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Money, Power and Race:
The Lived Experience of Fundraisers of Color

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——— Long-time Fundraising Professional of Color ———

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Introduction

Today's nonprofit sector work occurs within the context of a polarized and racially-charged world. Several important studies have highlighted the important ways that systemic and institutional racism impact our sector, and have examined the effects of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) on the structures and mechanisms that drive individual nonprofit organizations. A notable outgrowth of this work has been that nonprofits – and the capacity-building organizations that serve them – are closely assessing the repercussions of a pronounced racial leadership gap in the sector, and are searching for solutions.

At Cause Effective, we've been grappling with these questions and challenges internally, and are looking at the implications for our work. A nonprofit ourselves, Cause Effective provides strategic guidance to nonprofit organizations and the people who lead them to strengthen their fundraising and governing capacity. Many of the individual challenges these professionals have revealed in our workshops, roundtables and consultations share the underpinnings of systemic bias as their cause, reinforced by the inequities that are present at the intersections of money, power and race.

As Cause Effective has witnessed and participated in the nonprofit sector's vigorous anti-racism work, we were moved to address the question of racial equity through the lens of the development director. As the primary person responsible for fundraising, the development director serves as a pivot point toward institutional advancement and sustainability. Some of the key questions we asked were:

- **Why is the development role,** so critical to an organization's capacity, sustainability, growth and ability to achieve its mission, **often excluded in conversations about leadership**?

- **How do issues of race play out in the context of fundraising**, which includes discussions about money (as a means of organizational investment) and involves significant relationship-building with people of wealth and privilege?

- **How do issues of race** (as well as the intersections of ethnicity and gender) **impact the job satisfaction and professional advancement** of development directors of color?

- What should the nonprofit sector, and individual organizations, do to ensure that **development directors are supported in navigating issues of race and class** that hinder their effectiveness?

- **How might those barriers be permanently erased**?

Because the road to racial equity is reflected in an individual's deeply personal journey, we focused our efforts on addressing these questions to the people most directly affected: the relatively small coterie of development directors of color working across the sector. We wanted to hear from them personally about the unique challenges they face. We also aimed to capture the insights of professionals at various levels – both people doing the work and those influencing the working environment – to get a full picture of the landscape that these development directors of color inhabit.

It is clear that the next generation of nonprofit leaders will look very different. Those who assume this mantle will need to be armed not only with fundraising acumen, but with the awareness and fortitude to navigate issues of race, and the ability to create a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment for all of their organization's stakeholders.

Introduction

Our goal with this initiative is to start a dialogue that is necessary and urgent in these times, and to use what we learn from these conversations to develop organizational approaches that will result in richer work experiences, increased performance, and stronger retention and advancement of people of color towards organizational leadership.

This project is not intended as a scientific study, though we did capture some very compelling data. Some of the findings are surprising, and others confirm what we already knew. Money, power and race are complex issues that elicit strong emotions and polarizing viewpoints. Discussions about these topics often raise more questions than are answered. Yet this is the messy, important work required of us to advance racial equity.

In total, we read dozens of articles and reports, conducted 52 interviews, received 110 survey responses, and shared the results with 13 professionals across the sector for their review. While this is not a complete resource guide, it is a field-wide promise to work toward multiple solutions. Our special thanks to The New York Community Trust, which provided the funding to launch this project, and specifically Senior Program Officer Patricia Swann, who has championed this initiative from the very beginning.

We are honored to be the repository of these individuals' stories, and hope we can do justice to their collective experience.

Zanetta Addams-Pilgrim
Board Chair, Cause Effective
June 2019

What We Did

In Summer 2018, Cause Effective launched a field learning project employing a combination of four components: **i) literature review; ii) stakeholder interviews; iii) survey distribution;** and **iv) peer feedback.**

Literature Review: Through an extensive literature review, we sought to better understand the nonprofit landscape as it relates to the intersections of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) with development as a management role, along with issues relating to the recruitment, retention and ascension to leadership of nonprofit fundraisers of color. Our scan surfaced an array of survey report findings, exploratory studies, articles and commentary on a variety of interrelated topics about DEI issues in the nonprofit sector and philanthropy, but yielded very little research or formal studies on the state of the development profession specifically. Not surprisingly, a familiar refrain we found was: despite growing acknowledgment of the need to move towards a more diverse and inclusive workforce of nonprofit professionals, progress has been slow.

Stakeholder Interviews: From October to December 2018, Cause Effective conducted over 50 phone interviews with fundraisers, nonprofit executives, philanthropists, recruiters and DEI specialists, most of whom were people of color. The interviews focused on eliciting the arc of their careers, and included the following questions:

- Please describe your pathway to a career in development. How did you get where you are now?

- What were the factors that made you decide to make this your career? Did you choose the job, or did it choose you?

- Do you think that race/gender/age or other personal characteristics have impacted your career pathway and/or your interactions with boards, funders and others in the field? How?

- How did you grow into the role/increase your skills? Did learning how to navigate social equity/DEI issues play a role in that?

- Would you recommend this field and line of work for people from "underrepresented" populations? Why or why not?

Survey Distribution: As the interview phase wound down, Cause Effective created an electronic questionnaire that we distributed via professional associations, federations, funders, executive directors and development professionals, asking them to share the survey with their networks. In two months, we received 110 completed surveys from development professionals of color across the U.S. The survey provided context to the personal experiences of development professionals serving nonprofits nationally, combining quantitative responses with open-ended answers soliciting descriptions of how respondents' identity has hindered or advanced their experiences in the field, what supports they found useful in surmounting DEI challenges, and what supports they wished they had had along the way.

Peer Feedback: Finally, Cause Effective sent the draft report to thirteen leaders in the field to test the report's preliminary conclusions and recommendations, and to gain feedback on program design options. We also wanted to secure the commitment, especially from senior career professionals, to participate in the roll-out and evolution of ongoing programs designed to support development professionals of color at critical junctures in their careers.

> **Note:** In Cause Effective's effort to amplify the real life experiences of development professionals of color, which leans into the discomfort of racial inequity in fundraising, much of this report outlines experiences of racial trauma and injustice that may be triggering to some readers. We appreciate our contributors' honesty and bravery. We hope that sharing these stories honors them, rather than simply reduces them to victims of trauma and injustice.

We interviewed over 50 stakeholders, from development professionals of color to recruiters and philanthropists:

Philanthropy (10%)
CEO (12%)
Executive Search (10%)
DEI Specialists (6%)

Stakeholder Interviews by Profession

Development Professionals (63%)
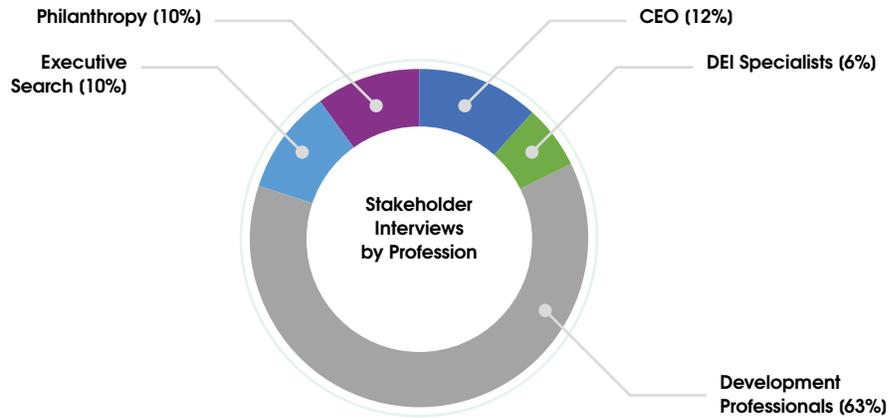
We placed a high value on hearing directly from professionals of color:

White (17%)

Stakeholders of Color vs. White Stakeholders

POC (83%)

Survey recipients worked in organizations with budgets ranging from under $500,000 to over $20 million:

Greater than $20mil (23%)
$500k or Less (8%)
>$500k to $2mil (24%)

