

# Race to Lead: Women of Color in the Nonprofit Sector



## Executive Summary

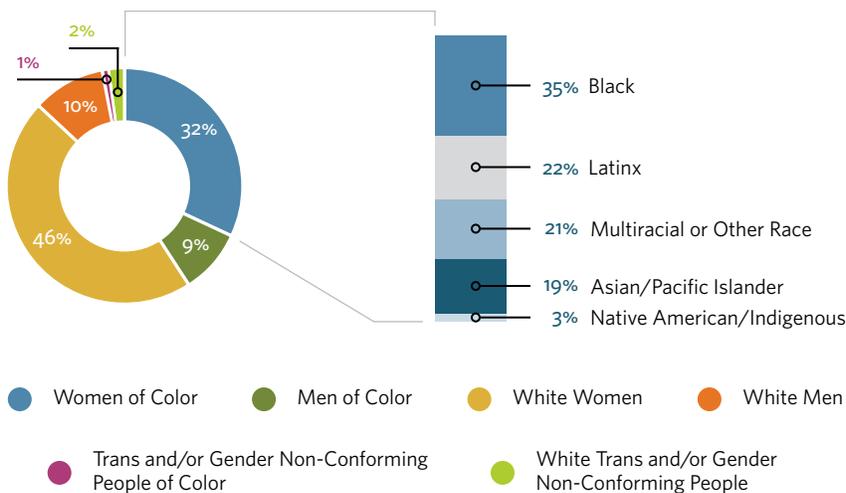
This report applies an intersectional analysis to the data from the Building Movement Project (BMP) national survey of more than 4,000 nonprofit staff.

BMP's research has already emphasized the need to address deeply embedded biases and systemic barriers that negatively impact the career advancement and experiences of people of color working in the nonprofit sector. By examining the impact of both race and gender on survey respondents, this report adds important nuance to the conclusions drawn from the other reports in the *Race to Lead* series.

Demographically, the Nonprofits, Leadership, and Race Survey sample primarily consists of women. The largest percentage of survey respondents were white women (46%), followed by women of color (32%). Men of color and white men were 9% and 10% of the sample, respectively. Transgender and gender non-conforming people of color (1%) and white people (2%) were the smallest share of participants. Black women comprised the largest portion of women of color respondents, followed by Latinx women, multiracial women, Asian/Pacific Islander women, and Native American women.



Survey data reveals that the nonprofit sector places particular burdens on women of color.



Race and Gender of Respondents

# Findings

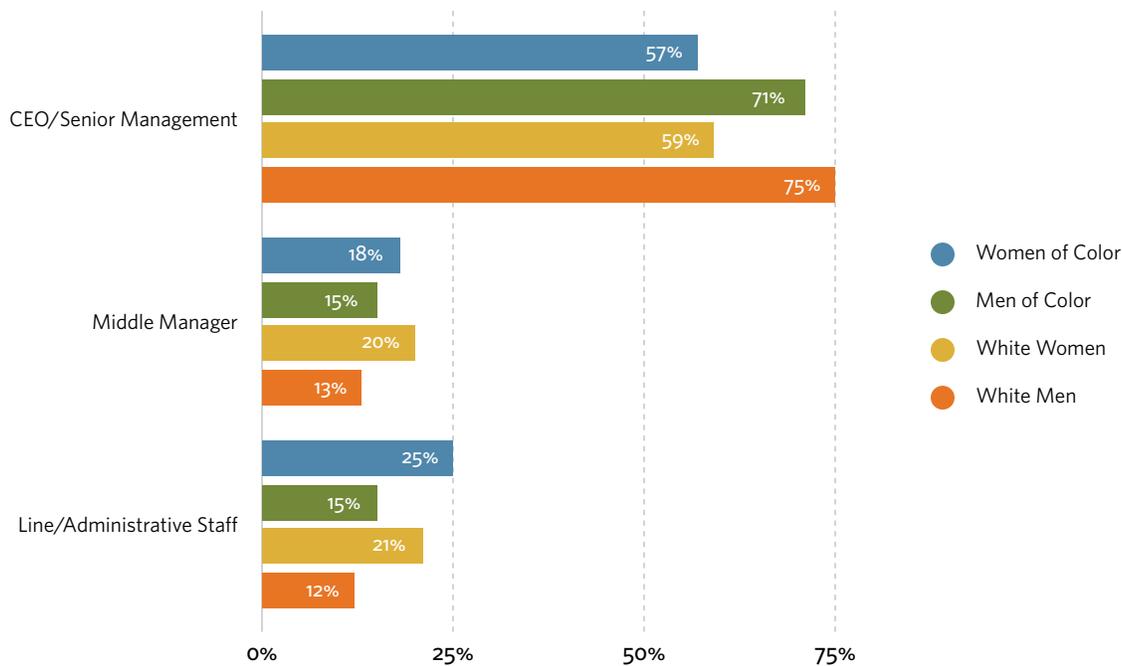
Although the survey data demonstrates that women of color face some barriers that are similar to those experienced by white women or men of color, the overlapping discrimination on the basis of race and gender places particularly acute burdens on many women of color. More specifically, the report details the following findings:

