experience with a foundation donor that wanted to control her decisions about how to manage her organization; when the donor didn't like the decision she made, they withdrew the funding,

> I had a funder who was in a three-year agreement with me, and then halfway through the first year decided that they didn't like my personnel decision, and cut my funding in half for no other apparent reason than they didn't like [a] personnel decision [I made]. I [said], 'Can you tell me based on our work what'—they're like, 'Oh, you met all your goals, but we just don't think you have strong enough leaders, or you transitioned somebody out, and we think they were the person to lead the program.'...'Do you say that to [bigger organizations]?' I think there is more of this paternalizing of [women of color-led] organizations because supposedly we don't know what we're doing because we're new rather than seeing the impact we're having.

This interviewee attributes the questioning of her management decisions to a lack of confidence in her as a woman of color leader of a newer organization. Managing doubt from foundation donors about decisions made by women and nonbinary leaders of color was another source of anxiety for these leaders. Finally, interviewees described how foundation donors' funding decisions can have an impact on the relationships between organizations in an ecosystem. One interviewee said,

> I really want to challenge the people in philanthropy and also private donors...At the end of the day you are really being divisive to us. You are putting a little money there, and you are making us fight against each other, look at each other as competitors, and miss the common goal of reshaping and redeveloping this model of what philanthropy [can] look like, and also making sure that these reparations, quote/unquote, which you are giving us are intentional.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color invest time and energy into pitching their work to foundation donors and maintaining relationships with foundation donors that already support them. These efforts take place in the context of systemic racism that has implications for the emotional labor required of women and nonbinary leaders of color individually, as well as the impact of foundation donor actions on their organizations and the movement(s) in which they work. The personal cost of weighing complex decisions about how to represent their work and their communities respectfully, while also appealing to foundation donors is exhausting. Even relationships with foundation donors that are overwhelmingly positive require emotional labor.

Foundation donors may also take actions that impact women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations on the ground acutely, such as asking them to provide in-depth information about their ecosystem, questioning their decisions and stoking competition between allied organizations where it otherwise wouldn't exist. These are important dynamics for well-intentioned foundation donors to be cognizant of, as they take a toll on women and nonbinary people of color-led organiza-

tions and their staff and also detract from the substance of their work.

## WOMEN AND NONBINARY LEADERS OF COLOR ARE BURNED OUT

Women and nonbinary leaders of color described profound experiences of overwork and burnout. At times interviewees connected these feelings to dealing with COVID-19 and responding to racial justice uprisings, but more often they recounted unrealistic expectations that landed on their shoulders from both work and personal responsibilities. Feelings of burnout were also deeply tied to their identities as women and nonbinary people of color and the emotional consequences of witnessing oppression,

> How I could do this work in a way that was emotionally safe for me, and non-traumatizing, and not also retraumatizing others...I think Black people have been beat up so bad, and me being a single mom having two Black male sons, I was just like Edward Scissorhands that come and had lacerated my heart for this work. I just needed to go and get it sewn back together.

This interviewee described how worrying about her Black sons motivated her to do justice work, while at the same time, it made it difficult for her to preserve her own heart in the face of the hardship experienced by others. Another interviewee shared how her personal experiences of street harassment added layers of stress on top of her work responsibilities,

> I personally have, and I know a number of our staff—in fact, we were talking about this a lot at the beginning of last year, was just the increased level of harassment we were experiencing on the streets. I've personally been verbally attacked when I had my daughter out with me on a walk in the middle of the day. I had this man chasing us down the block telling us to go the F home and take our China virus back with us and

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> go home and stop spreading China virus walking around the neighborhood...Incessantly yelling at me down the street when I was out on a walk with my daughter. I've had people throw rocks at me while I was out running...It's just layer upon layer of stress.

This interviewee's personal experience of anti-Asian harassment added layers of stress on top of what she was trying to negotiate related to her organization's own COVID-19 response and programming.

For a number of interviewees, burnout was also a practical issue—working long hours, not being able to ask for help and a lack of meaningful benefits and supports left women and nonbinary leaders of color drained and frustrated. One interviewee shared her own experience of burnout,

> I'm coming out of a hard burnout. I'm coming out of a really, really hard burnout. I had gotten to a point where I was working from 5 a.m. 'til 2 a.m. every day for a good four months. I couldn't even have a conversation with my kids that was healthy. I'm type one diabetic, and it was December of last year that my doctor told me that I am quickly on my way out if I don't just pause. I took December off last year, and I said, 'I'm just taking care of my health.' That lasted for a month...Because we're structured the way we are, I have no health insurance. My kids don't have health insurance.

For this interviewee, overwork was compounded by not being able to take time off or access health insurance for herself and her family, which ultimately led to a health crisis. Interviewees also spoke about the collective crisis women and nonbinary people of color are experiencing related to burnout—they are not able to support one another as everyone is in crisis right now. One interviewee said,

> I'm an emotional wreck, a little bit, right now because it's been a tough space the last few months, [I'm] not

going to lie. It's been a tough space. It's been hard to talk to people who really understand because the other Black women that know this space are feeling the exact same thing, so it's mutual exhaustion. We're talking about mutual frustration, but at the same time, we're not able to really hold each other because it's like, 'Baby, I'm tired too. Let's drink.'

Another leader echoed this sentiment—she did not want to ask for help from colleagues for fear of overburdening them. She pushed herself so hard, prioritizing work over other things in her life; she described not being able to be present for her family and new baby,

Holding on too much, like doing a lot of work, not wanting to ask for help because I know my colleagues are super busy too. Feeling that I had to do a lot on my own and not relying on a team or not sharing, 'This is too much for me. I need help.' I've [asked for help] when I'm like, I absolutely cannot hold it, but I am the type of person that will push, push, push, push until I can't. I think that's something that I will definitely not do. These are hard questions. I think, many times, having to give my baby and my family my tired self and not my restful self, so in some senses, prioritizing the work.

Another interviewee also spoke about the personal sacrifices she has made that have contributed to her burnout,

I think that's something that, again, because of my limited capacity as a new mom, I have had to sacrifice, and I feel that, within the work that I am doing, but also just within my own values and my desires on how to do the work. I think I will also say, advocate more for yourself. Speaking for myself, I think I have internalized...oppression and colonialism

a lot. I'm thinking that being humble means to sacrifice myself.

This interviewee's words reveal what is happening in her psyche when she overworks—she has taken on white supremacist expectations about how she should approach her work, including that nothing she ever does is enough. Speaking about this left her feeling vulnerable and emotional.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color responded to burnout in different ways depending on their mindset on the day of the interview, the supports they had in place and the degree and duration of overwork they had experienced—some expressed hopeful aspirations about the potential to take care of themselves, while others related experiences of crisis and unsustainability. One interviewee spoke frankly about whether she thought she could continue this work and what would happen to her organization if she could not,

I'll be honest in that I am growing very, very close to [organization name omitted] not being around in the next couple of years. I don't have the capacity to do it by myself. I'm doing fundraising and the work and the ideation and the programming.

Another interviewee described her own process of reflecting on how she could do this work in a more sustainable way, recognizing that the emotional toll of witnessing loss and grief amongst her constituents led to her own experiences of secondary trauma,

My expectation was that I would leave the work because I felt like social justice had betrayed us, or I felt betrayed by social justice. I was heavy. I was tired. I got tired of seeing...Black pain, Black death. I just got tired...that's when I started looking more deeply around the loss and the grief, and really rethinking how we could do this work. How I could do this work

> in a way that was emotionally safe for me, and non-traumatizing, and not also retraumatizing others.

This interviewee also acknowledged how her own experiences of secondary trauma were impacting others she worked with, taking action to address her own burnout so she can better show up for herself and others.

