

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

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Fundraising is amazingly powerful – it’s how we influence others in power and philanthropy around what is needed. It’s incredibly important to have diversity in this field to change giving trends and cultivate abundance.*

Long-time Fundraising Professional of Color

In 2018, Cause Effective launched a year-long field-learning project to explore questions 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. We reached out to development professionals of color from across the country to ask such key questions as:

- **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**?

In total, we read dozens of articles and reports, conducted 52 interviews, received 110 survey responses, and shared the findings with 13 professionals across the sector for their review.

# 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.

Our interviews uncovered 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, 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.

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

- ➔ Establishing a career in fundraising means entering into white-dominated spaces.
- ➔ 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 very fabric of fundraising deals with discomfort, rejection, and often unrealistic expectations – and inserting a racial component adds an extra hurdle to an already-charged interaction.
- ➔ The nature of fundraising changes 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.
- ➔ The competency of fundraisers of color is questioned while white fundraisers are assumed to be proficient.
- ➔ Belittlement happens as a matter of course in dealing with donors, board members, and, in some positions, executive staff.
- ➔ Internal support, particularly at the executive leadership level, is key to individual professional success.
- ➔ Fundraisers of color who do navigate the racial barriers find development to be a very rewarding way to contribute to social change.

**While 77 percent of 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.**

Overall, the impression from the data, and from example after example shared by participants, is that the everyday stresses on development professionals to raise revenue are so incredibly intense 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.**

# WHAT WE CAN DO

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

All players in the system, regardless of race or ethnicity, must 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).

**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.**

- 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.
- The **HR department** should forcefully advocate for inclusionary policies and practices that lead to more diverse and equitable nonprofit workplaces for nonprofit professionals of all backgrounds, social classes and intersectional identities.
- **Supervisors of development staff of color** must understand their own lens on structural racism and how it affects their staff of color's ability to be successful at their jobs.
- **Board members** are a bridge between the organization and donors and, as such, have an exceptional opportunity to be change agents.
- **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.
- It is essential for **white development staffers and allies** to be an active part of the solution, beyond simply “not being part of the problem.”
- **Professional fundraising associations** have a special opportunity – and responsibility – to support development professionals of color and reduce the sense of isolation overwhelmingly expressed by so many in the field.
- Due to fundraising's inextricable relationship with money and power, and the deeply entrenched links with racial equity that are difficult to untangle, **development professionals of color** will need to navigate circumstances differently than white peers; universal advice from senior development professionals of color is to actively seek support, empathy and advice from peers and colleagues.

For detailed recommendations, download the full report at [PreparingTheNextGeneration.org](http://PreparingTheNextGeneration.org).

*“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.”*

*“I have often been tokenized as a person of color in development or underestimated to be able to have authentic and meaningful conversations that will help further cultivate relationships with donors.”*

*“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.”*

*“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 were a priority for my white colleagues because it is hard being the only voice.”*

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

*“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.”*

*“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.”*



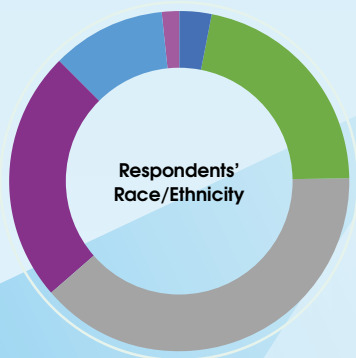
## WHO RESPONDED

Our stakeholder interviews ranged from development professionals of color to recruiters and philanthropists, with 83 percent of our interviewees (and all survey respondents) being people of color.

Survey respondents worked in organizations with budgets ranging from under \$500,000 to over \$20 million, within development departments ranging from 1 to 600 staff.

Their organizations ranged almost equally between having i) predominantly white board and/or staff leadership (less than 20 percent POC); ii) mixed board and/or staff leadership (20-60% POC); and iii) predominantly POC leadership (60-100%).

### Survey respondents identified their race/ethnicity as follows:



American Indian/Alaska Native	4%
Asian (East, South, Southeast, Central)	26%
Black/African-American/Caribbean	47%
Hispanic/Latinx	29%
Multiracial/Multiethnic	13%
Other	2%

### The gender breakdown was 78 percent female, 20 percent male, and 2 percent nonbinary/third gender.

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.



***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

## 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 to 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. 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.

Our special thanks to The New York Community Trust, which provided the funding to launch this project, and specifically to Senior Program Officer Patricia Swann, who has championed this initiative from the beginning.

Download the full report at  
**PreparingTheNextGeneration.org**