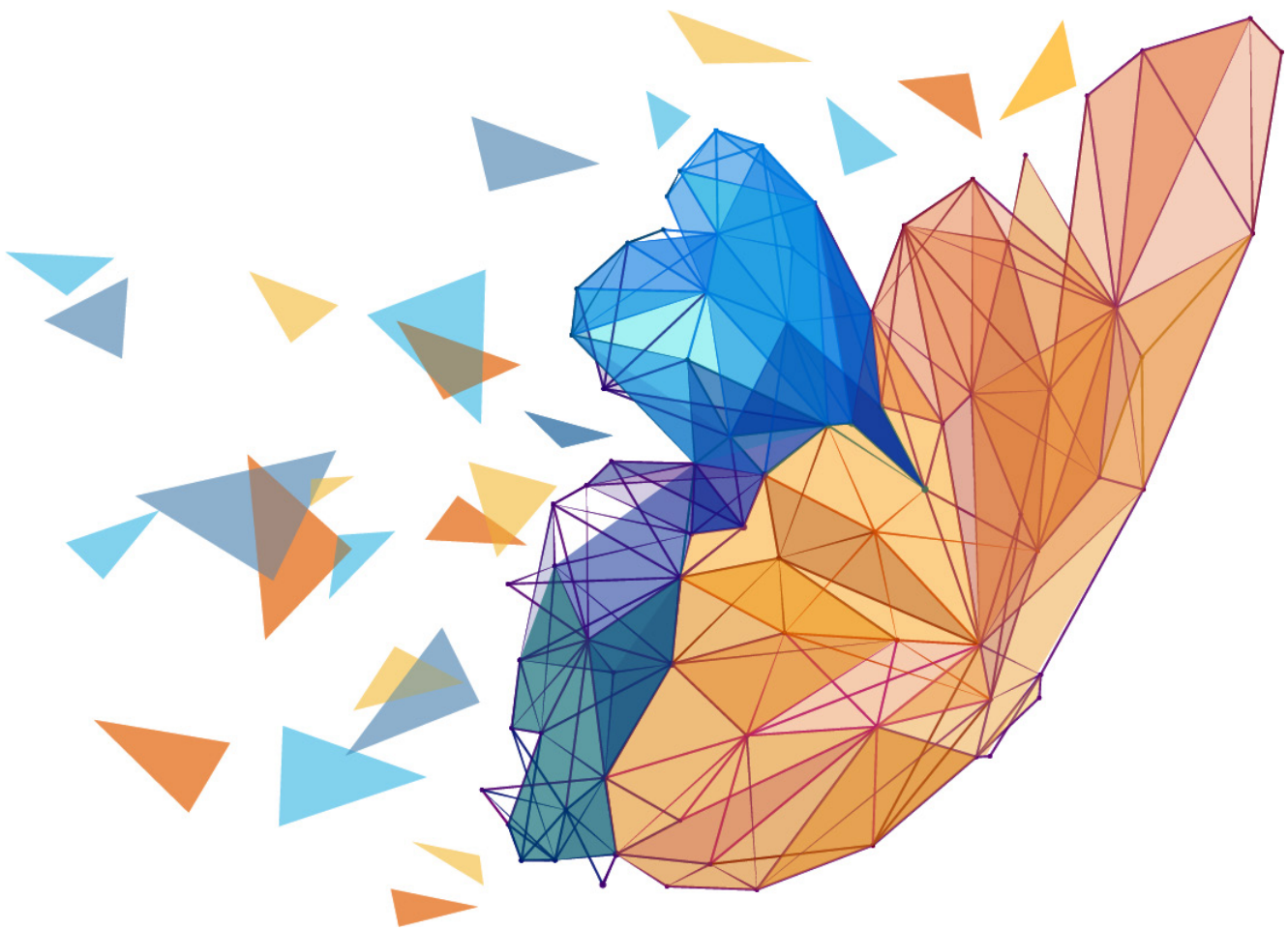


# From Transaction to Transformation:

Three Ways Foundations Can Invest in  
Black-Led Nonprofits for Lasting Change



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## Acknowledgments

Support for this report was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the foundation. Additionally, we would like to thank the nonprofit leaders and foundation representatives who shared their experiences with us and provided the data for this report.

## About Candid

Candid is a nonprofit organization that provides the most comprehensive data and insights about the social sector. Every year, millions of nonprofits spend trillions of dollars around the world. Candid finds out where that money comes from, where it goes, and why it matters. Through research, collaboration, and training, Candid connects people who want to change the world to the resources they need to do it. Candid was formed in 2019 when GuideStar and Foundation Center merged. Our history is steeped in transparency, data, and analysis, paired with guidance on how to leverage our tools. For more information, visit [candid.org](https://candid.org). Please contact Candid research, [researchteam@candid.org](mailto:researchteam@candid.org), with questions or feedback about this report.

## About ABFE

ABFE is a membership-based philanthropic organization that advocates for responsive and transformative investments in Black communities. Partnering with foundations, corporations, nonprofits, and individuals, ABFE provides its members with professional development and technical assistance resources that further the philanthropic sector's connection and responsiveness to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Established in 1971 as the Association of Black Foundation Executives, the organization was credited with many of philanthropy's early gains in diversity. It has since evolved into an influential network. For more information, visit [abfe.org](https://abfe.org).

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[doi.org/10.15868/socialsector.52067](https://doi.org/10.15868/socialsector.52067)

*“I remember hearing a Native American elder say, ‘Tell the story about the buffaloes on the plains during the winter.’ These huge winter storms would come and the buffaloes would turn into the storm and basically create a barrier, so that the smaller buffalo, the children, and the baby buffaloes could be protected from the wind and from the cold as much as possible. I often use this [analogy] to talk about philanthropy, because I feel like there is a storm. We’re on the horizon of a storm.*

*Philanthropy can be that buffalo to take the brute force because they have the resources to fight in ways that our communities don’t. And so I think that we’re looking for those types of relationships in which you have some funders that are ready to be the big buffaloes. They want to be the big buffaloes in every other room, but when it comes time to face a storm they’re hiding behind the baby buffaloes. So, we need them to be on the front lines.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER (INTERVIEW EXCERPT)

This report is a companion piece to ABFE and Candid’s 2025 report [Holding the Line: Black-Led Nonprofits and Race-Explicit Work Amid Backlash](#). Readers who want to learn more about Black-led nonprofits’ experiences navigating race-related conversations with funders may want to read ABFE and Candid’s first report in this series.