Interviewees also described proactive actions they have taken to address their own burnout and put the supports in place needed to draw boundaries and take care of themselves. One interviewee described joining a group of other Black professionals and organizers to get support,

> I was able to become part of a community of other Black professionals and organizers...where we thought about ways to support one another. We talked a lot about also what it meant to step back from this work: to not feel like you constantly have to be in this hamster wheel of funding and grant reports and programming and all those other kind of stuff. Right? That it was okay for us to redefine the timetables in which we will get this work done. That was very helpful.

Part of addressing burnout for this interviewee and others was to redefine what is expected from them, to take a step back from unrealistic expectations and center what is really important.

 Women and nonbinary leaders of color describe a complicated and multi-layered relationship with burnout and overwork. Their personal ties to the work drive them to overextend themselves, along with the external pressure they receive from their staff and communities. Burnout has impacted their health and families, as well as threatened the sustainability of the work they do and the existence of the organizations they run. They are often not in a place to support one another, as everyone is experiencing similar stresses. Many women

and nonbinary leaders of color have thought extensively about their own experiences of burnout, with some finding actions they can take to mitigate the harm. Several women and nonbinary leaders of color describe burnout as a drain to their energetic potential—it reduces the time they have to think about vision and strategy and diverts their attention in ways that may compromise their effectiveness. Without more holistic efforts to support leaders with rest, healing justice, and sustainably fund their work, burnout will likely continue and diminish the impact their work can have.

## WOMEN AND NONBINARY PEOPLE OF COLOR-LED ORGANIZATIONS ARE NOT FUNDED TO WIN

Women and nonbinary leaders of color describe a variety of barriers to securing stable and sustainable funding to support their broader vision. As Ash-Lee Henderson pointed out, foundations have pledged billions to racial equity, yet only a paltry amount of those pledges are reaching grassroots movements. This has occurred despite the fact that many legislative and organizing wins can be directly attributed to the efforts of grassroots organizations, many of which are led by women and nonbinary people of color. She and others have called on philanthropy to "fund us like you want us to win."

Interviewees describe grants that have stagnated in size, where regardless of how they have performed in the past, or the work to be done in the future, they receive the same amount of funding. In some cases, women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations described being asked to do more work with fewer resources. Several interviewees shared their observations that white-led organizations funded by the same foundation were able to secure larger grants. Stagnant funding from a limited number of foundations that invest in women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations left interviewees challenged to grow their organizations, attract quality staff and respond to opportunities and threats in the landscape.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color described getting smaller grants

and working hard to ensure they performed well on the grant deliverables, in many cases, exceeding expectations. One interviewee said,

> The other thing I'll say is, we took advantage of those smaller dollar amounts. We didn't bemoan it. I worked to make sure we had wins. We were getting $10,000 and $5,000 and $25,000. We delivered on what we said we were going to do, and in most instances, we exceeded that.

While this interviewee describes working hard with few resources, other interviewees also spoke about how overperforming on smaller grants led to a crisis in competency, where they had to navigate the tension between demonstrating their abilities to donors by performing well on small grants and reckoning with how small grants are not sufficient to adequately support the organization and its staff. One interviewee said,

> I think this is one of the tricky parts in seeking funding is finding that balance between showing how much we can do and how much we're doing and all the good work that we're doing and, at the same time, say, this is not sustainable. This is not a rational way to have an organization work and, therefore, we need more support. I think we've found that really tricky.

Another interviewee echoed this sentiment that performing well with small amounts of money can be a trap—donors begin to expect this kind of return on investment without reflecting on whether it's sustainable. One interviewee spoke about how a donor came to her expecting that her organization could reach large numbers of people through one small grant,

> We began a long game. We had to do some convincing to some funders who wanted quick results. 'I wanna be able to give you 20—' Plus, they were giving small amounts. 'I want to be able to

give you this $25,000. I want you to be really happy about this $25,000, and I want you to deliver 5,000 people for me.' I'm exaggerating a little bit, but not a lot, right? We were getting the least amount of money, and they were expecting the greatest kind of outcomes from us.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color describe an underlying mistrust they experience in their relationships with foundation donors. Several spoke about the importance of having a credible messenger to speak about the work. Interviewees also asserted their frustration that women and people of color aren't seen as credible messengers who can identify the resources needed and steward them accordingly.

...you mentioned earlier about what is the impact, or what do Black women and women of color experience when they are talking to people in philanthropic spaces. You do find yourself in every space having to explain, first of all, yourself as a credible messenger. Someone who can be trusted beyond the $25,000 to $30,000 amount that they want to give for funding, and the need for work such as this to be multi-year, not just a one and done.

At the end of the day, the very same way that these larger organizations who are trusted and are doing the boots on the ground work, that the voices of Black women and women of color should be trusted [by donors]. We should be seen as credible messengers. Because our lived experiences are lived experience. Nobody gets to tell the story. Nobody gets to tell it as powerfully as I can.

The first interviewee describes how she feels her organization receives small grants in part because she is not trusted with larger, longer-term

grants due to being women of color-led. The second interviewee states that women and people of color should be trusted by donors, as their credibility should be derived from their lived experience in impacted communities and their ability to share this with donors.

Interviewees ultimately spoke about the impact of being under-resourced on them personally, as well as on their organizations of not being trusted by donors and not being able to raise money to sustainably support their activities. One interviewee spoke about her own fundraising efforts, traveling to meet with donors who expected her to continue work that was not adequately supported. During this interview, she spoke about her own doubts about how and whether her organization would survive, despite generating lots of positive attention and new donors to the work, as the majority of grants were small,

> There's an expectation of $3 million worth of work to be done for $100,000. I even did a Hail Mary tour this last couple months, and I just threw resources, and I went around, outside of [our state], trying to encourage face-to-face conversations with people with resources.

Other interviewees disclosed how hard it has been for them to cultivate relationships with foundation donors. One interviewee spoke about how she felt her first larger grant came not because of the work she was doing, but because of a personal connection she had,

> ...The learning curve has been how to...put ourselves out there in these spaces because philanthropy and foundation work I think has been [difficult to establish]—just developing and cultivating relationships has been really hard in the first five years of our inception. We haven't actually been able to get resources, bigger resources until this last year for some of our work [and]...we even learned about [name of foundation donor omitted] through [a] personal connection.

Another interviewee spoke about how she has experienced less room for error for women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations. She sees larger organizations getting sizable grants without delivering the intended results. She feels foundation donors expect far more from her organization than they do these larger organizations, yet they give her far fewer resources to accomplish her goals,

> There's less room for error for organizations like us [women of color-led groups] than there is for...these bigger groups. I see how much money they get to do certain projects, and I'm like, 'Are you kidding me?' It's unbelievable what they—how much they get paid to do...if they gave me that much money, I could've done five times more work than they did, right? Not to be so capitalist about it, but...the expectation is that I would perform five times more than the white-led organizations are.

While women and nonbinary people of color interviewees were reluctant to compare their funding situations with that of others, they had an underlying sense that both expectations and grant sizes differed for white-led organizations as compared to those led by women and nonbinary people of color. Two interviewees shared their sense of being under-funded for the amount of work they're doing,

> It's hard when you watch white-led orgs just easily make a call [and get more resources], and...not do anywhere near the amount of work and not anywhere near the amount of innovation.

> ...what used to offend me was when I saw the work that many women of color was doing, oh my god. Then I saw the work—and no slight. They're doing what they were hired to do, but saw the work that my white, gay, male counterparts were doing, it offended me in the beginning. The offense came because the

gap was obscene. It's one thing if you're making a little more money. It's another thing when you're talking about $100-, $200,000 more coming to an individual that is doing good work, but can we not balance the scale just a little bit?