Organizational Budget Size

>$10mil to $20mil (10%)
>$2mil to $10mil (36%)
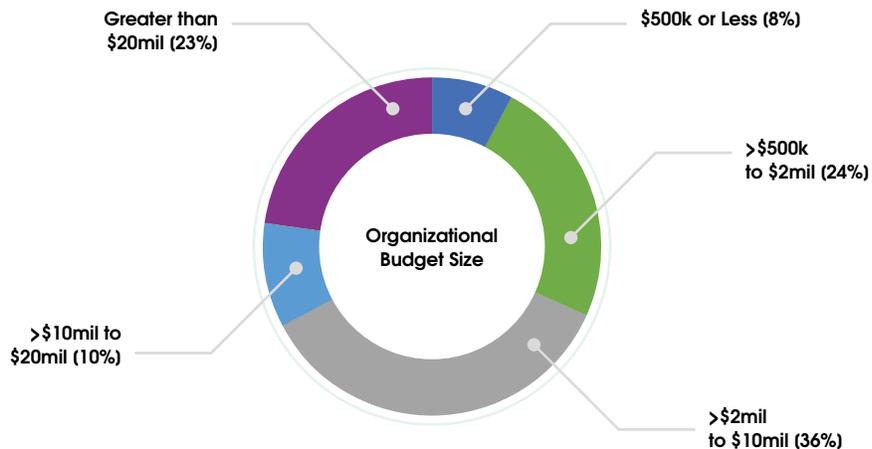
**There was a wide range of representation of people of color in senior staff leadership among respondents' organizations:**

Predominantly People of Color (60-100% POC)

Predominantly White (0 to 20% POC)

37%

Mixed (20-60% POC)

41%

22%

Percent of People of Color in Senior Leadership Positions

And in representation of people of color on the board:

Predominantly People of Color (60-100% POC)

Predominantly White (0 to 20% POC)

29%

49%

22%

Mixed (20-60% POC)
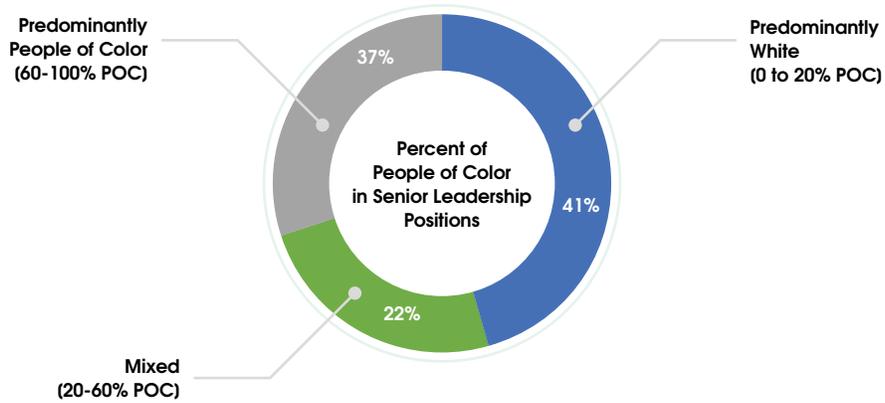
Percent of People of Color on the Board
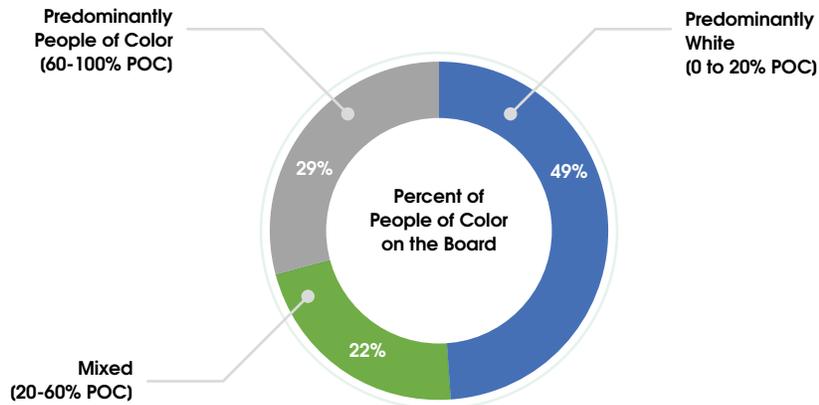
The representation of people of color on the development staff also varied, as did the size of the development staff (from 1 to 600)

Predominantly People of Color (60-100% POC)

Predominantly White (0 to 20% POC)

37%

34%

29%

Percent of People of Color on the Development Staff

Mixed (20-60% POC)
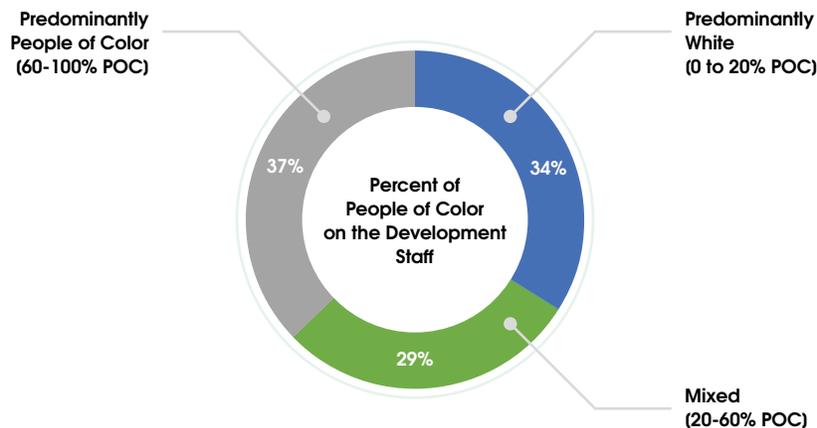
Survey respondents identified their race/ethnicity as follows:

Other (If you wish to identify) (2%)

Multiracial/ Multiethnic (13%)

American Indian/Alaska Native (4%)

Asian (East, South, Southeast, Central) (26%)

Respondents' Race/Ethnicity

Black/African- American/ Caribbean (47%)

Hispanic/Latinx (29%)
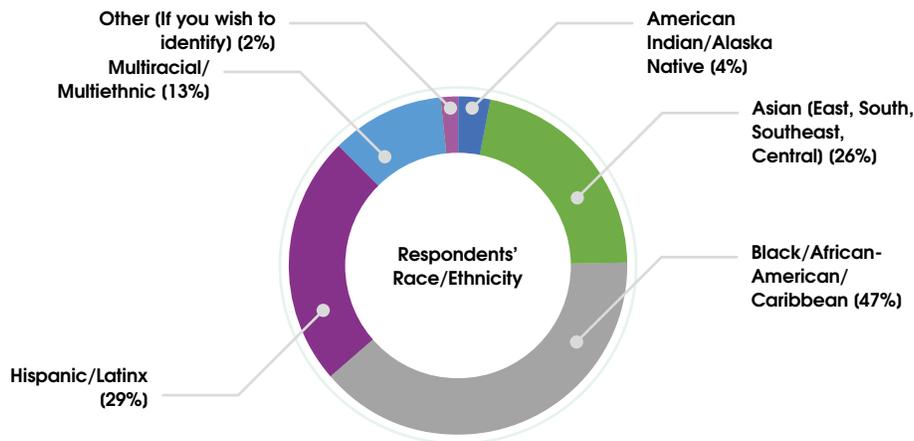
And the gender breakdown was:

Nonbinary/third gender (2%)

Male (20%)

Respondents' Gender Identity
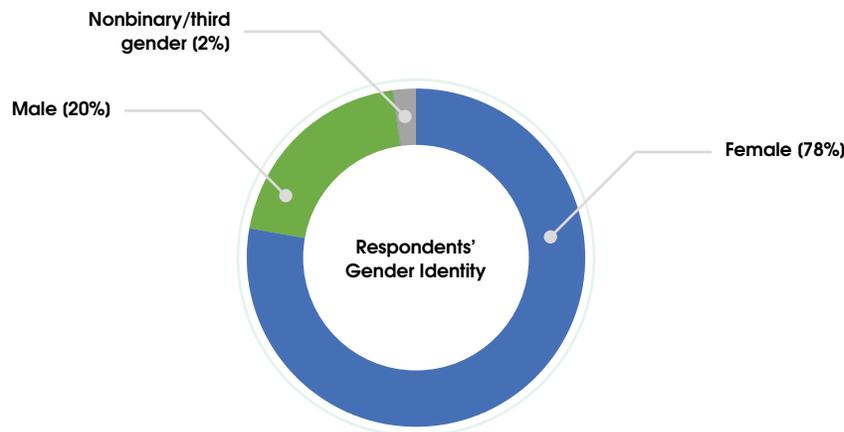
Female (78%)

This mirrors the gender breakdown nationally in the field, where in a recent study 74 percent of fundraisers were found to be female; 12 percent identified as people of color. [1]

Interestingly, there was no correlation between those who stated they had faced DEI challenges in their workplace and any of the following factors: i) their organization's size or mission area; ii) whether the organization was led by executives of color; iii) what percentage of the development department – or the board of directors – was comprised of people of color; or iv) what race or ethnicity they identified as. The DEI challenges of the fundraising profession, according to respondents, seem simply ever-present.