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# Executive summary

For generations, Black-led nonprofits have actively supported their communities and won rights and opportunities for others as well. Yet, despite their years of impact, many Black nonprofit leaders report struggling to form sustained partnerships with foundations. Then, in 2020, racial justice uprisings led to broad philanthropic commitments to support Black-led organizations and their communities. But how much really changed, and who did it change for? This report examines the extent to which foundations have—or have not—supported Black-led nonprofits over time and the nature of funder-grantee relationships.

## About the study

For this study, our data includes:

- Historical grants data (2016-2023) for 627 Black-led nonprofits
- Survey questionnaires from 246 representatives of Black-led nonprofits
- Interviews with 24 leaders of Black-led nonprofits that also completed the survey
- Historical grants (2016-2023) and survey data for 3,642 other nonprofits
- Data from a focus group with foundation representatives

Our analyses provide new and nuanced evidence that affirms a well-established trend: Black-led nonprofits experience challenges establishing and sustaining relationships with foundations, which in turn perpetuates a racial funding gap. Findings emphasize the need for funders to provide three types of support:

- **Financial support:** the money that nonprofits need to accomplish their work
- **Social support:** the relationships that help nonprofits thrive
- **Human-centered support:** the resources that nonprofit staff need to be healthy and carry out mission-driven work at full capacity

## Key findings

### **Financial support: Black-led nonprofits, especially small organizations, were less likely to be funded than other nonprofits between 2016 and 2023.**

- On average, half of Black-led nonprofits received a foundation grant in a given year compared with 70% of other nonprofits. Black-led nonprofits were also less likely to receive general operating support, with only one-third receiving it.
- Black-led nonprofits that received foundation funding had fewer total grants annually compared with other nonprofits. They also received a smaller percentage of the grants they applied for, being awarded 54% of total grants applied for and the smallest nonprofits awarded only 34%.
- More foundations began awarding grants to Black-led nonprofits in 2020. However, more funders did not translate into increased financial support for most nonprofits. Large Black-led nonprofits saw a temporary funding increase between 2020 and 2022, followed by a decline in 2023. Small Black-led nonprofits saw no significant funding change.

### **Social support: Black-led nonprofits, especially small organizations, were less likely to receive sustained foundation support.**

- Small Black-led nonprofits received most of their grant dollars from first-time funders, compared to other nonprofits that were primarily funded by preexisting foundation partners.
- Small Black-led nonprofits averaged fewer active funder relationships than other small nonprofits. Nearly half had only one funder at a time.
- In interviews, Black leaders described six barriers to cultivating strong relationships with foundations, highlighting funders' underinvestment in connection, relationship building, and trust.
- Black leaders interviewed also identified six factors that contributed to supportive and genuine funder-grantee partnerships, broadly categorized as working alongside nonprofits, sharing ideas and connections, and investing in Black communities.

### **Human-centered support: Black nonprofit leaders want to partner with funders that also invest in the people doing the work.**

- Black leaders shared in interviews that their nonprofits do not just face inequitable funding compared to other nonprofits; they also experience double standards, discriminatory practices, repeated rejection, and unreasonable requests that exhaust and undermine their staff.
- These Black leaders seek respect, care, and authentic commitment from funders. Leaders cited funder actions such as trusting nonprofits' expertise, recognizing their commitment to their missions, and building a shared future as signaling genuine relationships.

## How to read this report

This report includes a brief introduction, followed by three chapters on financial, social, and human-centered support, respectively. Each chapter includes a definition of the topic, details about data sources, key findings, and implications for foundations.

This report can be read cover to cover for a comprehensive understanding of our findings. However, different audiences may want to engage with this information in slightly different ways. For example:

- Readers most interested in the results of this research can skip straight to the “Key research findings” section in each chapter.
- Foundation executives seeking immediate insights may want to focus on the “Implications for foundations” section at the end of the financial, social, and human-centered support chapters. This section offers considerations for how to take action based on key findings from this research.
- Researchers may find particular value in reviewing the details regarding our data sources, methods, and analyses found in the Appendix.

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# Introduction

Across America, Black-led nonprofits have created lasting change in the communities they serve. These nonprofits—led by and primarily serving Black community members—deliver essential services, advocate for policy reform, and build support networks that strengthen society. They represent a vital force in the social sector and are uniquely positioned to address the needs of more than 48 million Americans self-identifying as Black, including both native-born African Americans and foreign-born Black immigrants.

Black-led nonprofits not only support Black communities; they emerge from them. Because leaders and staff share lived experiences with community members, they can build trust that opens doors to change. They know how to identify emerging needs alongside stakeholders, develop culturally relevant solutions, and maintain relationships that sustain impact over time. From establishing mutual aid networks to advocating for systemic change, Black-led nonprofits have consistently delivered results despite being smaller and newer and having fewer financial resources than other nonprofits in the sector.

Previous research has consistently found that nonprofits led by or serving Black communities rarely receive their fair share of resources. On the nonprofit side, several studies have demonstrated that those with Black CEOs and/or Black boards tend to have smaller revenues and asset sizes compared to other nonprofits. A 2020 report also found a fundraising gap between Black and white early-stage organization leaders.

## **Definition: What is a Black-led nonprofit?**

For this report, we define Black-led nonprofits as:

- Having a Black CEO
- Having a majority Black board members (51% or more)
- Serving predominately Black community members (51% or more)

Our definition acknowledges the importance of nonprofits that are both led by and focused on serving Black community members. Black-led nonprofits can effectively serve Black Americans by centering community members' experiences and customizing supports to best meet their needs.

On the foundation side, several studies have shown that relatively few grantmaking dollars explicitly support communities of color. A 2017 study found that less than 2% of grant dollars explicitly went to Black communities. Additionally, a 2025 study indicated that less than 7% of institutional grantmaking explicitly went to communities of color in 2023. These studies offer a broad picture of racial disparity in the sector. However, currently available research does not provide a closer look at the intersection of Black-led nonprofits and philanthropic support, especially in recent years.

This study addresses this gap by examining if, how, and when private foundations supported nonprofits led by and serving Black communities over the last decade. We focus on private foundations specifically because they are one of the primary sources that nonprofits traditionally turn to for funding and because they have access to the resources needed to facilitate nonprofits' work. We focus specifically on Black-led nonprofits because not all grants earmarked for Black communities go to nonprofits that also have Black leaders. As such, previous research on foundation grantmaking does not offer organization-level comparisons between Black-led and other nonprofits. This report is also unique in that it offers a statistical analysis of foundation funding at the recipient organization level, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how the racial funding gap plays out across different types of organizations (e.g., across nonprofit size) that is not possible when aggregating data at the sector level.