Getting smaller grants ultimately keeps women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations from growing sustainably. It makes it difficult for them to recruit and retain talented staff and it has a direct impact on the salaries of their employees. One interviewee addressed this disparity directly,

I'm just curious, and I haven't done this research, but I'm interested in knowing how much people in white-led organizations...earn compared to organizations led by people of color, and then comparing men-led and women-led...I have the sense that we're not compensated fairly for all the amount of work that we do...if we earn larger salaries, it will have an impact in our budget...I'm curious about just the role that funders have in that as well.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color also spoke about how difficult it is to get an increase in grant size or duration once they've established a relationship with a foundation program officer. Interviewees spoke about how any increases they get from foundations supporting their work are minimal or nonexistent, even when it's common knowledge that the foundation provides larger grants.

I would say with existing funders, there is a sense of, okay, you're doing good work, but there isn't, like, oh, you're doing so good. Let me double up on

my investment because...—you'll do twice as much, right? I'm not getting any of that. Any increase we get is pretty minimal. Based on what I know they give to some of these bigger organizations, what they give us is a drop in the bucket...

Then what happens is we end up in somebody's portfolio forever. You get stuck in a rut. That's one of the things that I think about a lot. 'Am I going to be stuck at $300,000 for another [X years]...Like I was stuck at $80,000 for almost 10 years of doing this work.'

It's been a while [since a donor increased the size of a grant they give to us]. It did happen. Like our first funder, who continues to fund us, started off with 75,000 a year, and at one point—I can't remember when, but it's been a while—increased that support to 100,000. It has happened, but it hasn't happened in a while. I know that they give much larger grants to some other organizations.

Ultimately, women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations do not feel trusted by foundations, nor do they feel funded in a way that would support them to achieve their goals. Many feel bound by both proving their competence and advocating for the resources they need to do the work. Interviewees felt that there was little to no margin for error in their relationships with foundations donors and that their expectations outpaced the resources available, while at the same time they exceeded what is expected for white-led organizations. Women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations also described stagnating support from foundations, regardless of the quality or quantity of their work. Several had the sense that white-led or men-led organizations are provided with more resources to do less work. The result of these funding behaviors by foundation donors is that women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations are prevented from

growing, even when they have already demonstrated that they can do more work and have more impact.

*Healing justice is a strategy*
*to remedy this underinvestment.*

## INVESTMENTS IN SURVIVAL AND WELLNESS

Women and nonbinary leaders of color spoke about a desire and commitment to prevent burnout for their staff and promote health and wellness. This includes organizational investments in healing justice, such as staff members or contractors hired to coordinate or offer wellness services for staff, as well as flexible and expansive remote work and time off policies for staff. Leaders described both formal and structural efforts that are embedded in an organization's policies and procedures, as well as informal or ad hoc ones, that may be short-term, one-off or targeted to a particular staff member. One leader spoke about her own commitment to taking care of her staff,

> I really try to take care of my team, and people often ask me about this as a manager because we have so much talent. We have amazing, brilliant people who are doing amazing, brilliant work. It's only fair to take care of them, and it's only fair to expect that reciprocity. You know? I'm not going to risk my team with anything less. They just deserve better. We've deserved better for a long time.

This leader also places herself amongst her team members when she says "we've deserved better." Another leader echoed this thought, drawing a connection to social justice workers taking care of them-selves as a form of resisting oppression,

> It's 'heart work,' we say. We burn out people all the time because it's our lives. You know? It's our land; it's our lives; it's our well-being. If I was going to sign

up to do this work, I know that it has to be done in a good way, or else we just aren't going to make it. It's not possible to realize our vision if we don't take care of our people. I often tell my staff that the biggest act of resistance that they can have is just to be healthy and well...

This leader alludes to the impact on the quality of the work if staff are not well—ultimately the work will not succeed. Several leaders spoke about how they have worked to infuse wellness into their organizational culture and the connection that has to the sustainability of their organization's work,

That the money that we invest in our staff is sustainable; that we have an organization even within policy. Like we just moved to a four-day work week, for example, and that we use our funds to take care of folks. We have childcare stipends, internet reimbursement, and things like that. I can share about that later because it became especially important during COVID.

We started doing check-ins at the beginning of meetings. We also started making wellness a part of your work. At first that started with just putting it into your work plan, so we invited people to put wellness and healing activities into their work plans. It could be anything. It could be a walk; it could be beading; it could be whatever; meditation.

Healing, wellness, and resilience is core to our work, so we have a healing wellness—we have a director of cultured healing first. He's on our executive team, and their work is to oversee how are we at the organization continually ensuring as we scale

> that the culture, how we do what we do, how we move in circle, how we check in, how our space is, is centering healing and wellness.

These leaders describe a move to a four-day work week, encouraging staff to include wellness activities as part of their work and in one case, hiring an employee whose work focuses on building a culture of healing. Other leaders described making a stipend available for healing to all employees that they could use for acupuncture, massage or anything else insurance may not cover. Others enforced a structured break, giving all staff time off to rest without using paid time off. Women and nonbinary leaders of color also described concrete actions they've taken to make additional resources available to their staff for healing,

> We did Community Circles, community alters, weekly—maybe every other week Sister Warriors Healing Circles, paying for people to have—we brought in some more consultants to even deepen our work around anti-Blackness, anti-transphobia, homophobia. It's like we say it's ongoing, but, during this time, we even had more.

> 'If we can have a lawyer on retainer, can we have a traditional healer on retainer?'...What we did with her, and what that means is that we found a comfortable set rate that our staff can reach out to her; and that she agreed to make availability for our staff knowing that the work they do is really hard; and that she charges only a certain amount for us to have our staff have access to a traditional healer without having to go through all of these, you know, processes; how long it takes to normally get behavioral health and stuff like that.

Leaders described healing at multiple levels—both in how the organization does its work and relates to different members of the community,

as well as how staff are able to recover from the trauma and stress they experience while doing justice work. Even when formal policies weren't available, women and nonbinary leaders of color described taking concrete actions to support individual staff members in difficult times,

> Quite often I am taking funding dollars and doing some sort of ghetto-fab version of flex-spending for our staff members as things come up. You know? If someone's got a sick child, or a sick animal, or some sort of housing issue, or a medical issue—we've had several of those—then the organization will then create a line item in our budget and notate it as a 'fringe benefit.'

> Letting people take day offs when they needed to, when it was all too much. Man, even when somebody got an abortion, having a doula...Just really trying to be there for folks when they need it.

Women and nonbinary people of color leading smaller organizations with less infrastructure and funding described providing tailored support to staff, such as cash assistance in a time of crisis, extra time off, or funding to meet a specific health or wellness need. In some cases, these benefits came when they were not able to provide other benefits, such as health insurance.

Several interviewees spoke about the nature of the environment they're trying to create in their organizations—one that sees staff as whole people and enables healing from injustice. One interviewee alluded to the compartmentalization that is required for social justice work and

how she wants to create an environment where her team can bring their whole selves to work,

> The spirituality of liberation is a significant part of our work because mind-body-spirit, we're whole humans. Part of what we're trying to heal is being treated as not whole. The way that everything is compartmentalized in fragments, and humans are demanded to compartmentalize and fragment themselves in order to survive inside of somebody else's culture...

This interviewee draws the connection between doing social justice work on behalf of or with the organization's beneficiaries and recognizing that social justice workers also need care in a hostile world. Another interviewee echoed this sentiment, speaking about the potential healing that could happen if her organization were adequately supported,

> As I visualize it, I see vibrancy and joy, people would be able to walk into their joy. It would be a pathway where women would be recognized and empowered to be who they need to be. With [support from a values-aligned funder], we can heal, and I mean from the crown...of our head to the soles of our feet.

This interviewee articulates a vision where resources can help create a space for women and nonbinary people of color to heal, both as community members and workers or organizers for social justice.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color know what their staff need to feel supported, and in many cases, these needs align with what they themselves need. In an environment of constrained resources, they provide flexibility and support to their staff in ways that counter traditional expectations about work (e.g., following conventional hours with specified time off and benefits). Women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations need flexible funding to provide healing justice support to their staff, both on an ad hoc basis, but particularly through organizational policies that favor workers and ultimately lead to more

effective social justice work. Such flexible support would enable them to treat their staff as whole people, as well as create space for healing and joy.