[1] **Fundraisers in the 21st Century,** Sarah K. Nathan and Eugene R. Temple, Indiana University Lily Family School of Philanthropy, 2017, https://scholarworks.iupui.edu/handle/1805/13845/

Our interviews did uncover three specific stages in development professionals of color's career trajectories, with distinct DEI-related challenges for each phase:

- **Early Career:** Development staff from first hire to those with 3-4 years' experience are making their way through the principal challenges of learning the job, finding one's place within the fundraising field's many hierarchies, and figuring out if one has the skill set, aptitude and temperament for a career in development, including functioning within a hierarchy where the donor's opinion unquestioningly takes priority.

- **Mid-Career:** As development staff move up, the primary work of fundraising shifts from a series of tasks to actual relationship-building, which carries with it a multitude of charged racial dynamics (as well as generational and cross-class currents).

- **Seasoned Professional:** These senior fundraising leaders have made their peace with the accommodations necessary to navigate through a white-dominated nonprofit world, and are eager to help the next generation find its way into fundraising and up the ladder.

Survey respondents at each of the above stages were fairly evenly represented in our samples:

Late Career (10+ years) (41%) · Early Career (1-4 years) (28%) · Respondent Career Stage Based on Years in the Field · Mid Career (5-10 years) (31%)
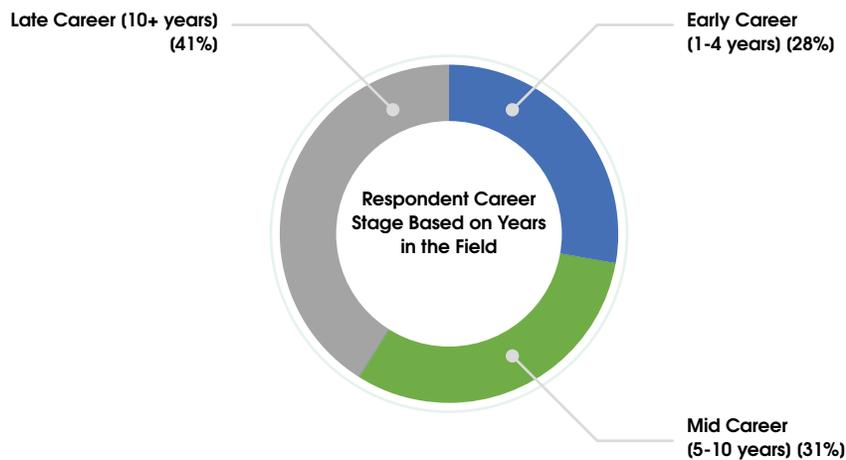
Unsurprisingly, the longer someone had stayed in the field of development, the more they cited experiencing discrimination along their career trajectory.

What We Learned

One of our key questions was why respondents felt that diversity mattered in the fundraising profession. Repeatedly, people we interviewed emphasized that:

- **Fundraising is where the narrative of organizations is shaped** – development professionals create the language that describes the problems, solutions and visions for change.
- **Fundraising manages the external relationships of nonprofits** – development professionals are entrusted with representing their institutions to individuals with the ability to make a game-changing difference in their constituents' future.
- **Fundraising is the nexus where money comes into the organization** – carrying with it the power to bestow resources and enable programming.
- **Donors of color are a rising philanthropic asset for the nonprofit sector** – and seem especially responsive to being approached by fundraisers of color.

And, as our interviewees repeatedly told us – **development professionals of color need to be in the room where these conversations happen**, and in fact need to be leading this dialogue.

People of color in development understand their position as fundraisers as one with a degree of power within an organization. Being in development *"gives you a seat at the table when it comes to where the direction of the nonprofit goes. You are at the heart of what the funding issues are, what the budget issues are, and how you create solutions based on resources and strategy,"* explained one senior fundraiser. Many longtime professionals expressed both pride in their place in the nonprofit industry, and resignation about the racism and microaggressions experienced over the course of an otherwise rewarding career.

Overall, the impression from the data, and from example after example shared in the interviews and the survey's open-ended responses, is that the everyday stresses on development professionals to raise revenue are so incredibly intense[2] that DEI-related challenges are seen as just part of the landscape fundraisers must navigate – **what simply must be waded through because fundraising reflects and magnifies the racial hierarchies of our culture.**

The development directors of color we interviewed described a constantly-surfacing tension in their lived experience as successful professionals:

> *"In any career there's always interactions that give you pause...Nobody is burning crosses but sometimes you pick up things that can be perceived as microaggressions."*

> *"It has always been difficult to work in white work environments because the common perspective is that it is not a 'white environment.' The lack of awareness of both institutional and personal bias/racism is impossible to change."*

[2] See CompassPoint's seminal 2013 analysis of the stresses on the Development Position for a full explanation. **Underdeveloped: A National Study of Challenges Facing Nonprofit Fundraising,** CompassPoint and the Evelyn and Walter Hass, Jr. Fund, 2013, https://www.compasspoint.org/underdeveloped.

Fundraisers of color identified the following themes, woven throughout each of the distinct career stages:

I. Establishing a career in fundraising means entering into white-dominated spaces.

- Fundraising staff of color expect that they will often be the only person of color in the room when meeting with donors (including board members).

- Twenty to thirty years ago, the mark of success in cross-racial business relationships was "assimilation" and code-switching. But a younger generation has different attitudes about what is authentic and appropriate – which may or may not resonate with the expectations of white donors, board members and executive leaders.

- Class background is also relevant:

  - The development professionals of color we interviewed who grew up middle class or with wealth felt they had childhood experiences in socializing among groups in which they were one of few people of color (i.e., in prep school or college), and had an easier time adjusting to and "reading" individuals of wealth and different backgrounds.

  - The development professionals of color we interviewed who grew up lower-income or in poverty often felt estranged and experienced "imposter syndrome" when confronted with the privileged lifestyle of donors with wealth.

  - One senior development director of color reflected: *"My success in development has a lot to do with my upbringing. I grew up around wealthy white people, and throughout my career I have continued to form relationships with affluent white people. I've seen over and over how people of color who didn't have the same background struggle within development teams – they find it difficult to navigate the tension around race and socioeconomics, and often leave the profession."*

- To be successful in development, people of color must be comfortable with their racial identity, one interviewee observed: *"Buttons are going to be pushed and you have to decide which ones you are going to respond to and which ones you're not."*

II. Fundraising is a field in which donors, board members and executive directors' comfort with the fundraising relationship is essential for success; when people of color are viewed (consciously or subconsciously) as outsiders it is harder for them to bring in the expected resources.

- The job of a development officer, especially one with major gifts responsibilities, requires donors to bond with the solicitor. *"Donors see themselves or their children in our white colleagues"* observed one formerly university-based fundraiser of color. *"They can't see that in us."* Another senior professional noted that it takes her longer to close on major gifts, because the first two meetings are spent getting the donor comfortable with her as a "likeable Black woman" before she can get to the same starting vantage point as her white colleagues.

- This comfort level matters more than it might in most other professions because fundraising revolves around catering to donors, and making them people feel comfortable with their choices and their donation. One interviewee noted: *"As Chief Fundraiser you have to feel comfortable and get people comfortable with you,"* adding, *"especially as a person of color, you have to be able to check your emotions."*

- The presence of wealth in communities of color is largely dismissed across the field; the general assumption is that people with the resources to capitalize nonprofits are white, which further dismisses the value of the connections that fundraisers of color might bring to benefit the cause.

    - *"Over and over I've experienced white organizational leaders wanting to water down fundraising event content out of fear that it might be 'too Black' – so that white people won't feel uncomfortable,"* explained one long-time gala producer. This undermines the assumption of expertise on the part of fundraisers of color and ignores their cultural competency, she continued: *"People of color who work within nonprofits that are white-led have to justify our culture even though we are often advocating for or serving people of color."*

    - This dismissal of the potential for donors of color to offer meaningful support, is especially frustrating to fundraisers of color in organizations whose work primarily benefits recipients of color.

III. The very fabric of fundraising deals with discomfort, rejection and often unrealistic expectations; inserting a racial component adds an extra hurdle to an already-charged interaction.

- One needs a thick skin to work in development, interviewees noted, since you get a lot of no's. There's always the question in the back of your mind, and possibly in your executive director's eyes, mused one respondent, of whether a rejection was due to racial bias. *"When you add race to the mix it gets really complicated,"* said one mid-career fundraiser of color.

- Also, given that development is such a mystery and source of discomfort for so many executive directors and board members, they may set unrealistic expectations – either based on lack of knowledge about how fundraising functions or through their need to "fill a budget hole." In this instance, they become quick to assume that the development director is failing. There is no room for error, which is compounded by implicit bias that calls the competency of development staff of color into question.

IV. The nature of fundraising evolves as one advances in the field, from tactics-oriented to relationship-based, which opens up more exposure to racially-tinged interactions within a development professional of color's career trajectory.

- Early in development careers, people often join the field because they are a skilled writer, or because they wanted a placement in a particular organization/cause and a fundraising position was available.