In addition to more in-depth financial analyses, this report also contributes to our understanding of the field by considering foundation support beyond grantmaking, including a thematic analysis of how foundations can better support nonprofits through strengthening relationships and adopting a human-centered approach.

Finally, this study leverages data collected between 2016 and 2025, a decade that involved major social movements, a global pandemic, the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent racial justice uprisings, and shifts in philanthropic funding trends. This longitudinal data allows us to examine what changed over the decade. Did foundations strengthen their relationships with Black-led nonprofits during and after the racial uprisings of 2020? Have the broad philanthropic commitments made to address racial equity and support Black-led nonprofits resulted in systemic change? Has foundations' support for Black-led nonprofits waned in the years following the call for racial justice in 2020? Our findings suggest that, while some shifts occurred during this time, larger Black-led nonprofits were most likely to benefit from foundations' investment, while smaller Black-led nonprofits saw no increase in funder support.

The study results, particularly input directly from Black nonprofit leaders, also suggest that grant dollars are both necessary and insufficient for foundations to build authentic and trusting partnerships with Black-led nonprofits. Instead, foundations interested in collaborating with Black-led nonprofits need to consider three types of support:

- **Financial support:** the money that nonprofits need to accomplish their work
- **Social support:** the relationships that help nonprofits thrive
- **Human-centered support:** the resources that nonprofit staff need to be healthy and carry out mission-driven work at full capacity

Interview insights indicate that Black leaders valued funders that cultivated all three types of support in their funder-grantee partnerships. When foundations invested in their grantees’ financial, social, and human-related resources, they bolstered nonprofits’ potential to expand their impact and better meet community members’ needs.

We have organized this report into three chapters, each highlighting findings related to the three types of support underscored by nonprofits, as well as implications for foundations that want to support Black-led nonprofits’ efforts. To center the experiences of Black leaders in their own words, we included direct quotes from nonprofit leaders throughout the report alongside results from qualitative and quantitative analyses.

## About our samples

### Nonprofit organizations

Our primary sample was Black-led nonprofits in the United States. In total, we analyzed:<sup>1</sup>

- Historical grants data (2016-2023) for 627 Black-led nonprofits
- Survey questionnaires from 246 representatives of Black-led nonprofits
- Interviews with 24 leaders of Black-led nonprofits that also completed the survey

We also collected data from other nonprofits. This helped us understand the broader experience of nonprofits that pursue foundation funding and contextualize Black-led nonprofits’ experiences in contrast to the sector. In addition to Black-led nonprofits, we also analyzed:

- Historical grants data (2016-2023) for 3,642 other (i.e., not Black-led) nonprofits
- Survey questionnaires from representatives of the same 3,642 nonprofits

**Table 1. Information about nonprofits in our sample**

	Black-led nonprofits	Other nonprofits
In human services subsector	42%	36%
Located in the South	48%	35%
Operating budget \$50,000 or less	37%	19%
Operating budget under \$1 million	76%	62%
Founded in 2010 or later	68%	41%

<sup>1</sup> These numbers are the total number of nonprofits and participants in our samples. Sample sizes may vary for specific analyses in the report based on survey responses and available data. We report the number of valid cases for each analysis throughout the report.

There were observable differences between the two samples. Compared to other nonprofits, Black-led nonprofits in our sample were more likely to be in the human services subsector, located in the South, founded in 2010 or later, and have smaller operating budgets.<sup>2</sup>

Leader characteristics, however, did not differ between Black-led and other nonprofits in our sample:

**Table 2. Information about nonprofit leaders (CEOs) in our sample**

	Black-led nonprofits	Other nonprofits
Women	68%	66%
Average tenure	9.2 years	8.6 years
Started their role in the past five years	40%	42%

### Foundation grants and representatives

To more fully understand funder-nonprofit interactions from both foundations' and nonprofits' perspectives, we also collected information about foundations. We analyzed:

- Historical grants data (2016-2023) for 24,933 foundations that funded nonprofits in our sample
- Data from a focus group with representatives from four foundations with a history of supporting Black communities and Black-led nonprofits

**Table 3. Information about foundation grants to nonprofits in our sample**

	Black-led nonprofits	All nonprofits
Number of funders	2,938	24,933
Number of grants	13,550	197,962
Grant funding awarded	\$979,979,199	\$7,214,399,690

Foundations that funded Black-led nonprofits were more likely to be dedicated to children and youth and economically disadvantaged populations. They were also larger (i.e., total annual grantmaking greater than \$1 million) than foundations that did not fund Black-led nonprofits.

<sup>2</sup> Given differences in organizational characteristics between Black-led nonprofits and other nonprofits in our sample, we conducted supplemental analyses to account for organizational differences. Results aligned with analyses in the report. More details are provided in the Appendix.

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# Financial support: How have foundations invested in Black-led nonprofits financially?

When considering how foundations assist nonprofits, financial support, generally in the form of grantmaking, is what often comes to mind. Private foundations are a common source of revenue for nonprofits, providing critical resources for programs and, in some cases, nonprofit infrastructure and growth.

Despite a strong reliance on foundations, however, many Black-led nonprofits have experienced challenges in securing enough financial support from foundations to carry out their work. Many nonprofits also cited declining foundation support in recent years. One Black leader described their experience of having foundation funding rescinded in 2024 and the implications for their organization's future. Originally, foundations had awarded their nonprofit nearly \$1 million in grants, but:

*“By April, all of the funds, with the exception of one, were pulled. We were looking at how we navigate this year with \$152,000. We do not know how we are going to do this. I do not know how we are going to keep our team. I do not know how we are going to keep our office.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

## Data sources

To examine foundations' financial support for nonprofits, we analyzed the following data (full methodology available in the Appendix):

- Private foundation grants, including grants awarded to 627 Black-led nonprofits and 3,642 other nonprofits between 2016 to 2023 (based on Candid's grants data)
- Survey data about nonprofit funding strategies, including data from 246 Black-led nonprofits and 3,642 other nonprofits about their funding models and grant application success in 2021, 2022, and 2023
- Interviews with 24 Black nonprofit leaders about their experiences interacting with foundations

The importance of monetary investment—or financial support—for nonprofits cannot be overstated. Most nonprofits run on shoestring budgets; without ongoing grants to support nonprofits’ projects, programs, and missions, their ability to serve communities is immediately put at risk.

