New Building Movement Project Report: Meeting the Need

By: Amy Silver O'Leary

In December, Building Movement Project (BMP) released *Meeting the Need: Building the Capacity of Community-Based Organizations*, the first in their new series on Movement Infrastructure. The report was co-authored by Frances Kunreuther and Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, Co-Executive Directors at the Building Movement Project.

Meeting the Need is based on responses to a survey of nonprofit leaders intended to find out **what they needed to maintain and build their organizational infrastructure in order to fulfill their missions.**

The survey explored challenges that organizations face in achieving their mission by first asking respondents about four overarching domains that are key to maintaining and building nonprofits: 1) Operations, Communications, and Development, 2) Staff Wellness and Development, 3) Strategy and Evaluation, and 4) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

We know that nonprofit leaders reading this article are pressed for time (as the survey data clearly demonstrated), which is why we prepared this summary of the report's highlights. **Still, we strongly recommend that you download and read the whole report.** It's concise and we think that at the least, you will feel less

alone in dealing with shared challenges.

BMP focused on **leaders of smaller community nonprofits that are often left out of national discussions on nonprofit capacity**. BMP also sought to understand whether challenges differed when comparing organizations with Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders and white-led groups. The findings—from more than 800 survey respondents, including extensive write-in responses and four focus groups—show that the capacity challenges nonprofit leaders face are similar across race.

Respondents said their greatest challenge to stabilizing and growing their organizations was funding. **The mostly small community-based organizations that responded to this survey reported how they were caught in a bind.** Addressing their infrastructure issues would help them grow as an organization, including raising more funds. But money for capacity-building did not necessarily lead to funding for doing the work.

Nonprofit leaders expressed a desire for help growing their organizations, raising money, and addressing staff issues, especially burnout.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion were the second-greatest challenge identified by white-led organizations and the fourth-greatest challenge for BIPOC-led respondents. **Among those reporting DE&I to be one of their top challenges,** addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion issues internally was the greatest concern for all, although of greater concern to white-led organizations (77% vs. 65% among BIPOC-led organizations).

BIPOC-led groups were much more likely to identify racism and other challenges external to their organizations as a concern. Examples of such concerns were, "Identifying partners who know how to work with BIPOC-run organizations," or "Identifying providers from the community served." It is a reminder that while both white-led and BIPOC-led groups face DE&I issues, their concerns in this domain may be very different.

The researchers found that, **when faced with an issue, most leaders sought external support.** Respondents more often sought help in the domain of

Operations, Communications and Development. Though the percentage of respondents who sought help was not as high for issues in the other three domains, it was rarely reported by fewer than half of respondents.

Overall, BIPOC leaders sought out support more often compared to white respondents, though most of the differences were not significant. **Seeking support did not always result in respondents receiving what they needed**, and that was truer for BIPOC leaders than white ones, depending on the domain.

"[M]oney for capacity-building did not necessarily lead to funding for doing the work. BIPOC participants were especially concerned that they received grants to hire consultants instead of, rather than in addition to, funds that would help them build and operate their organization, or even support to implement the recommendations." *--Meeting the Need*

Respondents identified the following as being the top leadership challenges:

- **Setting aside time for strategic thinking/planning**
- **Developing networks to meet new donors/funders**
- **Demanding workload.**

For the challenges identified, respondents were asked whether they sought and received support, and if the support they received was adequate. For this set of questions, BIPOC and white respondents had similar challenges, although as with the organizational issues, BIPOC leaders were less likely to receive the support they needed in most areas.

The survey asked respondents about the types of providers they used to help meet their challenges, such as nonprofit support organizations, consultants, support groups, or staff trainings. It also asked about the barriers to identifying and accessing support. **"Finding time to participate in programs and technical assistance" was the number one barrier to accessing support identified by both BIPOC and white leaders.**

"So for me, it's not just who is able to give [support], but also am I in a place to receive it? And once we're in this cycle where we're so overworked that there's not even any time to work on [our issue] or get help, I find that's really challenging, and I don't really know how to get out of that cycle."

—BIPOC FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

The last set of questions in the survey explored changes since March 2020. **Respondents reported the greatest increase in challenges occurred in areas related to staff well-being and work,** including "Demands on your organization's essential workers" (71%), "Providing for staff's emotional and mental wellbeing" (67%), and "Demand for services" (63%).

Those surveyed were evenly divided among five geographic regions: East, West, Southeast, Southwest, and Midwest. They were also distributed across mission area and budget bands. 39% of the 819 respondents were BIPOC and 61% were white.