- As they decide to stay in the field, their relationship with their supervisor, or someone who "takes them under their wing" to show them strategies for getting ahead, becomes critical to job performance and satisfaction.

- Very few of these relationships have been with senior development professionals of color, which becomes a significant gap as the fundraising professional moves from early-career to mid-career positions.

- At the point that they progress (often by switching jobs) from a tactics-oriented coordinator/manager position to an associate director or director role, their job shifts into one of the development profession's primary challenges – achieving success through the actions of others (donors, board members, executive staff, solicitors, etc.).

- Without guidance, mid-career development professionals of color are often left to wonder if their competency is in question, if implicit bias is at play, or if a fundraising interaction that ended less than fully satisfactorily is simply the result of the fact that fundraising never has a 100 percent success rate.

  - The professional fundraising associations, while offering career guidance for early-career fundraisers, have not been focused on the special needs of fundraisers of color and have not helped these professionals parse their unique issues particularly well. *"The development field is a really emotionally draining environment to be in,"* described one mid-career professional. *"There aren't enough programs aimed at helping underrepresented individuals in these roles so it ends up being a burden that you have to bear on your own."*

  - Mid-career development professionals of color feel isolated and unsure of how to navigate this new terrain; several told us they didn't know many people they could connect with.

  - Fundraising professionals of color who had entered into this phase of discouragement often expressed uncertainty about whether they would stay in the field: *"When I think long-term, I'm not sure how committed I am to this,"* admitted a mid-career professional. *"I'm good at it but who knows what I'll be doing 3 to 5 years from now."*

- Some fundraisers of color leave the field at mid-career, feeling thwarted by their lack of personal networks; or if they remain in the field, position themselves in the interpersonally "safe" areas of grant-writing or fundraising administration: *"I became better at the areas of fundraising that didn't have me interacting with a social class that I was uncomfortable with,"* explained one seasoned professional.

V. The competency of fundraisers of color is questioned while white fundraisers are assumed to be proficient.

- Microaggressions and racial bias abound, but are rarely addressed due to the power imbalance between staff and board, and staff and donors.

- Respondents also cited multiple examples of board members questioning development staff of color's knowledge and assumptions, instead turning to white staff as the experts. Development directors of color felt they had to work harder than their white counterparts to establish their authority and gain the trust of executive directors and board members.

- This scenario can be compounded by the fact that many board members and executive staff are uncomfortable with development work itself – and are unconsciously looking to discount the message and authority of development staff charged with securing revenue for mission and programs. *"The development department was often called 'the necessary evil' in front of the entire staff and board by the CEO,"* noted one mid-career development professional. Resistance to development can become intertwined with racial rejection.

- The sense of the fundraising arena as a "club" comprised of donors, board members and executive leaders who come from similar backgrounds can disadvantage fundraisers of color who didn't grow up with a comparable background. Observed one interviewee: *"I am a gay Black man who doesn't come from the right family name and school lineage – I'm questioned in a different way."*

VI. Belittlement happens as a matter of course in dealing with donors, board members, and, in some positions, executive staff.

- Coping strategies range from having a "thick skin" to trying to educate co-workers about the changes needed.

- Rarely, if ever, are board members or donors called out on their behavior. *"I've learned how to recognize and identify funder biases and assumptions as well as learned to bite my tongue and not speak out, as that could lead to disagreements and loss or lack of funding,"* one mid-career development staffer explained.

- The culture of deference in fundraising is based on an accepted hierarchy in which pleasing donors is key to professional success, making everyone reluctant to upset the status quo.

  - Pressure on development staff to respond to the perceived whims of donors leads executive staff to prioritize donors' comfort over fundraising staff's right to dignity and equity.

  - Not disturbing the donor's sensibility becomes a guiding motivation, linked in fact to both professional success and personal renumeration. A mid-level fundraiser explained: *"Oftentimes I'm raising money from people who are not like me, and having to navigate what the dynamic is."* This can lead to interactions where she had to figure out *"if things feel funky…how is that potentially connected to race, gender and age? And how am I going to respond in the moment at the same time that I know that my goal is to raise money for the organization?"*

  - Board members both acquiesce in and are drivers of this phenomenon, being sometimes perpetrators and rarely allies in standing up to their peers.

VII. Internal support, particularly at the executive leadership level, is key to individual professional success.

- The single most important element mentioned was a supportive executive director who "had the back" of fundraising staff of color in external situations and created a culture of equity internally.

  - Conversely, when executive directors don't understand development, explained one long-time development director, *"that means the development director is working without a lot of supervision and feels isolated. Adding on top of that being a person of color creates a serious level of pressure and stress that you will fail."*

- A supportive supervisor was seen as helpful, but on their own not able to redirect organizational culture and priorities, or set boundaries for external interactions.

- Occasionally board members were mentioned as being supportive, but mostly they remained oblivious or part of the problem.

- Support from donors was almost never cited as a critical element in creating an inclusive and welcoming environment.

- The emotional labor to bring an organization along on a DEI continuum was described as exhausting but also necessary. Doing it in partnership with non-fundraising staff, and especially with white staff as allies, made a huge difference in a fundraising professional of color's willingness to stick it out and do the educational work required to help create an inclusive work environment.

VIII. Fundraisers of color who do navigate the racial barriers find development to be a very rewarding way to contribute to social change.

- Development was noted to be a good choice for people who are not called to take on program positions (nor trained in finance), to make a career in social change.

- The fact that fundraisers are relatively well-paid and, once skilled, are highly sought-after, was mentioned by many as a plus for staff of color who may not come from a financial cushion and so need a secure professional pathway. *"Development is a great career path for a person of color because you make a decent salary, it's meaningful work, and you're marketable,"* reflected one senior development professional of color.

- Most fundraisers of color fall into development by accident (as do most individuals in the profession), but as one senior development professional of color reacted, *"Once I realized I could raise money, have an impact, and build a career in this – I was all in."*

Overall, the development professionals of color we spoke with loved their profession but were often frustrated with the lack of supports provided for them to achieve their potential. While this is certainly not limited to people of color in the field, it is exacerbated by implicit biases and structural racism that work against their success. Those who stick it out and succeed have a nuanced perspective on what it takes and whether it's worth it.

In Their Own Words: The Lived Experience of Fundraisers of Color

Over eight months, nearly 200 nonprofit development professionals of color spoke to us honestly, eloquently and passionately. More than any quantitative data, their words speak volumes on the quality of their experience – whether just starting out or close to retirement. The following is a representative sample of hundreds of pages of responses:

On entering the fundraising profession:

"I came into fundraising because it was important to me – who was bringing in resources to programs and how was that getting decided?"

"Becoming a fundraiser is a transforming role. It's a way to amplify my activism, and people see me in a different way when they know I can bring them money."

"People of color should be in development leadership positions within organizations that advocate for or serve people of color. Executive directors must make a genuine effort to hire people of color for those positions, particularly when the organization's mission is to help marginalized communities."

On having to work harder to prove themselves:

"There is the stigma that I cannot secure the funds because of the color of my skin. This has been the case when either whites or Black/Africans do the hiring. This has been a struggle during my career."

"Fundraising is hard enough, and I had to expend one and a half times as much energy as a white colleague to do an equal or better job."

"It's often perceived that Black people cannot be major gifts officers since they are not already in the social circles of these donors. This bars Black people from receiving promotions to these roles."

"I find that the advice I give is dismissed or is seen as a challenge to authority. It's as if I don't know how to do my job."

"I've gone to fundraising events where people would talk to my (white) assistant as if they were the one in charge. I've also been labeled as not assertive enough by board members which is a common stereotype of Asian American women."

"I felt that my race/ethnicity and age often led higher ups, board, and other high-level donors to perceive me as the assistant, while my counterparts received more respect and even more time to complete requested tasks. My superiors also routinely questioned my readiness and ability to meet with donors face-to-face while providing similar opportunities and better titles/pay to white colleagues."

> *"Philanthropy does not belong to the wealthy, to the white, to the privileged. If people of color leaned into our power as philanthropic agents, we could commit genuine culture shift."*

> *"Leadership discounts my role and donors take their lead from them."*

On their experiences with implicit bias and racism:

"Our current board is mostly white and very privileged. They often play insider baseball with connections/interests that may not be readily accessible to POC fundraisers and thus they form closer bonds to white colleagues who might have a better grasp of 'culture.' If this is an expectation of the role, then it must be something that all fundraisers are trained on or given direction/resources for."

"There is institutional bias against people of color in development, women, and frankly against those who come from a certain socio-economic background. The incidents range from shaming and dismissive narratives to tropes about 'aggressive' behaviors, unrealistic time expectations, and the spiral of perfection needed to compete."