In this chapter, we explore the following research questions related to financial support:

- How many Black-led nonprofits have received grants from foundations?
- How much financial support have Black-led nonprofits received from foundations?
- How many foundations award grants to Black-led nonprofits?
- What proportion of Black-led nonprofits’ grant proposals are successfully funded?

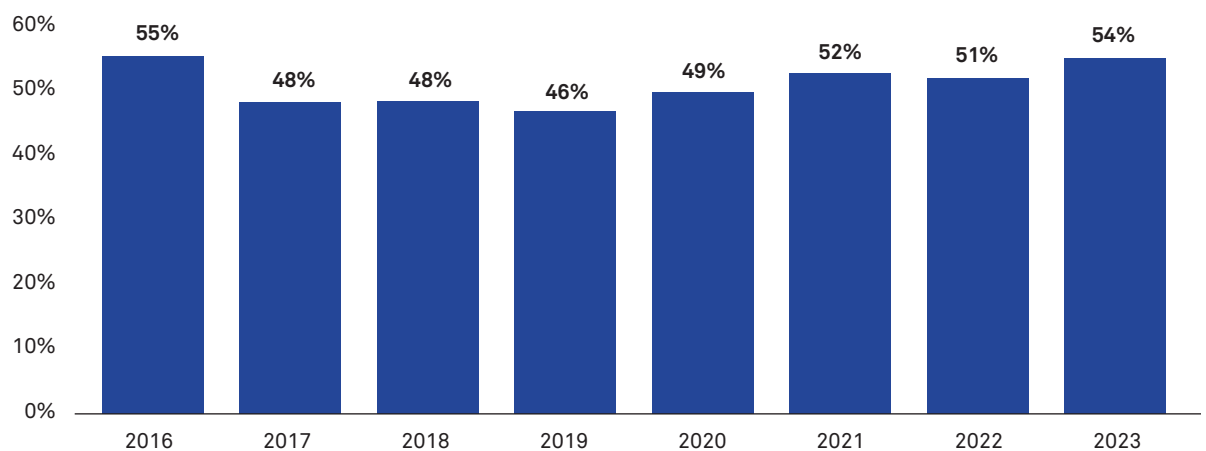
## Key research findings

### Many Black-led nonprofits are not funded by foundations.

To understand the extent of foundations’ support for Black-led nonprofits, we first calculated the number of Black-led nonprofits in our sample that received a grant from 2016 to 2023 (Figure 1). On average, around 50% of Black-led nonprofits received at least one foundation grant in a given year. Findings were consistent over the years, ranging from 45% to 55%. Conversely, this means that approximately half of Black-led nonprofits in our sample did not receive a foundation grant each year.

**Figure 1. On average, half of Black-led nonprofits were funded between 2016 and 2023**

Average percent of Black-led nonprofits that received a foundation grant by year



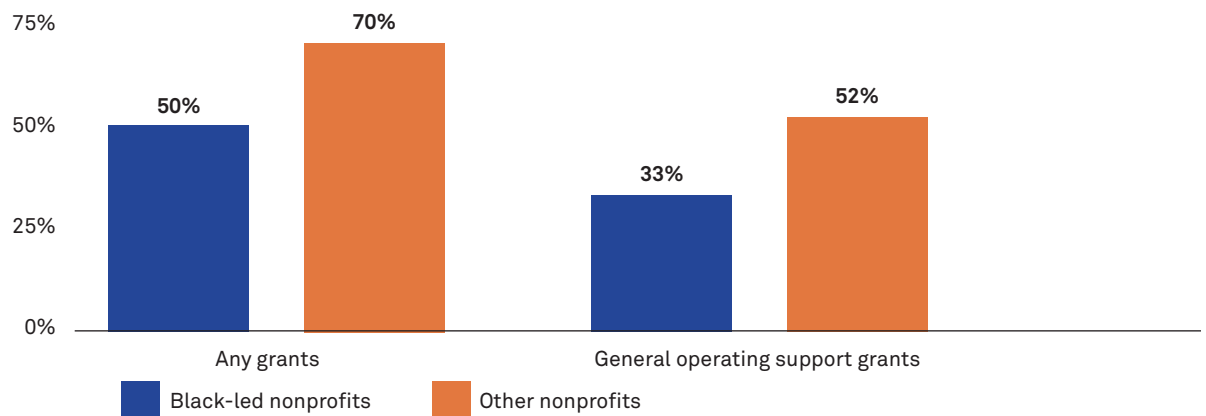
## **Black-led nonprofits are less likely to be funded than other nonprofits.**

To understand the percentage of Black-led nonprofits funded in the context of the broader nonprofit experience, we compared the percentage of Black-led nonprofits that received grants to other nonprofits (Figure 2). Black-led nonprofits were significantly less likely to receive a grant than other nonprofits in our sample. Consistently, about 70% of other nonprofits received at least one grant from a foundation each year, compared with 50% for Black-led nonprofits.

Black-led nonprofits were also less likely to receive grants for general operating support (i.e., unrestricted funds that nonprofits can spend where they see fit, as opposed to restricted funds that support a specific project). Only one-third of Black-led nonprofits received a general operating support grant from 2016 to 2023, ranging from 28% to 38% over the years. By comparison, over half (52%) of other nonprofits received funding for general operating support.

**Figure 2. Black-led nonprofits were less likely to receive grants than other nonprofits, including general operating support**