## FROM TRUST-BASED AND TOWARDS CARE

Women and nonbinary leaders of color also shared some positive experiences they have had with foundation donors, including when they have felt like their work was seen and understood by foundation donors and/or donors came forward to support them in productive ways. In some cases these examples of support relate to aspects of trust-based philanthropy, such as changing their own grantmaking practices based on feedback from grantees and making application and/or reporting processes more accessible. Sometimes women and nonbinary leaders of color attribute this flexibility and/or support to the COVID-19 pandemic and/or to women and noninary people of color being in positions of power in philanthropy, while for others the support is unrelated.

However, other forms of support identified by leaders are deeply tied to the interpersonal relationships funders build with grantees that enable them to be vulnerable and honest about their needs. Several interviewees described how foundation staff care about them as people, take the time to do site visits and talk to partners to more deeply understand their work and come forward proactively with funding commitments that directly align with their visions. Others spoke about long-term relation-ships they have with foundation donors where they have been able to be vulnerable, go through transition and be cared for as individuals and sector leaders.

Interviewees spoke about how they felt foundation donors had started to loosen their requirements, making it easier to apply for and report on grant funding. Interviewees said,

> I think, with the pandemic...a lot of donors or funders have been making it a little bit easier for us to report and share our work. We've been reached out to for video or Zoom applications where someone is taking notes and listening to our conversation, which has allowed for the process to be a lot easier and a lot more

accessible. It feels a lot better...because it takes me a while to write...

I think these few things came after the pandemic, but I have a sense that there's more flexibility in funders. For example, in regards to the process to request or apply for grants, simplifying it a lot, which I know has been super, super helpful. I know some funders even encouraged you to just copy and paste from other proposals. For organizations that are small, I think that's huge. Also, an easier process to do reporting.

The first interviewee here is speaking about how foundation donors offering the opportunity to report by video or Zoom has reduced the time it takes for her to report on funding received. The second interviewee spoke about how she has observed that in some cases application requirements have been simplified, and at times, she has been encouraged to use proposals or reports she has already written, as opposed to writing something new and tailored for each donor.

Several women and nonbinary leaders of color also spoke about how they feel some of the foundation donors they work with have become more interested and invested in listening more to grantee and community needs. Interviewees said,

I think the shift happened not just for me. I think it happened for everybody. I really believe folks started listening. Philanthropy really started listening...They were intentional around asking certain questions to make sure that they were supporting grantees...They didn't do these interviews or send out these surveys and check [consultation off their list] so they can go to their funders and say, 'Hey, we did what you said we needed to do.'

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> I'll also say one thing that I've appreciated, that I have had quite a few funders that have said, 'I'm just here to listen.' [Foundation name omitted] is really good about that where they have phone calls with me and like, '[Name omitted] I just need an hour of your time just so I can listen.' What I've seen is them actually move from the conversation. I'm having the conversation, and then I see [some]thing happen differently, and I'm like, 'Oh, okay, they [are] actually... listening'...I've seen that happen a few times.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color consistently emphasized that listening should not be an endpoint, proactive changes need to follow listening. The first interviewee quoted here emphasized the importance of not treating consultation as an item on the "to do" list to be checked off, while the second interviewee quoted felt that change was really happening when she saw donor behavior change, as opposed to when they first started asking her for input.

Another interviewee spoke about how she felt foundation donors were starting to be more deliberate and thorough in their own understanding of the landscape. One interviewee said,

> Something else that I've noticed is, from some funders, being very intentional at really understanding the needs of the community where they're planning to invest and understanding the dynamics in the ecosystem. [In the past] I've seen the opposite happen, and I know how much damage it causes, so seeing funders being more aware of that and more conscious and more intentional, I think it's really important.

Greater awareness of the ecosystem and the power dynamics between organizations and within movements was identified by interviewees as a positive development. This may also be related to more women and nonbinary people of color working

in philanthropy and making funding decisions. Several interviewees connected shifts in donor behavior to the presence of more women and nonbinary people of color in philanthropy. One interviewee said,

> Then we saw a shift in the leadership in philanthropy...We saw more women of color. We saw more people of color actually being the ones who are leading these philanthropic foundations, right, or being the ones to guide where these monies go. I think that had a lot to do with it as well.

A few grantees described relationships with donors that went beyond trust-based approaches. Foundation donors who they felt they could have meaningful conversations about how to shift how they're using their resources, foundation donors who stood up for them and supported them within their own foundations and in front of other donors in the sector and donors who really cared about them as people. One interviewee said,

> We had funders who already believed in our work who knew the work that we did. It was easy for us to get really clear about, what are we focused on right now? Can some of these restrictive funds be unrestricted so we can think through what we're doing? I think most of those conversations went well. Many funders had our backs, really gave us the opportunity to be flexible with how we spent the dollars.

This interviewee alludes to longstanding relationships with donors who had strong confidence in her work, which created an environment where she could approach them when she needed to change direction. Ultimately, she found they were receptive to changes she proposed. Another interviewee spoke about how two foundation donors sticking by her during a period of organizational change made all the difference in her ability to attract new donors to her work in a time of transition,

> All it took was a couple of funders to say 'I'm in.' Once those two influential funders—and I have to say, they both were influential. I also have to own they were also both women. I do believe that it made a difference when you have diversity at the program officer level because their job is to translate what you've just said to them.

This interviewee also felt that program staff at foundations who shared identities with her and her constituents enabled them to be better advocates for supporting her organization's work. Finally, interviewees spoke about feeling genuine care and support from some foundation donors,

> There's been some recognition from funders that they feel like...there are a lot of women of color EDs quitting. I'm getting this. They're like, 'Are you okay? Are things going okay? Do you need more support?' I've gotten that quite a bit, actually, these last six months. What more do you need? What would make you stay at your job? A lot of that. Yeah. Funders have been supportive.

This interviewee felt seen when foundation donors recognized that women and nonbinary leaders of color are experiencing burnout across the social justice sector. She appreciated being asked what support she needed, as well as having donors assert that they don't see her as easily replaceable—they want her to stay in the sector and be able to continue contributing to social justice work.

The last three examples here describe donor relationships where trust has been built over longer periods of time. They go beyond loosening application or reporting requirements or cultivating a deep understanding of the work and flexibility in how foundation donors are supporting them. They imply a confidence and care for women and nonbinary leaders of color and an investment in their survival.

# WHAT WOMEN AND NONBINARY LEADERS OF COLOR WANT FROM FOUNDATION DONORS

Women and nonbinary interviewees of color were ultimately hopeful about the possibility of cultivating positive relationships with foundation donors. They feel that foundation donors are in a unique position to help them leverage support for their work, as well as time and space to think strategically about their priorities. They also felt that foundation donors could help them connect with other women and nonbinary leaders of color, reducing isolation and building community. Ultimately, the vast majority of interviewees did not want foundation donors to "give them money and leave them alone"—they want respectful thought partners and philanthropic champions. They want to be able to be authentic and open about their needs and experiences without fear of losing support.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color described how they want to be in community with foundation donors and the ways donors can help them create opportunities for rest, reflection and community building with their peers. One interviewee spoke about her desire for retreat spaces for women of color leaders,

> One of the things I think that could be very interesting would be something like a kind of retreat structure that could be spaced where women EDs, particularly women of color EDs, could have the opportunity to rest but also to reimagine together.

Another interviewee echoed this request, noting that foundation donors have a bird's eye view of what grantees in their portfolio are experiencing and they have the potential to help folks with similar struggles or different skills/knowledge to connect with one another,

> ...really finding the time to bring [grantees together]—we used to have the convenings, and that was a time for us as grantee partners to really understand each other and then support each

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other...Is there ways to really do buddy groups with grantee partners like, okay, we listened, and these two seem to be going through the same thing, or this person went over this hurdle [and could help another organization that's experiencing a similar problem].