"Being Latina in many spaces, in particular donor and board spaces, creates an expectation that I 'tone down' that aspect of myself to be an effective fundraiser. I was passed over for a promotional opportunity to the point of being told not to apply because 'as a single parent and Latina' I could not build credibility with high-net-worth individuals."

"My last organization had a board of almost entirely senior citizen, wealthy, conservative, white men. The amount of direct disregard I felt when speaking to them, I will never forget. And I never want to feel that way again."

"Our executive director is a white man and I often reinforce some funders' bias by assigning him a more pronounced speaking role when I do not reasonably think I will be taken seriously."

"I think there are very subconscious beliefs that people carry about who is the right person to interact with a major donor, sometimes even internalized in people of color."

"The world of fundraising is predominantly white, as with most donors. I feel that when I, a person of color, get in front of a donor who is accustomed to a white development director, they are less inclined to give me their time. This makes it difficult to be a successful fundraiser."

On their experiences with tokenism, microaggressions and pressures to assimilate:

"Mostly from white donors and funders – expectations that I will carry certain 'authentic' narratives, erasure of identity, questioning of expertise."

"I think there are white board members at my organization who assume that just because a person is Black that s/he is not a high-net-worth person. They have no knowledge of high-net-worth Black people and think all of us are broke, poor and ignorant."

"Being the 'token' Black woman on a major gifts team [is uncomfortable]."

"Some board members treat me like a secretary; microaggressions are comments like 'I don't see you as a person of color. I see you as normal.' 'I have a Black friend.' as if that means they are not racist."

"I have experienced prospects and/or donors touching my hair, making inappropriate comments about my body, had supervisors request that I smile more, and suggest that my very reasonable concerns were angry or negative. Some have even suggested that I was not committed to the organization despite years in my position and long hours – if and when I stood up for my boundaries."

"This wealthy white woman at a fundraising event only wanted to talk to Black organizers, presumably to show that she cares about and wants to fund work led by Black people. But she judged my organization and its membership based on my skin color, assuming we don't support Black communities because I'm Asian."

On how intersectionality makes the job even more challenging:

"I feel as though I am constantly othered in my role. I am in the lowest role of the department and also the only person of color. When I make mistakes I feel as though I am met with a lack of understanding that I do not see mirrored in relationships my superiors have with other young white women in my department."

"I have to work extra hard to be taken seriously by certain folks of certain backgrounds, particularly older white men. It often means that while my white counterparts can shoot the breeze with some older white folks just dressed in jeans and a T-shirt, I need to put on heels, a suit, glasses, and come on extra assertively sometimes in order to be noticed/taken seriously."

"I feel there is a strong intersection between race/ethnicity and age. No matter how much talent and results you have, being a young POC professional, my experience has been that people assume I do not carry as much experience, insight and wisdom as I actually possess."

"I have often been tokenized as a person of color in development or underestimated in my ability to have authentic and meaningful conversations that will help further cultivate relationships with donors."

"No one takes you seriously when you are young, capable and a woman of color."

On experiencing impostor syndrome in their relationships with donors:

"*I constantly ask myself how we can better have our donor pool trend toward those values, but I'm not sure it's a priority for others. All of these elements lead to an overall feeling of not belonging.*"

"*Major donors invite us into their spaces with good intentions but don't recognize how uncomfortable those spaces are.*"

"*Sometimes there is an internal struggle with constantly asking people (specifically white people and/or white people with money and power), because of the cultural stigmas about money and how it impacts dynamics and relationships.*"

"*The fact that development is about money can be really hard to navigate if you don't come from that world. Even just learning the language of money can be intimidating.*"

On the sense of isolation they routinely experience:

"*Race and gender are very visible and when white men see you as below them, you can feel it. It is uncomfortable.*"

"*I am often one of the few people of color in the room at some events, and have to navigate tricky circumstances and conversations. I have never had a POC supervisor and often I am tasked with explaining why inclusion, diversity and being intentional about historically oppressed communities is important, and how to do so.*"

"*If I am working with a conservative and wealthy board of older individuals, as a radical queer person of color, there is a disconnect that goes beyond board development and donor relations. There is genuine human disconnect.*"

"*The majority of conversations with an equity lens (if they happen) come from the perspective of white guilt or white wokeness. I have no partners on the board to discuss equity issues from marginalized perspectives, much less drive an agenda, and due to the majority whiteness of my sector, little opportunity to connect with fellow POC leaders.*"

"*When you grew up poor or lower income, it's hard to shake the feeling that you're putting on an act. On top of that, it's hard to reconcile the fact that while the organization as a whole might value DEI and intersectionality, the donor pool definitely doesn't reflect that.*"

"*I'm often the only person of color at a donor experience. There's something shameful about that, but I'm used to it.*"

In Their Own Words: The Lived Experience of Fundraisers of Color

On how DEI issues are addressed (or not) in the workplace:

"HR is not helpful, they work for the employer. Executive team thinks POC complain too much."

"Workplace does not have adequate training in sensitivity or social awareness. DEI is a loose goal that, if unfulfilled, has no repercussions. No tangible or quantifiable efforts are made to reach, interview or hire applicants of color."

"My supervisor has expressed a genuine desire to support me, so I use our 1:1 meetings to raise issues. But sometimes he is the problem and this is more difficult to unravel. He gets extremely defensive and I have to do a lot of peacemaking and reconciliation work, which often involves assuring him of his good intentions and appreciating what he has done. That can be exhausting."

One-third of survey respondents reported that they experienced DEI issues on the job. Of those, *two-thirds did not feel supported by their supervisors.*

"As a woman of color, giving feedback or pointing out areas for improvement at the organizational level comes off as defensive or 'you're just the know-it-all.'"

"It requires herculean efforts on my part to push any of my ideas through, and at that point, I don't have energy for anything else."

"There is a lack of diversity of fundraisers in my department, which indicates a lack of commitment to hiring and valuing POC as valuable contributors to development roles. There is a strong implicit message that I experience as lack of support."

"I mostly experience sound bytes about inclusion and the work that needs to be done, but it doesn't ever become actualized. And conversations about race/inclusion/diversity or microaggressions are stifled and diversion tactics are used: the conversations are then made about organizational structure, or staffing, or logistical needs – but not about the deeper-seated systems of oppression and privilege."

"I am the only person of color in my division and have additional tasks for anything that is related to diversity – without additional help or budget."

"You can run a truck through the DEI framework. The term is so broad as to be meaningless. I just want people to respect me so that I can figure out what needs to be done to create a new and better world."

"Any time I bring up problematic issues, I am told I misunderstand the culture of the institution OR 'personal quirks' or 'just how things are.' I wish DEI skills (even basic ones) were a priority for my white colleagues because it is hard being the only voice."

"I am asked to do more work, emotional labor and to "teach" people about inclusion because of my informed identity politics, and that work (as well as other work outside of my position) is not compensated but expected."

In Their Own Words: The Lived Experience of Fundraisers of Color

On how they address DEI issues themselves:

"*I let it all go. Because what else can you do?*"

"*I am always heard, but I don't necessarily want to be the one to always bring these matters up.*"

"*When it happens I laugh it off, so that I don't appear to be a 'sensitive person.'*"

"*Outright bigotry and the need to switch jobs because of microaggressions that go unchallenged and unchecked.*"

While 77 percent of survey respondents acknowledge facing obstacles in their development careers due to their race/ethnicity, only 22 percent consider these impediments to be one of the top three challenges of their jobs. The three top challenges cited were:
- ↗ Expectations of role exceed time/ability
- ↗ Lack of pre-existing fundraising structure
- ↗ Lack of donor pool

"*I have been told to 'assume best intent' in regards to microaggressions I have experienced in the workplace. I was told I was hired to 'try something different' in regards to my race and by not hiring another white female.*"

"*I feel that at times when I speak about the underlying racial inequity in our current culture, I am perceived as the angry Black woman.*"

On working in DEI-supportive environments:

"*My workplace has been actively working to be more inclusive – in fact I would say it is ahead of many organizations in this regard.*"

"*As a person of color, I feel my perspective is valued. It is also smaller things, such as no resistance when I wear my hair naturally.*"

"*I've talked to one of my supervisors specifically about how it can feel to be a woman of color in development, especially if you also don't come from money. She didn't try to say that she understood that exact experience, which I appreciated. Instead, she connected me to a friend and colleague of hers who also works in development and is a woman of color.*"

"*My current job feels like an oasis of diversity and inclusion. My bosses have made it clear to me that because the fundraising field lacks diversity and because they believe in my potential, they are invested in growing me as a fundraising professional. Whereas in other positions at other organizations I have fought for my talents to be seen, my current organization has recognized them, continues to nurture them, and I feel wholly supported.*"

"*Putting power to words means so much. Being able to embrace the elephant in the room and speak on these issues is important.*"

"*I had to culturally silence myself. I had to let things slide that offended me because I didn't want to be seen as the angry Black/brown man.*"

"*My organization is a multi-racial, pan-ethnic group of people of color, and we're always learning about each other and learning the ways we internalize oppression or act it out with each other. But I have support from my co-workers on the issues I experience outside of our organization, which is a relief.*"

In Their Own Words: The Lived Experience of Fundraisers of Color

On what aspiring fundraisers of color will face:

"It's just simply harder for people of color. First to 'acclimate' to the field and then to try to rise through the ranks."