Average percent of nonprofits that received a foundation grant, 2016-2023

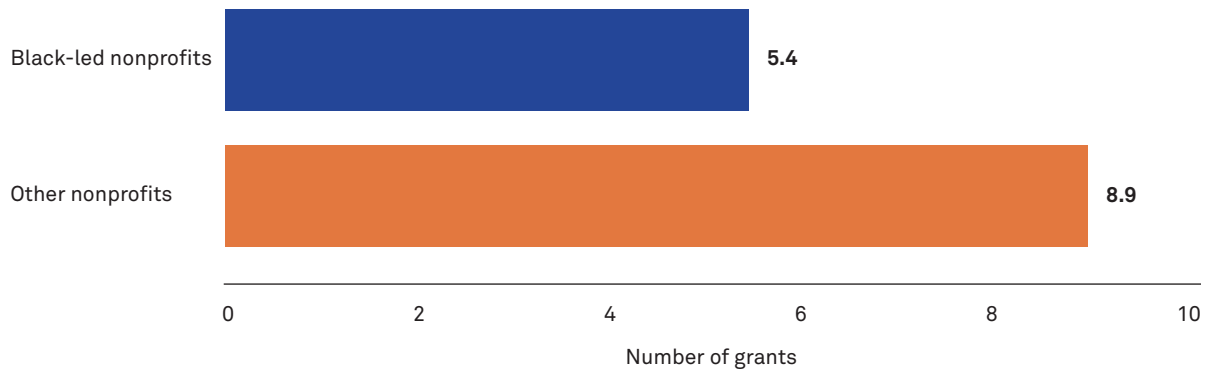


## **Foundations award fewer grants to Black-led nonprofits compared with other nonprofits.**

We also examined the average number of grants nonprofits received annually (Figure 3). Black-led nonprofits that were funded received fewer foundation grants than other nonprofits. Funded Black-led nonprofits received four to six grants each year (average 5.4 grants). This was significantly fewer than other nonprofits, which received eight to 10 grants each year (average 8.9 grants). Of note, these differences were not due simply to other nonprofits applying for more grants. In our survey, we asked nonprofits to report how many grants they applied for in the past three years; Black-led and other nonprofits applied for the same number of grants.

**Figure 3. Black-led nonprofits averaged five grants per year compared with nine grants for other nonprofits**

Average number of grants received each year, 2016-2023



Note: Analysis only includes nonprofits that received at least one foundation grant in a given year. The total number of organizations included in analyses varied each year (Black-led nonprofits: 156-323 organizations; other nonprofits: 1,613-2,135 organizations).

### **Small Black-led nonprofits are even less likely to receive foundation funding.**

Recent research suggests that most Black-led nonprofits are small. Given the difference in resources, capacity, and funder expectations of nonprofits with different budget sizes, we examined how foundation funding differed for small and large nonprofits. **We defined small nonprofits as organizations with annual expenses of \$1 million or less and large nonprofits as organizations with annual expenses greater than \$1 million.**<sup>3</sup> Mirroring the sector, over three-quarters (76%) of Black-led nonprofits in our sample were small organizations.

Small Black-led nonprofits appeared to be at a particular disadvantage when it comes to foundation funding. On average, only 30% of small Black-led nonprofits received at least one foundation grant in a given year. This percentage was significantly lower when compared with other small nonprofits (43% funded) and large Black-led nonprofits (81% funded), suggesting that organization size also matters when it comes to securing foundation funding.

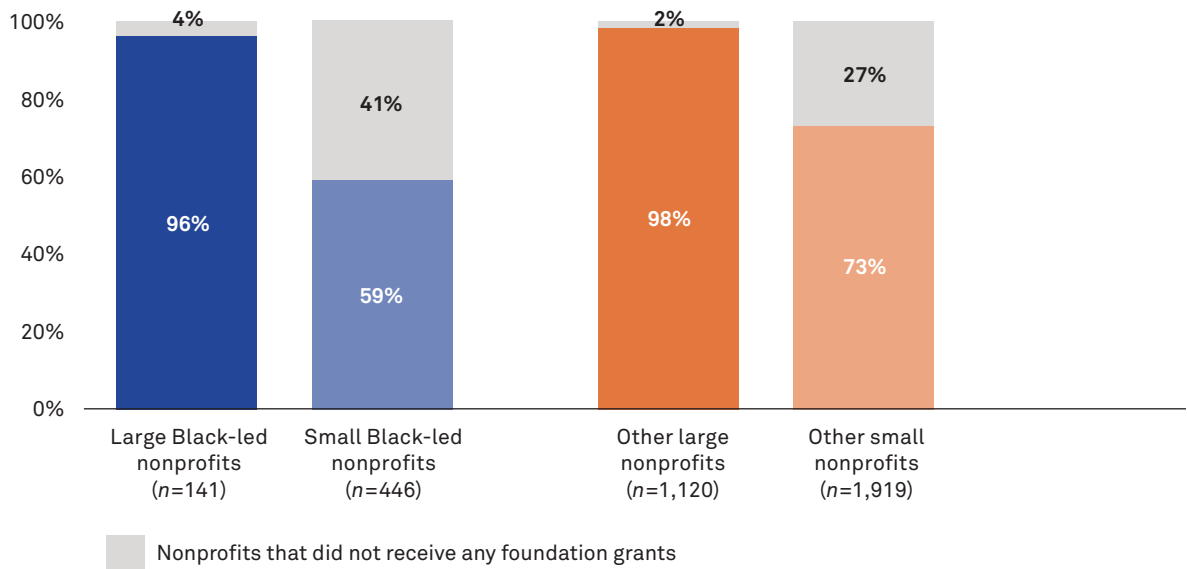
On average, only  
**30%**  
of small Black-led nonprofits received at least one foundation grant in a given year.

We also examined the number of nonprofits that received no foundation funding between 2016 and 2023 (Figure 4). Small nonprofits overall were less likely to have received a foundation grant than large nonprofits. Approximately 41% of small Black-led nonprofits received no foundation funding, compared with less than 4% of large Black-led nonprofits. We observed similar differences among other nonprofits, though the gap between small and large organizations was narrower (27% vs. 2%).

<sup>3</sup> We also conducted analyses using more segmented categories for organization size. Results revealed consistent patterns within two broad groupings; nonprofits with annual expenses under \$1 million showed similar findings, as did nonprofits with expenses over \$1 million. Based on these patterns, we present findings for these two groups—which we characterize as small and large nonprofits—to maximize clarity while maintaining analytical rigor.

**Figure 4. Small Black-led nonprofits were most likely to never be funded**

Percent of nonprofits that received vs. did not receive foundation grants, 2016-2023



## How reliant are Black-led nonprofits on foundation funding?

In our 2024 survey, we asked nonprofit representatives about their organization's revenue sources. Black-led nonprofits that we surveyed reported several different revenue sources.

- **91%** sought funding from individual donors (including small and large donations)
- **86%** sought funding from foundation and nonprofit grants (including community, independent/family, and corporate foundations, the United Way, etc.)
- **46%** sought government funding

- **44%** relied on earned income (revenue from sales, member dues, or fees, etc.)