While every connection may not take root, women and nonbinary leaders of color recognize the power for connection that program officers have and how it could benefit their work. Women and nonbinary leaders of color also spoke about a desire for emotional support from program officers, as well as to feel an investment from them in their success and the success of their organizations,

I think finding ways of supporting EDs emotionally, and I know that may sound a little weird...I don't want to use the word 'emotion' like they need therapy, but I'm just saying that there is something to be said about feeling like you have to work in isolation versus being in a cohort where there's a commitment of shared growth, shared responsibility. I think certain funders are in positions, particularly depending on the size of their fund, to do one of two things. One is to either create such cohorts within their own portfolio and/or consider establishing something like that where you even have somebody that you actually pay to run a thing like that.

This interviewee also spoke about the potential for program officers to convene grantees within their portfolio or to support others to convene organizations led by women and nonbinary people of color. Women and nonbinary leaders of color also spoke about their desire for foundation donors to have candid conversations with them about mobilizing resources,

I [said], 'Let's have real conversations [about] funding. This is who's funding us. Can you share your list?

Can we talk through your list? Are you willing to make introductions? Who do you think should be funding us that's not based on our list?'

This leader envisions conversations with program officers where they're strategizing with her about fundraising, making suggestions about who to approach, as well as making direct introductions. Women and nonbinary leaders of color also wanted program officers to have conversations with them about outcomes and what is realistic—they want to be accountable, but not to foundation donor strategies in isolation. Instead they want to have honest conversations about what is reasonable to achieve and what the work looks like on ground,

[Speaking about how she wants to be treated by funders and the questions she'd like them to ask] 'This is what we're going to build...' 'This is a realistic time of what we think it would look like to be able to lay the foundation for that...' 'These are the ways in which we want you to show up as funders...' 'Let's negotiate what that system of accountability looks like on an organizational basis because what one organization can do, another organization may not be able to.'

This interviewee also spoke about how she would like to see foundation donors be accountable. She also spoke about what accountability means and how it manifests, and the need for it to be negotiated at the level of an individual organization and what works for them. Another interviewee echoed this desire for a two-way relationship with foundation donors,

Part of the conversation that we had with grantmakers was not only the introduction of the community but it was also to share the message that grantmaking is a relationship between the two and that it should flow both ways, that we are both contributing to the process and that it's not a one-night stand. This is a long-term relationship.
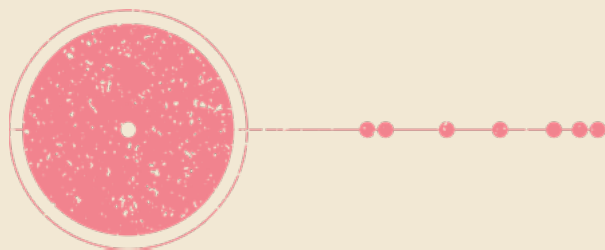
Women and nonbinary leaders of color were hopeful about their relationships with foundation donors. They recognized that foundation donors bring the potential to convene organizations and movement leaders and make connections they may not otherwise be able to make. They also appreciated foundation donors' efforts to convene organizations, recognizing how valuable that could be for combatting their own feelings of isolation and creating space to strategize and develop a collective vision(s). Interviewees also appreciated foundation donors connections within the philanthropic sector and how those connections could be leveraged to help them raise funds to support their work. Ultimately, women and nonbinary leaders of color wanted to cultivate and foster two-way relationships with foundation donors— where both make commitments and are accountable.
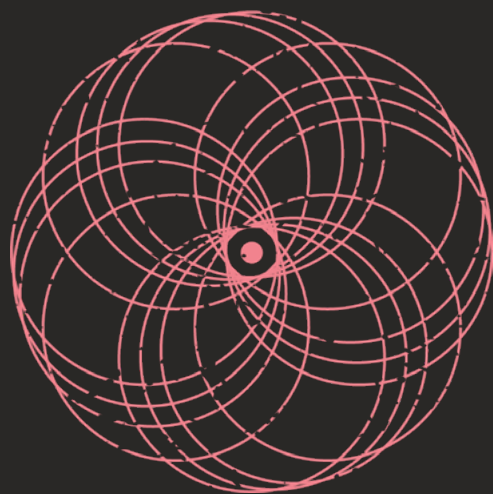
# RECOMMENDATIONS

Women and nonbinary leaders of color have provided a valuable clarity about their needs and experiences, shedding light on essential considerations for grantmakers and donors. In this section, we delve into a comprehensive set of actions that individuals with influence over resources within foundations, including program officers and directors, as well as potential donors, including high-net-worth individuals not yet engaged in philanthropy, can take to actively aid women and nonbinary leaders of color in funding their organizations, championing their initiatives, supporting their wellness and nurturing their broader ecosystems. To bridge the gap between these invaluable insights and meaningful change, we present a series of recommendations firmly grounded in the voices and experiences of these leaders.

## DEVELOP AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS WITH WOMEN AND NONBINARY LEADERS OF COLOR

- Understand and address *structural racism* and how it manifests in philanthropy

- While coming from community is a strength, recognize *secondary trauma*

- Encourage conversations about rest and support *sabbaticals*

- Provide support for *dignified salaries and benefits*

- Invite *honest conversations about what support looks like*, and adjust your approach based on what you hear

This study reveals that the systematic and structural racism in philanthropy has negative effects on individual women and nonbinary leaders of color, their organizations, and the field. Staff who direct resources at foundations can alleviate these effects and begin to dismantle their causes by approaching grantee relationships with knowledge and awareness of how this historical context has contributed to harm. For example, by acknowledging underinvestment and disinvestment at multiple levels aloud, grantmakers can contribute to repositioning their relationships with women and nonbinary leaders of color. This acknowledgement, when coupled with awareness of how one's own identities, behaviors and actions may be contributing to those harms, and working against those tendencies, can improve these relationships.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color often come to the work from a place of protecting their own families and communities from oppression. This position is one of strength in that they innately understand community needs; however, they also may feel threats to their communities more acutely. Opening doors for rest and restoration are

one way that funders can help women and nonbinary leaders of color stay in work sustainably. Offering opportunities for sabbaticals is one mechanism by which grantmakers can acknowledge this secondary trauma and the toll it takes on women and nonbinary leaders of color.[16]
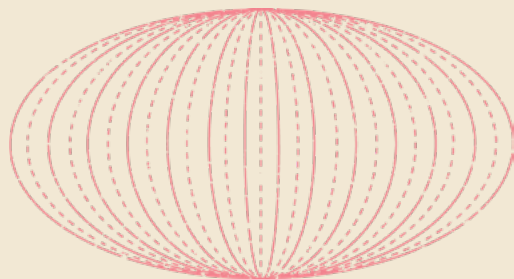
Another way is to have honest conversations about salaries and benefits available to organizational leaders and staff, and ensure that compensation reflects both the work they're doing, as well as the market for such labor.[17] Funders are well positioned to research competitive salaries in the broader field and to share their research with women and nonbinary leaders of color and their staff. Transparency can help assure that women and nonbinary people of color know what they are worth. Help them raise this money if you are not able to fund competitive salaries fully on your own. In this way, grantmakers can support organizational leaders to more fully align their organizational values and internal practices with their external values.

Changing one's own behavior is just one part of making change in a relationship. Listening to how grantees respond and what they need is also crucial. Many funders assume "one size fits all" in how they relate to the leaders of organizations they fund or co-exist with. For example, a program officer in a foundation might believe that they are always doing the right thing if they demonstrate their commitment to trust-based philanthropy by taking a "hands off" approach with all of the leaders of organizations in their portfolio. Perhaps this program officer believes that the primary problem with grantmakers is that they take up too much time from grantees; however, this "one size fits all" approach does not recognize that what might feel like a trusting and respectful distance to one grantee feels like neglect and disinterest to another. While they are hardly universal in their preferences, this document highlights that women and nonbinary leaders of color have articulated that they prefer to negotiate authentic, non-transactional, open relationships with grantmakers.