"It is a very siloed profession and fundraisers are not always in alignment with the organizations they fundraise and advocate for."

"It reinforces problematic power dynamics."

"Wealth is concentrated in white communities and dealing with them, answering to them, is a chore."

"There are a lot of triggers in doing this job."

At the same time that 88 percent of survey respondents said they would recommend a career in fundraising as a career for a person of color, almost 60 percent acknowledged they might be reluctant to suggest that people of color they know move into the fundraising profession "because fundraising involves external relationships where bias might be present."

On surviving and succeeding in the profession:

"There is little room in this field for people who lack confidence or are not resilient. Those are key traits for learning and building the ability to cultivate donors."

"Being able to adapt in professional settings where I might be the only person of color was an important skill I learned."

"In development you must learn to work with a wide variety of people."

"You need a thick skin and formidable work ethic."

"In navigating some of the wealthier and whiter circles, I know there will be preconceived judgement and perhaps disrespect. If that is the circle I am going to have to work in for a given event, then I know to lean into my resilience and teflon myself against the microaggressions."

"With maturity comes firm conviction in one's professional abilities that makes it easier to command and demand parity and respect on all fronts."

"A key skill for any fundraising professional, but especially those of color, is the ability to find common ground with the circle of influence, i.e., board members, connectors and donor prospects."

"Unfortunately, at some point, most likely several points, you will have to overlook disrespectful comments in your career. That being said, only you will know when the line has been crossed too far."

"You develop skills to determine when to confront and when to comply to gain what you want professionally. You determine criteria and thresholds for tolerance around ignorance and bias."

"It takes a coupling of emotional intelligence and research – with a massive shot of creativity – to find the intersection of values."

Fundraisers of color need a passion for mission, perspective, a keen sense of self-worth and the ability to keep their eyes on the prize, to be successful. Cause Effective salutes their dedication and stands in awe of their professionalism. We present their narratives, with urgency, to discern how to create a more inclusive environment for those in the fundraising field now, and for those who may enter in the future.

What We Can Do

If the first step is to acknowledge the problem, the next is to act.

The themes that this survey explores are not issues in the abstract. As the compilation of personal narratives illustrates, there are system-wide deficiencies that hamper the retention, promotion, advancement, satisfaction and success of fundraisers of color.

Below are a series of strategies, incorporating the challenges posed by respondents, which key stakeholders and actors on the nonprofit landscape can undertake to effectuate change. By no means complete, this compendium of actions can help us focus on the needs of fundraisers of color, retaining their ranks, advancing their leadership potential, and thereby improving the sustainability of myriad missions, as well as the sector itself.

> *"Being a development officer of color, when most of the folks I'm raising money from are white, you hear some amazing things, and sometimes you cringe. I always had to be in a space where my first reaction to anything was to take a pause. In order to have impact, I have learned to rest in the pause before responding."*

All players in the system, regardless of race or ethnicity, must commit to the "reflect and respond" strategy described by this senior-level fundraising executive. In our experience as practitioners, relying on "gut" is not enough: Gut reactions often emerge as a subconscious outgrowth of our immersion in a white-dominant culture. Gut must be checked, and rechecked, in order to break those patterns. Agency-wide anti-racism training, including board members as well as staff, can help recalibrate the lens through which we view and engage in interpersonal encounters.

And because fundraising at its heart involves human connections, it is imperative that everyone engaged in it take responsibility for changing the operating assumptions that prevent development professionals of color from performing at their best. Solutions do not rest solely – or even primarily – with the directly affected (development professionals of color). We are, all of us, negatively impacted when the system of financing nonprofits is built upon a series of racially-charged interactions in which wealth and status are allowed to dictate human relations. By the interdependence of the world we operate within, when some of us are held as "less than," we are all functioning at less than our full potential.

Accordingly, our recommendations are addressed to executive directors, HR managers, supervisors, board members, donors and funders, white development staffers/allies, and professional fundraising associations, as well as development professionals of color. In addition, there are a set of recommendations, still to be explicated and beyond the scope of this report, that pertain to the future of the pipeline, especially relevant to universities, professional certification programs, and other means for fostering people of color as fundraisers. **Each of us has a role to play in disrupting the tightly-woven nexus of money, power and race upon which the status quo rests.**

What We Can Do

For Executive Directors

Change starts at the top. One-third of respondents identified the executive director as a key determinant in creating a welcoming and supportive climate in which development professionals of color can fulfill their job expectations with dignity and authority.

- ➔ **Be aware that your actions set the tone.** A commitment to DEI cannot be relegated to the HR Department – they can be responsible for implementation, but they cannot create the organization's values nor show its commitment to walking-the-walk.

- ➔ **Be cognizant that stakeholders look to you** – both internal (managers, line staff, others) and external (board, donors, etc.) – for guidance and leadership in how to approach DEI concerns. Your voice, above all, has agency on these issues. Your silence speaks volumes, and others derive cues about the organizational culture you are helping to foster, both positive and negative.

- ➔ If your aim is to lead a diverse, equitable and inclusive nonprofit workplace, **make sure that your organization has a DEI policy in place** that is bolstered by professionally and externally-facilitated racial equity training for all staff, with regularly-intervaled refreshers.

  - ○ Bring in outside experts to support your efforts to create a workplace where all perspectives and lived experiences are weighted equitably and valued across your organization.

  - ○ Make sure that senior management is held accountable for DEI strategies and that benchmarks are regularly measured to ensure progress is being made.

  - ○ Budgeting time and money is critical to making sure this all happens.

- ➔ **Make sure there is a mechanism in place to get development staffers' honest feedback** about their working conditions – both internal (transparency and equity in staffing decisions) and external (relationships with board members, donors and other stakeholders).

  - ○ Ask for feedback from white development staff members as well as staffers of color, which may reveal more about shared experiences and divisions within the department.

  - ○ Offer regular, anonymous feedback tools to all staffers.

- ➔ In order to hear what is happening, even when it is not easy, **be prepared to listen closely**. Then engage in honest internal dialogue – with staff leadership and board members – based on the feedback you're given. Take the opportunity to hold a mirror up to these findings because even the most DEI-astute organizations make mistakes – and it's how we deal with them that matters in creating a lasting culture of equity.

  - ○ Invest in DEI training for yourself, as needed. Leading by example gives you more authority to invite other staff and board leaders to join you.

  - ○ Give yourself (and your organization) the tools and support to address the tensions by having these sometimes difficult conversations.

➔ **Know that development is an arena with power-based interpersonal interactions on a number of levels,** making it ripe for DEI abuses. Raise up these aspects of the work (as opposed to treating the entire staff as an undifferentiated group). The clout possessed by donors who can potentially offer access to significant funding is a real factor in fundraising. Therefore, development relationships need special attention and care.

➔ **Be prepared to have open-minded conversations on specific donor issues as they arise,** with a range of organizational leaders, board members, and directly affected development staff of color. If you as an organizational leader are experiencing these issues for the first time, get help on how to conduct an appropriate dialogue. Development professionals of color can help develop guidelines that enhance their agency and discretion in navigating DEI-challenging scenarios towards a positive outcome (whatever that outcome may be). Create an organizational policy that supports this process beyond the particular triggering situation.

For Nonprofit HR/Talent Managers

Above all, the HR department must forcefully advocate for inclusionary policies and practices that lead to more diverse and equitable nonprofit workplaces for professionals of all backgrounds, social classes and intersectional identities.

➔ **Make sure there are DEI policies implemented across all departments.** DEI policy should be more than just a paper document, it should reflect the organization's values, be embedded in the culture, and inform the appropriate and acceptable ways that staff interact with each other and outside stakeholders.

➔ **Ensure that the organization's promotion policy is transparent and equitable for development staff.** Require the development department to create a process that assesses staff by established and published standards relevant to that person's role in the development process, rather than going by gut (which is often based on who is perceived as more "likeable" based on dominant white culture). Even the seemingly-impartial standard of direct money raised (which is partially dependent on assignments given to different staffers based on internal "feelings" about who will "get along better" with certain donors – and be able to cultivate and successfully solicit a particular charitable gift) is problematic.