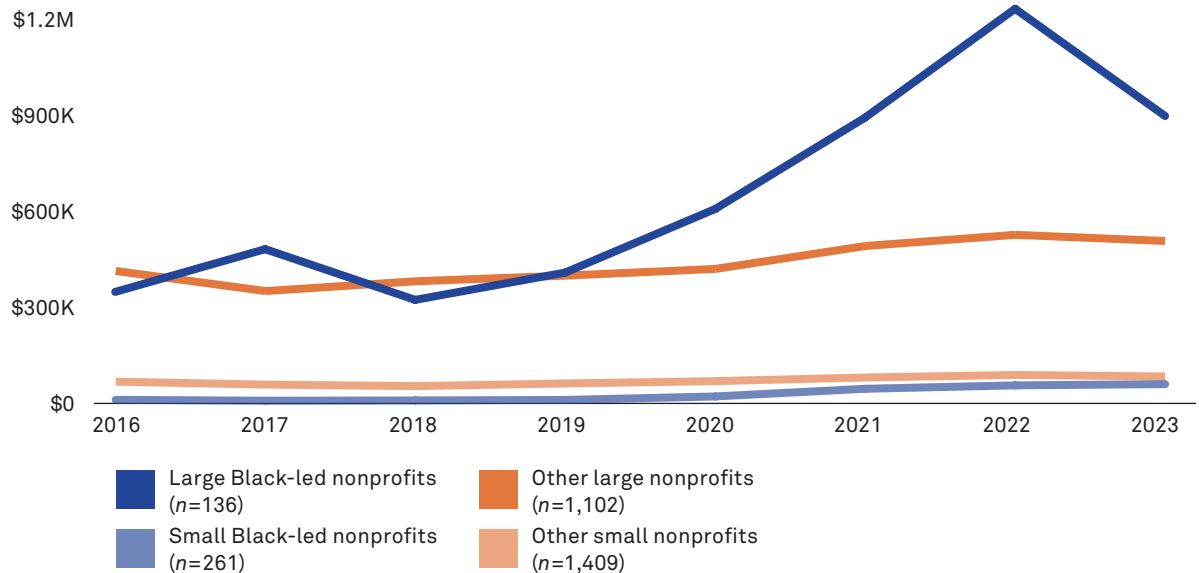
Most Black-led nonprofits in our survey reported that they relied on foundation funding. They were also more likely than other nonprofits to rely only on foundation grants for support. This suggests that Black-led nonprofits do not receive fewer grants because they follow a different funding model, but rather that there is a gap between the funding needed and funding received. For a more comprehensive examination of this topic, readers can refer to a forthcoming Candid insights article, *Diversifying revenue sources: Where do nonprofits find funding?*

**Small Black-led nonprofits saw no significant difference in funding after 2020; large Black-led nonprofits saw temporary increases.**

Following George Floyd’s murder and heightened focus on racial equity in 2020, many foundations pledged support for Black communities; similarly, many also increased giving to address pandemic-related urgent needs. To examine the impact of these trends, we looked at average grant dollars received by nonprofits before and after 2020 (Figure 5).<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 5. Large Black-led nonprofits saw temporary funding increases around 2020**

Average amount of foundation funding by year



Note: Analysis of nonprofits that received at least one foundation grant between 2016 and 2023. Excludes three Black-led and 15 other nonprofits that were considered statistical outliers based on funding received. Findings represent estimated marginalized means from a repeated measures analysis of variance (full methodology available in the Appendix).

Results suggest two divergent stories of financial support for small and large nonprofits. For large organizations, Black-led and other nonprofits received similar amounts of grant funding from 2016 to 2019. Beginning in 2020, large Black-led nonprofits saw their average funding increase and surpass that of other large organizations. By 2021, funding to large Black-led nonprofits reached nearly 300% of 2016 levels. However, by 2023, funding began to decline, suggesting that the increase in support may have been temporary. One Black-led nonprofit leader shared their experience of the short-term funding influx:

*“During the George Floyd period, the pandemic period, there were definitely some things that came available to our organization because there was just this tremendous response to what was happening in communities and it was more available to Black communities, Black organizations, and Black-led organizations than it has been historically. But I think that that window closed probably in 2023....”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

<sup>4</sup> We conducted similar analyses examining general operating support, which represents a subset of total grant dollars. Findings and differences between nonprofit groups were very similar to overall funding trends.

76%

of Black-led nonprofits saw no significant funding change from 2016 to 2023.

However, for the majority (76%) of Black-led nonprofits in our sample—those with budgets below \$1 million—there was no significant change in financial support across the same eight-year period. No significant funding increase is particularly notable because these analyses only include nonprofits that received any foundation grants. If we included the 41% of small Black-led nonprofits that never received a foundation grant, the median amount of grant funding for small Black-led nonprofits was \$0 from 2016 to 2022 and \$2,000 in 2023. These findings suggest that funding in response to the racial justice uprisings was directed to a small fraction of large Black-led nonprofits.

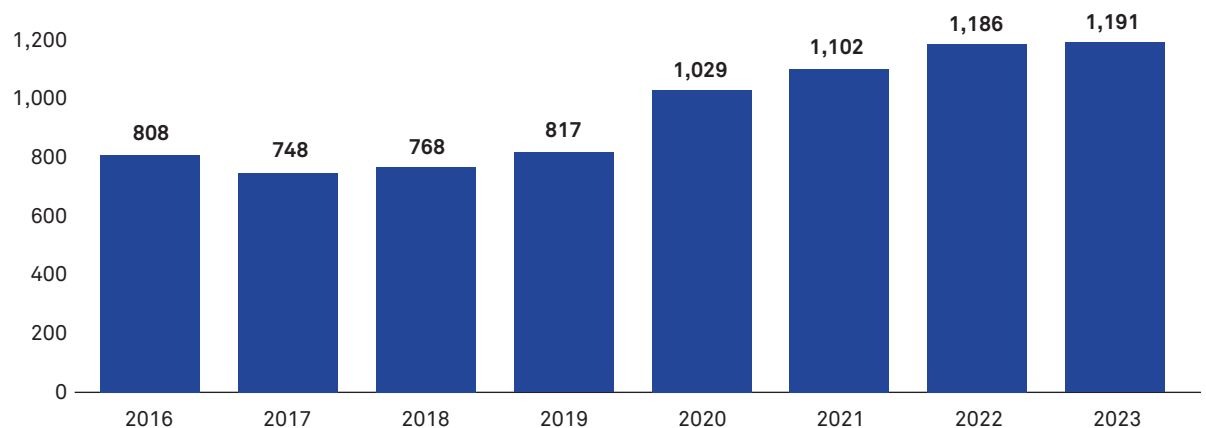
### More foundations started awarding grants to Black-led nonprofits in 2020.