Grantmakers who couple this type of acknowledgement with a celebration of the ways in which women and nonbinary leaders of color have – both generally, as a group and individually – survived and strategized through this process can also show that philanthropists understand that these two countervailing processes can co-occur.

16 https://bipocedcoalitionwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Sabbaticals-for-BIPOC-Leaders.pdf

17 https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2022/9/28/nonprofit-employees-are-burned-out-heres-how-funders-make-it-worse-and-how-they-can-help

## CONTINUE TO IMPLEMENT TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY PRACTICES; ADD AN ETHIC OF CARE

- Name *intersecting oppressions* and how they impact power dynamics with funders, recognize *implicit bias*

  - Minimize *emotional labor*

  - Make intentional efforts to shift *power imbalances*

  - Integrate *healing justice* approaches in funding

While trust-based philanthropy practices help social justice leaders, they do not fully address historical underinvestment and disinvestment in women and nonbinary leaders of color and how they have been treated by philanthropy. The first step in bridging this gap is naming sexism, racism, and other intersecting oppressions in grantee relationships and reflecting on the ways implicit bias may exist in these relationships, as well as how they show up in funding strategies. Reading and learning about the power-laden history of philanthropy can be helpful as a basis for considering how to challenge the power dynamics embedded in the distribution of wealth. This is particularly important when identities and experiences between program officers and women and nonbinary leaders of color differ drastically.

Funders should understand, learn, and support self-determined healing justice work as essential work for long-term movement building and recognize how their own practices and behaviors may contribute to additional cycles of stress and burden.[18] Women and people of color interviewees draw our attention to the emotional labor required to maintain even supportive relationships with donors. By being trans-

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parent, clear, and accountable about their funding requirements and decisions, funders can help minimize the emotional labor of women and people of color. Funders can take this one step forward by funding women and nonbinary leaders of color and organizations holistically, and integrating healing justice approaches as a core part of funding.[19] Funding efforts that allow for rest and restoration and investment in training, convenings, or spaces that enable healing, resiliency, and wellness, are essential to collaborative movement building work.

19    https://www.astraeafoundation.org/microsites/healingjustice/
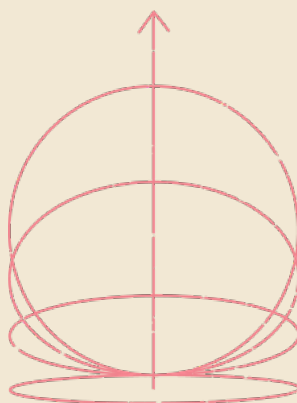
## BREAK DOWN SILOS IN PHILANTHROPY

- Fund *multi-issue, multi-strategy* work

- Proactively challenge the individualistic tendencies of philanthropy— *share strategies and information* with funders and activists, fund *collaboratively* with others

- Let go of *funder-determined outcomes*, relinquish the desire to take credit

- *Align funding opportunities* with the work on the ground

Foundations need to shift toward funding organizations that work on multiple issues and use multiple strategies as opposed to funding in issue-based siloes that only support or recognize one area of an organizations' work. When funders support a single issue or single strategy, they force women and nonbinary leaders of color to do critical parts of their work in a way that isn't funded and perpetuates the invisibility

of community needs and/or the true nature of organizing work. Such a shift will require foundations to challenge the individualistic nature of claiming to have funded particular outcomes. Foundations can align strategies and fund collaboratively to reduce application and reporting burdens and amplify funding that better match grantee priorities on the ground.

Foundations should recognize the ways in which the system of philanthropy historically is highly individualist, unaccountable, inequitable, and rife with contradictions; and often lack leadership and skills to collaborate, coordinate, or share strategies and information across issue siloes within and between foundations. To fund social justice and social change work requires intentional efforts to work against the individualist, do-it-alone status quo, to undo actions and behaviors that perpetuate systemic and structural racism and sexism and exacerbate power dynamics. Taking a stand for justice in the philanthropic sector is not an inherently neutral endeavor; it means moving intentionally to cede power to community and holding oneself accountable in ways that may be uncomfortable and challenging.
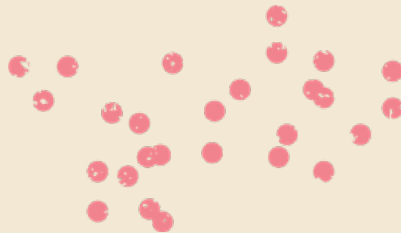
## SUPPORT THE LONG GAME

- *Fund intermediaries and public foundations with close proximity to communities*

- Support *cross-movement solidarity* work

- Strategy is a *two-way street* — integrate the expertise of field leaders

- *Be transparent* — make data and reports available to activists

- *Be open to failure*, it's part of learning and innovation

- Be steadfast in times of *transition*

A strong social justice ecosystem is comprised of strong intermediaries and public foundations that are accountable to movements and communities. Fund intermediaries and public foundations that have closer relationships to women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations. By drawing on and better resourcing these pre-existing relationships, funding will ultimately reach grassroots communities, and be more flexible and responsive to grantee needs. Staff at intermediaries and public foundations often have a strong sense of existing partnerships, particularly relationship-building and cross-movement solidarity work, which are essential for long-term advocacy campaigns and wins. While philanthropy should not be trying to orchestrate or force partnerships, funders can seek to understand existing partnerships and fund work in a holistic way that discourages competition and facilitates collaboration.

It's key to develop a symbiotic relationship between foundation strategies and leaders and organizations on the ground – we should be impacting each other on a two-way street. One way to do this is for foundation donors to share back aggregate data that has been provided by movement leaders. Landscape scans, funding or evaluation data, and reports should go back to the field, as this enables an exchange of information between funders and women and nonbinary leaders of color. In addition, when doing landscape scans, proactively work to avoid exacerbating conflict and tensions between organizations doing related work. Consider not engaging in landscape analyses, scoping, evaluation or research work that will not result in concrete and transparent support to participants and their organizations. Ultimately, foundations, especially large private foundations, should recognize their impact on movement ecosystems and seek to do no harm.

Supporting women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations to do advocacy and organizing work requires an understanding that not everything may go as initially planned. Investing in the long game means trusting that women and nonbinary people of color-led groups will adapt to complex and oppressive systems using general operating support and multi-year grants. Funding in this way also enables women and nonbinary leaders of color to try out different healing approaches in their work, including cultivating an environment where

they are able to innovate and try out new ideas to maintain their own and others' health and wellness. Such trust and steadfast support is especially important during times of organizational transition, such as changes in organizational leadership and/or strategy, opportunities or threats in the external environment. Women and nonbinary leaders of color frequently describe being saddled with intractable problems in their organizations and they need support and faith from donors to rebuild.[20]
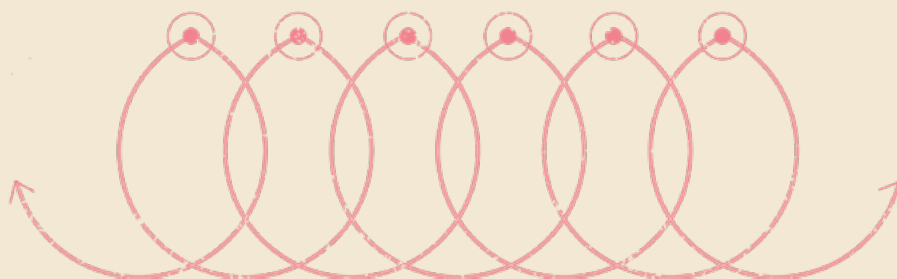
## FUND SELF-DIRECTED CAPACITY BUILDING FOR WOMEN AND NONBINARY LEADERS OF COLOR AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

- Proactively offer support

- *Earmark additional resources* for necessary, unplanned requests

- *Extend extra support* to leaders in times of transition and women and nonbinary leaders of color in historically white-led organizations

- If capacity building is not paired with funding, *support intermediaries, public foundations and women's funds that do*

Funders often offer capacity building opportunities to grantees; however, these may not meet needs expressed by women and nonbinary leaders of color and may even feel like requirements that hamper the work of organizations. By proactively offering capacity building support and frameworks that allow women and nonbinary leaders of color to direct their own capacity building, funders can interrupt these

patterns. Capacity building may mean offering training to improve some skill or ability of interest to the leader or her staff, but it may also mean offering coaching, fellowships or other investments in women and nonbinary leaders of color.

