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

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE FIELD

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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 —————

What We Can Do

The themes that **Money, Power and Race: The Lived Experience of Fundraisers of Color** explore 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.**

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.

What We Can Do

- **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.

What We Can Do

- **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.

What We Can Do

- **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.

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.

What We Can Do

- **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).

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.

What We Can Do

- 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.

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. 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.

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.



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 —————