- **Racial and gender biases create barriers to advancement for women of color.**

Women of color reported being passed over for new jobs or promotions in favor of others—including men of color, white women, and white men—with comparable or even lower credentials.

- **Education and training are not enough to help women of color advance.**

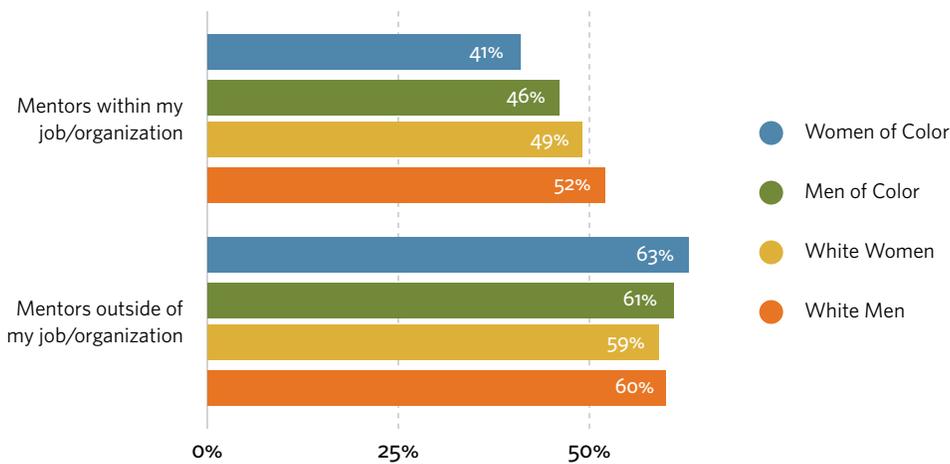
Women of color with the highest levels of education are the most likely to be in administrative roles and the least likely to hold senior leadership positions. Women of color also are paid significantly less compared to men of color and white men and more frequently report frustrations with inadequate salaries.



*Current Role/Position in Organization (Master's Degree and Above)*

- **The social landscape within nonprofit organizations can create conditions that undermine the leadership of women of color.**

Women of color who reported that their race and/or gender have been a barrier to their advancement indicated that they were sometimes left out or ignored and sometimes hyper-visible under intense scrutiny, with both conditions creating burdens.