Capacity building needs may arise at different times during a foundation's support of a leader or organization. This is not reflective of a lack of planning or foresight, but instead is the consequence of working in a complex, evolving context, where what is required may change. Foundation donors can earmark and set aside additional resources to support current grantees—leaders and organizations. They can anticipate that grantees will need unplanned support and plan to have it ready/available to them.

Grantmakers with discretion over the *type* of funding they provide benefit from considering whether they can provide opportunities for women and nonbinary leaders of color to rest. For some, this may mean a sabbatical from their organization or a fellowship allowing them to do a particular self-directed project. While people often use the word "capacity" to mean "ability" or "skill", capacity also refers to the amount of time and energy someone has. As this report demonstrates, women and nonbinary leaders of color have a lot of skills and abilities, but their time and energy are often eroded by forces beyond their control. A funder, especially one who has established trust (see first section in recommendations), is well-situated to ask individual women and nonbinary leaders of color about what type of rest and restoration they need in order to stay in the work. Investments in these women and nonbinary people are investments in movement assets as well as investments in their success in their current position.

Another important form of accompaniment that differs from traditional capacity building approaches is providing support for women and nonbinary leaders of color through leadership transitions. While steadfast funding for organizations and leaders going through a transition is important (see Support the Long Game section), capacity building can also be crucial during this period. This can involve offering funding for coaching for women of color transitioning into leadership of historically white-led organizations. This recognizes and mitigates the additional challenges they face and could prevent a fall over the

"glass cliff" (Thomas-Breitfeld & Kunreuther, 2022). While not all foundations may provide capacity building support, donors can build these resources into grants and/or support public foundations and intermediaries that offer capacity building opportunities requested by women and nonbinary leaders of color and their organizations.
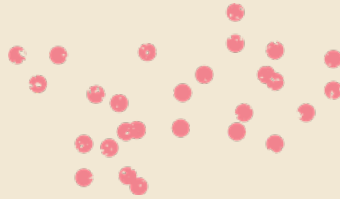
## INVEST IN WOMEN AND NONBINARY PEOPLE OF COLOR'S WELLNESS, POWER, AND INFLUENCE

- *Consciously build the pipeline* of new leaders
- Increase the *representation of women and nonbinary people of color* in philanthropy
- Ask for and work from a *needs-based budget*
- Help grantees build new relationships and *leverage new funding*

Foundations need to make long-term investments in individual women and nonbinary leaders of color who are young and/or new to the field in order to build a strong pipeline of women and nonbinary leaders of color who are ready to take on responsibilities and give the most visible leaders a break. Several interviewees spoke about the challenges they had finding the time and resources to invest in second line leadership. Without well-equipped younger leaders to take on the work, movement elders will not be able to move into advising roles and/or take time off when they need to rest or consider how to redirect their efforts in support of movements.

Women and nonbinary leaders of color need foundation donors to broker introductions to new funders and philanthropic networks and

to support them to raise the money to cover their full budget, including overhead costs like staffing, training, rent and functioning IT systems.[21] The first step of determining what an organization needs is to invite a needs-based budget, including asking about work that is currently done without funding and what it would cost to fully support that work. Foundation staff have connections to one another and can influence how their peers fund. Women and nonbinary leaders of color and organizations need supportive foundation donors to be advocates for their work and help them to leverage new funding and new donor relationships.

Increasing representation of women and people of color in decision-making positions in philanthropy, especially those who have intersectional identities and/or share life and/or cultural experiences with grantees, is another way the philanthropic sector can invest in women and nonbinary people of color's wellness, power and influence. Interviewees spoke about how having programs officers who share identities and experiences with them can reduce the amount of explaining [that] they need leadership and growth as well.

21    https://ssir.org/ articles/entry/the_nonprofit_ starvation_cycle

## BUILD THE EVIDENCE BASE AND STRENGTHEN ACCOUNTABILITY

- Aggregate and gather more information on *organizational resources* for women and nonbinary people of color-led organizations

- *Track investments* in capacity building and leadership development

More research on organizational resources (e.g.: budgets, salaries, benefits) is needed so we have an evidence base against which to look

at disinvestment and underinvestment and how to systematically rectify it. While individual foundation staff can do this research by speaking with their peers, looking at organizational budgets for organizations already in their portfolios and/or speaking candidly with nonprofit leaders, a more systematic approach may be helpful to avoid bias. Systematic data would be useful to initiate a sector-wide discussion about equity that highlights issues of underinvestment in historically excluded people, including women and nonbinary people of color. Ultimately, such research can contribute to forums to discuss ways to support de-siloing the progressive philanthropy sector and to support long-term infrastructure building and movement building.

Foundations would also benefit from more research and ability to track how much has been invested in leadership development, capacity building and skills building for women and nonbinary leaders of color and organizations. Existing studies show that funders have invested very little in these opportunities as compared to the private sector, despite the desire, demand and need. Research to track investments in organizations by and for women and nonbinary people of color (such as *Pocket Change: How Women and Girls of Color Do More With Less*) could be augmented with studies about similar investment in capacity building for women and nonbinary leaders of color and organizations. Such tracking studies also need to be repeated periodically to assess progress and hold donors accountable for commitments they have made.

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OUR
SMILES
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INTERESTED
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# THE OPPORTUNITY

We challenge philanthropy to transcend its traditional boundaries and embrace a profound shift in purpose. While good stewardship of resources is indeed a cornerstone value, it is an incomplete aspiration in our quest for social change. Our true powerhouse lies not just in endowments or investments, but in the grassroots activists, organizations, and movements that drive progress. These individuals, often women and nonbinary people of color, stand as our most valuable resource.

To embark on this radical transformation, we must redefine our role as philanthropists by placing change agents at the heart of our efforts. It requires a departure from mere financial assistance towards becoming a compassionate force that invests in their care and survival. Superficial support is no longer sufficient. Nurturing those who challenge the status quo means creating environments that prioritize their mental and emotional well-being. It means providing comprehensive resources for capacity building, leadership development, and robust support systems. By recognizing and meeting their holistic needs, we support leaders and organizations to not just survive, but to thrive and amplify their impact. We firmly believe that their well-being is inextricably linked to the collective well-being of our society.

While trust-based philanthropy has made significant strides in alleviating some of the burdens faced by grantees, we cannot ignore the unique challenges confronted by women and nonbinary people of color in their struggle for funding. They navigate a complex terrain marked by systemic racial and gendered oppression, necessitating a response that goes beyond trust alone. It demands a radical transformation of philanthropic institutions, accountability to communities, and repositioning grantees in relation to power and resources, rooted in an ethic of care.

At this pivotal moment in history, incremental changes and values-neutral approaches fall short in the face of the monumental battles for progressive rights, values, justice and democracy. To truly challenge and dismantle oppressive systems, we must make an unapologetic and unwavering commitment to confront racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and antidemocratic forces head-on.