➔ As a staff retention measure, **recommend to leadership that a career development pipeline be established that prioritizes early- and mid-career growth for development professionals.** Consider what access to mentoring, job shadowing and coaching might look like, if your organization has the infrastructure to support it. If not, consider collaborating with other like-minded nonprofits to provide a range of learning opportunities for entry- and mid-level development managers of color.

➔ **Consider encouraging affinity groups,** if your organization is large enough, or collaborating with Talent Managers at similar organizations to support development staff of color in finding and gaining support from their peers. In Cause Effective's role as a convener of development director peer learning circles, we've found that offering an alternative to the isolation experienced by so many in the profession is extremely helpful.

➔ **Before a recruitment process begins, review your nonprofit's DEI policies and its strategic plan using a DEI lens,** meet with your development department head, and consult nonprofit HR talent management best practices. Inquire about existing search and posting strategies – and expand them to include online portals for affinity-based professional associations; gather resources and advisors to broaden the search. Make a commitment to actively recruit from underrepresented groups across all identities.

➔ During the recruitment process, **be sure to actively promote staff position openings so that an internal recruitment process is equally robust.** And, if you send the job posting to your own formal and informal networks, ask for help expanding the circle so the posting can reach a greater number of potential candidates. This will signal to friends and colleagues your intention to conduct an inclusive search and engage in a more equitable hiring practice, not simply "checkbox tokenism."

For Supervisors of Development Staff of Color

The first work in understanding the challenges of development staff of color is personal – understanding your own lens on structural racism and how it affects your staff of color's ability to be successful at their jobs.

➔ **Engage in your own DEI training, readings and professional development.** Take the time to explore your own biases (unconscious and conscious) and how they might be impacting your perception of the capabilities and potential of the people who you manage. Be sensitive to the reality of racial equity issues in society at large, but especially in the development program with its built-in tensions around class, power and privilege.

➔ **Strive to develop open, trusting and supportive relationships with all of your staff.** Get to know them as people, and not just a job title or function, by giving due attention to the "who" of the work, and not just the "what." With respect to supervising fundraisers of color, this means understanding that DEI issues are real and that they occur within the confines of the work they do as well as in the outside world. Be sensitive to the fact that what may seem like a "small" or relatively minor issue is often compounded by many other pressures and circumstances the supervisor may not necessarily be aware of. Your ability to listen and empathize is critical. If you need support in this aspect of your role, request it from leadership.

➔ **Take time to reflect on the team-building environment** that helps your supervisees feel acclimated and welcomed into the organization. Consider what opportunities for exposure to other aspects of the mission they have been given. Check in to inquire about other ways you can align their interests with the work of the organization.

➔ **Be open to feedback if your nonprofit is still in the early stages of addressing inclusion,** and be prepared to listen to what can sometimes be difficult critiques about internally-focused or externally-generated racial tensions.

➔ **Make an investment in building and broadening the skills of your development staff** so they feel ready to take on additional professional responsibilities as they arise. Consider what access to mentoring, job shadowing and coaching might look like, and make sure your employees take advantage of these activities. Be transparent about the pathway to promotion, and establish one if it doesn't already exist.

➔ **Advocate for development staff of color in your charge.** Be the influencer on the executive director, where possible, and stand up for the needs of your supervisees.

➔ **Open up your networks within the organization as well as externally,** to help your direct reports build connections and relationships with stakeholders in the profession.

➔ **Make sure your assessment of development staff of color's performance is based on transparent, established checkpoints** (see HR department recommendations above).

For Board Chairs and Board members

Board members have an exceptional opportunity to be change agents. As both insiders and outsiders, you are able to insist that DEI be an organizational priority, and you are in a position to defend staff from any manner of offenses like those experienced by this study's respondents. If the development field is ever to challenge its hierarchical nature in which donors and board members are uncritically validated, you have a key role to play in enabling that transformation.

➔ **Invest and participate in organization-wide DEI training** and mandate the creation of board-specific DEI policies that provide oversight to ensure that policies are being implemented and embedded into the organizational culture. Be a forceful advocate internally for DEI.

➔ **Actively commit to board diversity** and take the necessary steps to identify board members who come from diverse backgrounds, particularly people of color.

➔ **Take personal responsibility for educating yourself on DEI issues.** Don't rely on people of color in the organization to be your guide – that is not their job.

➔ **Be an ally at the board table and with donors.** As a board member, you are a bridge between the organization and donors who may or may not be aware of the biases they carry.

➔ **Try to anticipate difficult fundraising situations** and support development staff of color in reacting to uncomfortable moments. If you are bringing a donor/prospect to the organization who may not be as far along on the spectrum of allyship as you or others, talk it over with the executive director and development staff ahead of time to prepare for what might occur – and to get their input on how to proceed. From your seat of power, support staff leadership.

What We Can Do

For Individual Donors and Institutional Funders

The entire field of development is built upon creating conditions that result in a match between the work of the nonprofit and the interests of institutional funders and individual donors. To the extent that your commitment to social change as a funder includes equity and equal opportunity, you can influence not just nonprofit grantees but the sector at large and the profession. Put simply, nonprofit fundraising is deferential to donors, and organizational leaders will pay more attention to your words and actions than to those from any other segments of the sector.

➔ **Institutional funders, particularly grantmaking foundations, have a bully pulpit** and are in a prime position to help steer desirable equitable behaviors and organizational priorities.

   ○ As foundations examine their grantmaking policies, identify where DEI-related practices and expectations fit into all funding priorities.

   ○ Begin by publicly stating a preference to fund organizations with a strong, established framework for promoting DEI in the workplace, which will encourage organizations to adapt and respond.

   ○ Actions like these will lead the way for fellow institutional funders and philanthropists to follow suit.

➔ **Donors, both institutional and individual, can be natural allies in the effort to educate their peers** and, when necessary, have the conversations to change hearts, minds and behaviors. Engage in some form of DEI/Undoing Racism training to provide tools to do so, increasingly being offered by funder networks.

For White Development Staffers and Allies

It is essential for those on the ground to be an active part of the solution, beyond simply "not being part of the problem." Your perspective, as peers to development professionals of color, is crucial in shedding light on entrenched patterns of attitudes and behaviors. And while your voice should not supplant that of fundraisers' of color in speaking up about these problems, you have a critical role in validating their perspective and helping it get truly heard.

➔ **Pay attention to how fundraisers of color are treated (by inclusion, exclusion or relegation of role) in mixed-race scenarios,** and do your part to create more equity at the table. Make room by speaking less, highlighting the voices of people of color, and, to the extent you can, steering white people in the room who overspeak to do the same.

➔ **Open your circle of influence to include development professionals of color,** especially if you notice that they are underrepresented within your existing networks:

   ○ **Mentorship:** Offer to connect development professionals of color to colleagues who are interested in supporting other fundraisers as colleagues.

   ○ **Fellowship:** Do all development staffers have the opportunity to be introduced and networked with people other than their supervisor or manager? Are they encouraged to connect with industry peers and build community with leaders in the field? If not, help promote community-building within your department, your mission area, and your partner organizations and any other sector cohorts.

- **Allyship:** To help make professional allyship more visible, begin normalizing it within your professional networks by broadening inclusionary practices. Invite fundraisers of color in your proximity to industry events where networking is the purpose and goal. To foster community-building, speak with your colleagues in professional associations who are attuned to diversity, equity and inclusion about best practices in allyship.

➔ **Support development professionals of color by validating – to them, to executive staff, to HR, to development supervisors – when you see instances of implicit bias and microaggressions occur.** But be sure to respect staff of color's judgement about how they want to deal with a particular situation.

For Professional Fundraising Associations

Organizations that bring fundraisers together have a special opportunity – and responsibility – to support development professionals of color and reduce the sense of isolation so overwhelmingly expressed by many in the field. Many of these membership groups – the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), and Women in Development (WiD) – are now focusing on DEI programming, while organizations like the African American Development Officers Network (AADO) were created to address the needs of fundraisers of color as a primary purpose. All of these voluntary bodies are poised to do more.

➔ **Use the convening power of these associations,** combined with the desire for community exhibited by the development professionals of color in this study and elsewhere, to call attention to, and further consider, the issues illuminated in this report.

- Commission a study to determine the size and needs of the fundraiser population in a particular geographic area – oversampling for people of color, who tend to be undercounted in studies – and determine, from its results, appropriate programming to suit the community's needs.

- Double down on mentoring opportunities for early-career professionals, including preparing them to grapple with issues of implicit bias and other racially-charged encounters, as well as providing robust development skill-building activities.

- Make space for affinity groups where people of color can gather, both virtually and in person, to share, gain support and guide each other to improve their professional trajectories.