To further explore if funders fulfilled their 2020 pledges to Black communities, we calculated the number of foundations that awarded grants to Black-led nonprofits in our sample (Figure 6). The number of foundations funding Black-led nonprofits remained similar in the years before 2020 but saw a 26% increase from 2019 to 2020. The number of funders remained fairly stable after 2020, with a peak of 1,191 foundations awarding grants to Black-led nonprofits in 2023.

Combined with prior results, our findings suggest a nuanced story of foundations’ financial support for Black-led nonprofits. In some ways, foundations answered the call to justice sparked by George Floyd’s murder. Notably, more foundations provided monetary support to Black-led nonprofits. However, grant dollars were not distributed equally. Increased support went primarily to a small subset of large organizations; most Black-led nonprofits were no more likely to get a grant or receive additional funding during or after 2020. Even for the largest Black-led nonprofits, grants data and leader interviews indicate that initial support began to wane by 2023.

Figure 6. More foundations supported Black-led nonprofits starting in 2020

Total number of foundations funding Black-led nonprofits by year



# How big is the funding gap between small and large Black-led nonprofits?

To highlight the contrast between Black-led nonprofits' experiences, we calculated the total and average amount of funding for nonprofits based on organization size.

The three most funded Black-led nonprofits (which were not included in overall analyses because they would skew results) received substantially more than the combined total of the other 587 Black-led organizations. Of note, the top three funded nonprofits are grantmaking

nonprofits and operate as intermediaries that reallocate funds to other nonprofits. The difference between large and small Black-led nonprofits was also notable. Large Black-led nonprofits received over 26 times more overall funding than their smaller counterparts, despite representing significantly fewer organizations in our sample. Large Black-led nonprofits also received 83 times more average annual funding than small Black-led nonprofits.

**Table 4. Total and average amount of foundation funding to Black-led nonprofits, 2016-2023**

Organizations	Number of nonprofits	Total foundation funding	Average amount of annual foundation funding
Top-funded Black-led nonprofits (outliers)	3	\$328,009,710	\$109,336,570
Large Black-led nonprofits	141	\$5,538,962	\$39,283
Small Black-led nonprofits	446	\$211,615	\$474

## **Black-led nonprofits' grant applications are less likely to result in grant awards.**

Examining grants awarded does not reflect the full scope of nonprofits' grant-seeking efforts. Applying for grants also requires nonprofits to identify funders, respond to requests for proposals (RFPs), craft proposals, and navigate multiple rounds of revisions. We asked our survey participants to share the number of grants they applied for and received for each of the past three years. We then calculated their **grant success rate: the number of grants received divided by the number of grants applied for** (see Appendix for full survey methodology).

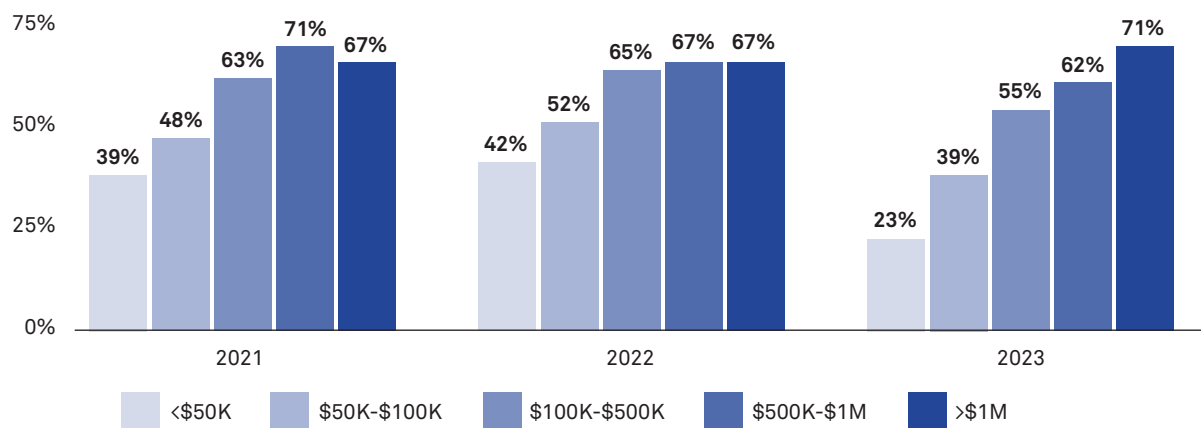
On average, Black-led nonprofits received 54% of grants they applied for from 2021 to 2023, less than other nonprofits' 65% success rate. The gap between Black-led and other nonprofits was found in all three years, though the grant success rate declined for all nonprofits in 2023 (57% in 2021 vs. 51% in 2023).

**The smallest Black-led nonprofits have the lowest grant success rates, and their success rates have declined over time.**

We also calculated Black-led nonprofits' grant success rate by organization size, considering small nonprofits as more differentiated categories (Figure 7). Results reveal a consistent trend: small Black-led nonprofits saw lower grant success rates than large Black-led nonprofits. The smallest Black-led nonprofits (with annual expenses under \$50,000) received, on average, 34% of the grants they applied for, while the largest (with more than \$1 million in expenses) received 70%.

**Figure 7. Black-led nonprofits' grant success rates increased with organization size**

Grant success rates for Black-led nonprofits, 2021-2023



The funding gap between small and large Black-led nonprofits also widened over time. The difference between the smallest and largest Black-led nonprofits' grant success rates increased from 28% in 2021 (39% vs. 67%) to 48% in 2023 (23% vs. 71%). This widening gap was primarily driven by declining success rates for small organizations rather than increasing success for large Black-led nonprofits. The next smallest group of Black-led nonprofits (with annual expenses of \$50,000-\$100,000) saw a similar decline as the smallest nonprofits, with their grant success rate decreasing from 48% to 39%. Meanwhile, the largest Black-led nonprofits displayed slight improvements in their grant success rates over the same period (67% vs. 71%).

This widening gap in grant success rates was driven by declining success rates for small Black-led nonprofits rather than increasing success for large Black-led nonprofits.

This troubling trend appeared unique to Black-led nonprofits rather than a reflection of overall funding trends. Other nonprofits in our sample also showed greater grant success rates for larger nonprofits. However, the gap between the smallest and largest nonprofits was less pronounced (50% vs. 72%) and did not widen over time. Unlike Black-led nonprofits, other small nonprofits did not experience declining grant success rates in 2023.