By centering care in our philanthropic practice, we acknowledge and begin to heal the wounds inflicted by historic systemic inequities. We cultivate nurturing relationships founded on trust, empathy, and shared experiences. Through care, we aim to forge a more just and equitable future, where philanthropy's resources are channeled more effectively to support and sustain the communities that need it most. Let us simultaneously embrace the principles of trust-based philanthropy while embarking on a radical transformation rooted in care. By listening and honoring the experiences and needs of our grantees, we contribute to the emergence of a vibrant movement that propels us toward collective liberation. Together, we have the power to rewrite the narrative of philanthropy, reimagining it as an instrument of justice, compassion, and lasting change.
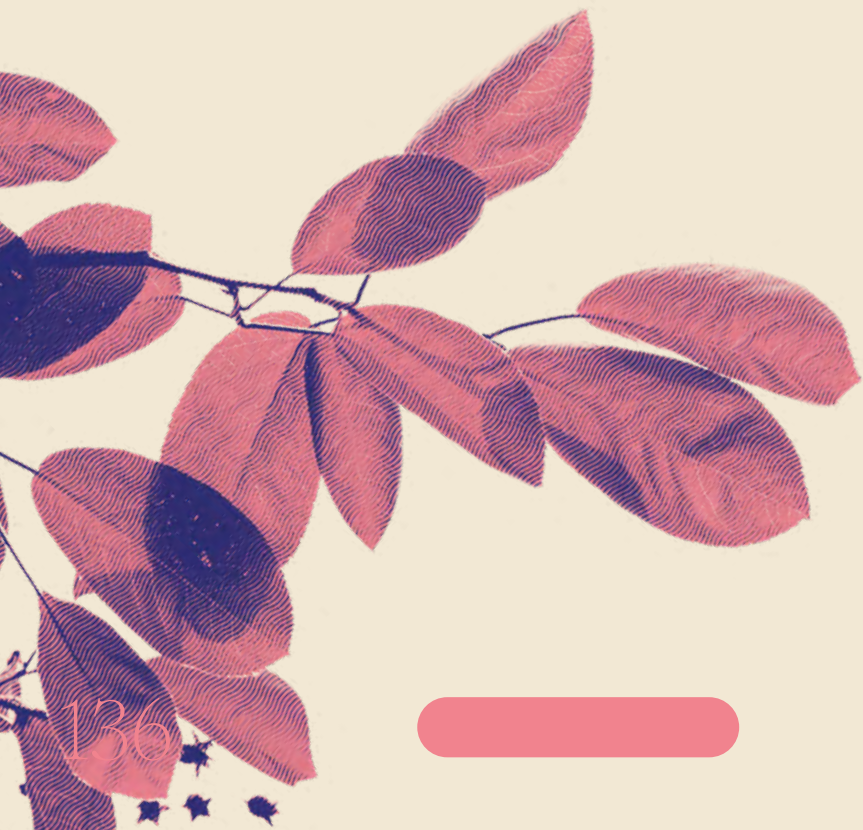
# ABOUT US

## MS. FOUNDATION FOR WOMEN

The mission of the Ms. Foundation is to build women's collective power in the U.S. to advance equity and justice for all. We achieve our mission by investing in, and strengthening, the capacity of women-led movements to advance meaningful social, cultural and economic change in the lives of women.

For 50 years, the Ms. Foundation for Women has shaped women's philanthropy in the United States, providing a blueprint for the establishment of hundreds of local and regional women's funds, influencing mainstream culture through nationwide projects such as Take Our Daughters to Work Day, and making grants totaling over $90 million to more than 1,600 grassroots organizations across the country. Through research, advocacy, and grantmaking, the Ms. Foundation is the national model for sustainable, trust-based philanthropic support of women of color-led movements. With equity and inclusion as the cornerstones of true democracy, the Ms. Foundation works to create a world in which the worth and dignity of every person are valued, and power and possibility are not limited by gender, race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability or age.

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*Shawnda Chapman* (she/her) is the Director of Innovative Grantmaking and Research at the Ms. Foundation for Women. Throughout her personal and professional journey, her efforts have been dedicated to addressing inequality and injustice with a specific emphasis on amplifying the voices and experiences of marginalized communities. At Ms., Shawnda leads and shapes research initiatives and manages two grantmaking portfolios. The Girls of Color Initiative combats inequity for girls and gender-expansive youth of color through grants and leadership development. The Activist Collaboration and Care Fund enhances collaboration and access to healing justice support in social justice movements. She holds a BA and MS from Hunter College and is pursuing a Doctorate from The Graduate Center at the City University of New York.

## SHAWNDA CHAPMAN

Director of Innovative Grantmaking and Research

## ELLEN LIU

Chief Program Officer

*Ellen Liu* (she/her) is the Chief Program Officer at Ms. Foundation for Women where she leads the strategy and practice of the Grantmaking and Capacity Building team to strengthen women and girls of color-led organizations and leaders, and organizes philanthropy to increase funding for women and girls of color-led movement building work. Ellen brings over 20 years of experience in grantmaking, capacity building, policy advocacy, and organizational development in support of social justice organizations in the U.S. and internationally. Prior to joining Ms. Foundation, Ellen was a Program Officer at Open Society Foundations where she worked with health and human rights organizations globally to strengthen protections for people living with HIV and AIDS and TB, people with mental disabilities, ethnic minorities, and people in need of palliative care. She holds a BA from Georgetown University and an MA from Johns Hopkins University.

*Calondra McArthur* (she/her) is a mission-driven communications professional with more than 15 years of experience developing expertise in media outreach, content development, cause-marketing, storytelling, social media management, and more. Prior to joining Ms. Foundation, Calondra was instrumental in driving communications strategy and messaging for nonprofits such as the Clinton Foundation and WhyHunger. She holds a B.S. in Business Administration from Xavier University in Cincinnati and is passionate about advancing social justice for all and empowering women of color.

## CALONDRA MCARTHUR

Director of Communications

# ABOUT US

## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS CONSULTING GROUP

Our mission is to contribute to the strategy, growth and effectiveness of nonprofits, foundations and government organizations by providing high quality research, evaluation, capacity building and philanthropic strategy consulting. We are unique in our commitment to combining rigorous, credible research processes with commitments and processes to enhance community participation and representation. We believe the process is as important as the outcome and determines how communities can use and benefit from research.

We prioritize work that supports the autonomy of marginalized populations. We have long standing experience working with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, communities of color, Roma communities, people who use drugs, people living with infections diseases such as HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, communities affected by violence, immigrants, youth and children, rural and urban communities, women and socioeconomically disadvantaged people.

We are dedicated to serving nonprofits, foundations and government organizations with a client-centered, practical approach. By using an individualized approach for each project, we take the time to understand the relevant stakeholders and context and contribute productively to desired outcomes.

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**ERIN HOWE**

Principal Consultant

*Erin Howe* (she/her) has deep experience in participatory research, evaluation and grantmaking. As a Principal Consultant at Strength in Numbers, she leads qualitative research and philanthropic strategy work and designs many of the participatory input processes that ensure the needs and voices of historically excluded people drive research and evaluation work. In this role she aims to better align funding with community needs and support activists, program officers and organizational leaders with the information to make decisions and/or advocate for increased resources. She received a Master in Public Health from the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and a Bachelor of Arts from Smith College.

*Somjen Frazer* (they/them) has over twenty years of experience conducting research, evaluation and strategy. They lead the quantitative and methodological work at Strength in Numbers as well as serving as the chief executive. Their passion for participatory research that is substantively influenced by marginalized communities and in service of social justice led them to start Strength in Numbers and continues to sustain their work to this day. They received a Ph.D. from Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health in Sociomedical Sciences (with Sociology), and MLitt from Oxford University's Nuffield College in Sociology, where they were a Rhodes Scholar, and a Bachelor of Arts from Cornell University.

**SOMJEN FRAZIER**

Principal Consultant

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