➔ Leadership on these issues starts at the top within voluntary associations – **commit to addressing DEI issues at the board level** (e.g., through a board resolution), invest in DEI training for boards and other volunteer leadership, and create a plan to increase the number of people of color on association boards at both the national and local levels.

- Ensure that industry associations serve as models for leadership diversification in all aspects (age, race, ethnicity, gender, ability and areas of professional specialization).

What We Can Do

For Development Professionals of Color

Raising money to create social good, for a professional of color, should not have to mean sacrificing your humanity. However, based on the special relationship of money and power to development department success – and the deeply entrenched links with racial equity that are so difficult to untangle – you will need to navigate circumstances differently than your white peers.

➔ **First and foremost, don't go it alone.** Universal advice from professionals with many years in the sector is to look for support, empathy and advice from peers and colleagues, both within and beyond the organization.

➔ **Attend professional gatherings to learn new material – and to meet your peers from across the field.** Don't rely on webinars, which by their very nature cannot serve this purpose. Connecting in-person with professionally-based communities of practice is vital not only to career growth; it can present chances to learn how others are coping with and addressing a variety of organizational issues and concerns.

➔ **Seek professional development opportunities that increase your leadership skills.** These don't have to be fundraising focused – everyone wins when you broaden your existing skill set and apply your acumen to further the mission.

➔ **Take advantage of ways to experience your organization's program agenda and finances.** You will be a better fundraiser with that knowledge, and staff in those departments will be your advocates when they feel that you've taken the time to understand and respect their work.

➔ As a developing professional, **look to broaden your range and understand your strengths,** then ask for assignments that help you display them. Make sure to keep your manager informed of your wins and ask external stakeholders to validate you – perception becomes reality. Trust in your value and in the idea that your presence at the table greatly enhances your organization.

➔ **Be prepared to advocate for yourself.** DEI training provides common language and strategies for "naming the problem" in ways that can help the entire organization create solutions for moving forward.

➔ **Consider providing feedback, if it feels safe, to HR** regarding your experience as a person of color in a mostly white environment.

➔ **Forge relationships with those who can help you.** Be proactive in seeking:

○ **Mentors:** You can have more than one of these. Seek out thought leaders and other subject matter experts within your fundraising specialization – and outside of it. Don't be afraid to reach out to someone you admire from afar.

○ **Sponsors:** Are you open to providing and contributing to intergenerational mentoring? Then explore sponsorship within your organization. Find a sponsor who will speak well of you, think about opportunities for you, and will validate you when you're not in the room.

→ When interviewing for positions, **look at board makeup and ask about it.** If the board's composition is not reflective and inclusive of the communities served by the mission area, is there an intention to change that? And beyond good intentions, is there a timeline with concrete next steps and assigned responsibilities?

→ **Make sure the place you work is aligned with your values.** Your job by its very nature is hard, and you need the psychic nourishment of knowing that, at the end of the day, your labors contribute to a mission you are passionate about.

→ **Make time for self-care.** This is an important reminder for all development professionals, indeed for all who work in the nonprofit sector. But especially in the context of working in an environment which can be disorienting at best, and hostile at worst, it is critical that you set boundaries, shut the office off, and schedule yourself for activities that nurture and leave you refreshed.

→ **Leave the organization if it can't or won't improve conditions.** The experience of senior development professionals of color shows that as a developing fundraising professional, you can find another position in which you will be supported to reach your full potential as a nonprofit fundraiser.

→ Don't conclude, based on a particularly difficult professional position, that fundraising is not for you. The capacity to raise money for social change can be tremendously empowering and rewarding. **Keep going to find a work environment in which you can manifest your full ability to resource a mission that ignites your passion.**

Raising money to enable social good is never easy, nor is it a solo crusade. This report is an attempt to gather together, from numerous stakeholders, the across-the-board experiences of nonprofit development professionals of color and, once examined, to suggest solutions that can be implemented by all of us on a consistent basis.

The work of nonprofit fundraising is both a glorious and uphill battle. The nonprofit sector sees societal needs that no one else is filling, and accepts the moral imperative to meet those needs regardless of their cost. We invite all reading this report to join us on this journey as part of the team devising, taking responsibility for, and implementing solutions.

Development is the place in which mission, market and values collide, and make their uneasy way forward together. It is our hope that this report can help make this a more rewarding and equitable path for all.

About Cause Effective

Cause Effective strengthens the nonprofit sector by helping organizations build engaged communities of supporters. We transform people, culture and systems, coaching nonprofits to learn, carry out and sustain new approaches to fundraising and board leadership. **Money, Power and Race: The Lived Experience of Fundraisers of Color** is a direct extension of our strategic focus and commitment to marrying our expertise, our values and our desire to have a field-wide impact on an issue of profound importance to the sector's future.

Cause Effective helps nonprofits diversify funding; build capacity for fundraising from individuals; activate boards for fundraising and effective governance; and leverage special events and anniversaries so they can achieve long-term community-driven change. Our clients range from small, community-based organizations to nonprofits with a larger footprint – over 80 percent of Cause Effective's clients are based in and serve low- and moderate-income communities. We lead interactive workshops and design in-depth, customized consultancies, from one-day board retreats to multi-year governance and fundraising systems redesign. We also offer our collective subject matter expertise through online resources.

Intensive, highly individualized one-on-one coaching is a vital part of Cause Effective's capacity-building work. From our perspective "in the trenches" with our clients, our coaching ensures that plans are put into action to achieve long-term outcomes, including increasing organizational capacity so that they can achieve similar results on their own in the future. We advise executive directors, board leaders and development staff; our guidance provides senior development staff with skills, understanding and support to exert influence, both quietly and out in front, which is indispensable to any healthy fundraising function.

Cause Effective's trainings draw upon sophisticated governance and resource development analyses in the context of the real world human relationships and competing priorities familiar to any group activity. We marry best practice to practical change through group discussion and implementable applications; participants work together to create a roadmap of next steps that will lead towards nonprofit sustainability.

Cause Effective has been advising organizations and individuals working in communities of color about their fundraising concerns since our inception. Our work has had considerable impact within diverse communities due to our commitment to assess and respect the unique challenges of each community while maintaining our agreement to move an organization forward. Cause Effective's methodology of supportive listening assumes that the ultimate answers to our questions lie within the expertise of the community. Our staff are trained to ask the right questions and, most important, to listen closely and humbly to our clients' values, operating style and cultural considerations.

Since our founding in 1981, Cause Effective has furthered the resource development efforts of more than 6,000 organizations primarily in the New York City area, which has, in turn, helped to improve the lives of tens of thousands of people.

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To the association networks that collaborated with Cause Effective in distributing the survey, sharing news of the initiative, and helping to build visibility for the industry-wide issue of pipeline building that advances and includes professionals of color: *Thank you for your cooperation!*

African American Development Officers Network
Association of Fundraising Professionals-NYC
Black Agency Executives
Candid

New York Women's Foundation
Nonprofit New York
Women in Development-NY
Young Nonprofit Professionals Network-NYC

To our survey respondents: As dedicated fellow fundraising professionals, our profuse thanks goes to each of you for taking the time, energy and effort to complete the survey and convey the uncomfortable truths embedded in the narratives, which reflect your lived experiences as fundraisers of color: **You have given the nonprofit sector so much more than insights, we all now have a blueprint** for how people, culture and systems can – and should – do better by each other and for each other.

And to anyone else who may have helped out without us knowing, our sincere thanks.

To the stakeholders highlighted in our recommendations section who will use these findings to examine their own nonprofit's environment, policies, practices and culture of philanthropy as it intersects with racial equity: When you take these steps, please share what you learn! Write up blog posts, case studies and LinkedIn articles. Or, submit commentaries and op-eds to industry publications. Fundraising as a vocation will benefit from this attention; and the nonprofit sector, in general, will be better for this discourse. ***Thank you, in advance, for choosing to lead the way.***

To leaders from the philanthropic and nonprofit fundraising sectors, and those adjacent to or outside of it, who feel encouraged, inspired or enlightened, please join with Cause Effective and others to:

- Strengthen a cadre of nonprofit fundraising specialists of color who are able to advance within their own organizations and remain in the profession over the long haul;
- Build a leadership pipeline of professionals of color with the fundraising skills to succeed as top organizational leaders; and
- Create momentum for the industry as a whole to advance progress in all aspects of equity (racial, ethnic, gender and/or sexual identity and ability).

This report is Phase I of the implementation-based interventions being developed to address our findings. If you're interested in learning more about follow-up programming, contact **Cause Effective**.

With the thanks of the entire team,
Zanetta, Judy, Janay, David, Cynthia, and Hera

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Having people of color who understand development is crucial to ending the undercapitalization of people of color social justice organizations. Only we can do this work and do it well in ways that humanize our people and create change.

——— Mid-career Fundraising Professional of Color ———