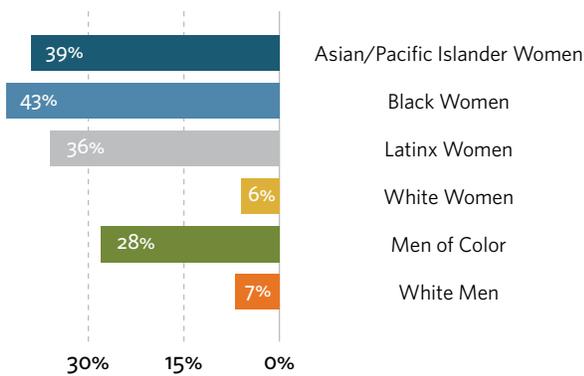


Mentoring Received by Race and Gender, and Type

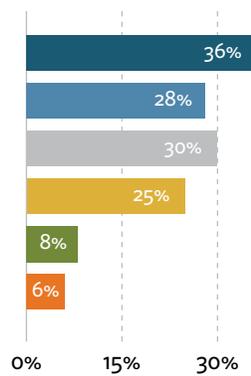
The report also explores key themes—based on survey write-in responses by women of color and from focus groups and interviews—among Asian/Pacific Islander, Black, Latinx, Native American, and transgender women of color.

Significant percentages of each group of women of color noted that both race and gender had a negative impact on their career advancement; most groups of women of color reported a negative impact of race or gender more often than white women, men of color, and white men. While the survey did not specifically ask respondents about the combination of both race and gender, several women brought up intersectionality in their write-in responses.

IMPACT OF RACE  
(Very/Slightly Negative)



IMPACT OF GENDER  
(Very/Slightly Negative)



Impact of Race or Gender on Career Advancement by Ethnicity and Gender\*

\* Insufficient sample size to report findings for Native American women or transgender women of color.

Women of color described instances of both blatant and subtle gendered racism and stereotypes they encountered in their work that affected their nonprofit careers. These stereotypes were distinct for each group and further illustrate the need for the nonprofit sector to make a stronger commitment to understanding the varied experiences of women of color and making organizational and systemic changes in response.



As an Asian-American woman, I am perceived as not being assertive, and managers have questioned my leadership abilities because they perceive me as being too quiet or asking too many questions...

As an African-American female, both my race and gender have... negatively impacted my career. [I] have learned to rise above it.

I was hired to represent all Latino/as, was given diversity awards, and was asked to speak for the whole community, but was given... no support, was paid significantly less than my peers...

Granted it's in an area where there are not a lot of Native people... [but] when you're at an event to promote diversity and I'm being singled out for a lot of stereotypical comments... our work is not anywhere close to done.

I feel like a lot of times, I have to be the token. I have to be the mascot... [although there are] other trans people who can step up to the role, they don't want to do it. They're not getting paid to do it.

# Call to Action

Many women of color in the nonprofit sector are highly skilled and want to lead, but the survey findings and focus group and interview reflections shared in this report identify significant obstacles and patterns of everyday discrimination that women of color encounter in the nonprofit workplace. Many women of color described working harder to overcome these barriers; not only is this an unfair burden, no amount of individual effort can be expected to translate into positive outcomes when an organization's social landscape is fraught with bias. The nonprofit sector must make real changes to ensure a fair and supportive workplace environment for all workers, particularly for women of color.



## SYSTEMS CHANGE

- **Leverage the power of philanthropy.** Funders should increase their investment in organizations led by and/or focused on the issues impacting women of color, which will help elevate the leadership, perspective, and influence of women of color across the nonprofit sector at large.
- **Advocate for enforcement of anti-discrimination laws.** The nonprofit sector should advocate for full funding of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which is tasked with investigating charges of discrimination, even if this means uncomfortably turning the lens on itself.



## ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

- **Address internal biases.** Nonprofits need robust and equitable human resources policies and systems that will ensure that racism, sexism, anti-trans bias, etc., will not be tolerated, and enforce real consequences for staff who violate those expectations.
- **Pay women of color fairly and create transparency around pay scales to expose discrimination.** Organizations should ensure transparency regarding pay scales so that individuals with similar credentials and experiences are similarly compensated.



## INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

- **Create peer support affinity groups for women of color.** Several industries have race- or gender-based affinity groups to encourage, support, and advocate for the inclusion and advancement of the constituency they represent. Peer support should be understood as a supplement to—not a substitute for—in-organization mentoring opportunities provided by supervisors and other senior staff, and increased grant investments in women of color-led organizations.



Building Movement Project

For more information, please visit  
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