Low grant success rates impact more than nonprofits' time. Interviewed nonprofit leaders indicated that their proposals were typically met with minimal or no feedback about funding decisions. One Black leader characterized their experience applying for grants as “totally transactional. It is clear. Check this box. Submit this. Push this button. Then you get a letter back, ‘Dear [name], congratulations’ or ‘Unfortunately...’ It is totally transactional. There is no ‘Let’s go get coffee.’” Some leaders perceived foundations’ funding decisions as mechanical, underscoring how lack of feedback denies nonprofits insights that might inform their approach or strengthen future proposals.

The absence of human connection or constructive feedback in the application process—particularly when coupled with repeated rejection—left some nonprofit leaders feeling unheard and undervalued. For nonprofits already navigating significant barriers with limited resources, the combination of high effort, low success, and impersonal rejection can erode their motivation to pursue foundation grants altogether. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle where the nonprofits most embedded in and responsive to Black communities lack access to philanthropic resources.

## Why don't nonprofits apply for foundation grants?

Most nonprofits in our survey applied for foundation grants from 2021 to 2023. However, 341 nonprofits reported that they did not apply for a grant in the past three years, including 18 Black-led nonprofits. Nonprofits that did not apply for a grant cited various reasons, including not knowing how to apply and not having capacity.

Other reasons for not applying for grants included being newly established and lacking fit with funder priorities. Many expressed that the effort required to apply for grants was not worth the potential payoff after experiencing repeated rejections and unsuccessful proposal attempts.

**Table 5. Nonprofits' reasons to not apply for foundation grants, 2021–2023**

Reason to not apply	Black-led nonprofits (n=18)	Other nonprofits (n=323)
Don't know how to apply	44% (8 nonprofits)	37% (119 nonprofits)
Don't have capacity (e.g., personnel, time)	78% (14 nonprofits)	55% (177 nonprofits)
Worry that their work is ineligible for grants	56% (10 nonprofits)	29% (94 nonprofits)
Different business model	0% (0 nonprofits)	11% (38 nonprofits)

## Implications for foundations

Overall, our analyses of grantmaking to nonprofits demonstrate a consistent pattern: Black-led nonprofits received less financial support from foundations than other nonprofits. Although more foundations contributed more grant dollars to Black-led nonprofits starting in 2020, funding was largely concentrated among a subset of large, well-known nonprofits; by contrast, funding to most Black-led nonprofits—those with fewer overall resources—remained unchanged. Small Black-led nonprofits were also less successful in securing the foundation grants for which they applied.

Results from this chapter suggest several opportunities for foundations that are interested in supporting Black-led nonprofits and the communities they serve.

**Provide multiyear, flexible funding.** Black-led nonprofits received less foundation funding than other nonprofits, especially general operating support. Multiyear, general operating support grants allow nonprofits to build infrastructure, retain staff, and plan strategically.

*“Please don’t make [funding] a one-year thing. Life does not change in a fishbowl, which means it does not change in a year. Do not give me \$100,000, or \$10,000, or even a million dollars and say, ‘I need you to change the world in a year’ because this problem did not present itself in a year.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Partner with small Black-led nonprofits.** Mirroring the sector, the majority of Black-led nonprofits in our sample had annual operating budgets under \$1 million. Foundations invested in supporting Black communities could invest in the small nonprofits that conduct critical work in the field but have historically received less foundation support. In doing so, funders should carefully consider how to adapt their eligibility requirements, expected deliverables, and other grantee expectations to fit the resources available to smaller or newer organizations. Funders may also need to explore alternative approaches to identifying and connecting with small nonprofits outside of their standard outreach strategy.

*“We saw all this attention, all these conversations about supporting Black-led work, but for most of us on the ground, nothing really changed. The big organizations got bigger checks, but we’re still struggling with the same challenges we faced before.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Align funding amounts with expectations.** Black leaders noted a rise in funder demands for increasingly smaller grant awards. They highlighted greater reporting demands that required extensive staff time. Some leaders shared experiences when funder requests cost them more than the grant itself was worth (e.g., asking for an event that the grant did not fund). Funders can consider what amount of reporting and deliverables are reasonable, given the size of the grant, and ensure that all costs are covered, including staff time and indirect expenses.

*“Requiring evaluations and impact statements and quantitative data gathering that [funders] are unwilling to pay for [disadvantages small nonprofits]. For example, you want all this data...but are you willing to pay the salary of a data person on our staff?”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Provide feedback on applications, including rejections.** Nonprofits emphasized the challenge of receiving generic or no feedback from funders, leaving them unsure of how or whether to modify their proposal framing in the future. Funders can support nonprofits by providing specific, timely, and actionable comments to applicants that can inform future grantseeking approaches.

*“We have not had a lot of success with looking for grants. Oftentimes we have no idea why...More often than not, you apply and if you get a letter saying we did not select you, that’s good. You almost never get any feedback as to why.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Remove unnecessary barriers to eligibility.** Small Black-led nonprofits indicated that requirements like audited financials, minimum staff sizes, or years of operation automatically excluded them from funding opportunities. Funders can evaluate their eligibility requirements to assess whether they are necessary for grantees to effectively carry out the work outlined in their proposals. They can also ensure that eligibility requirements are communicated in clear, accessible language to clarify which opportunities are available for various nonprofits.

*“Grassroots organizations like myself are operating under less than half a million [dollars]. We’re not going to have some of the things that are required that these larger institutions have. I feel like that’s a part of gatekeeping.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

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# Social support: How have foundations built relationships with Black-led nonprofits?

Along with securing financial resources for their work, nonprofit leaders emphasized another critical benefit from connecting with foundations: the opportunity to form authentic relationships with funders. For some, building strong relationships was as valuable as grant support. Leaders also highlighted the importance of fostering lasting funder partnerships rather than forming single-year collaborations. One nonprofit leader reflected on the funding spike for Black communities in 2020, underscoring the benefit of foundations committing to long-term support:

*“I hate that people gave emotionally because emotions are so short-lived. If you are mad about something, it is not going to be forever. You are going to chant and act really quickly. Truly learning from listening, connecting, and understanding the philosophy around that leader [or] that organization, it takes time. The fact that people gave no time to truly connect to Black-led [nonprofits], they just wanted to take action and give and kind of did it on an emotional whim, it is just unfortunate. I really wish that it was not emotional and that it was more of an awakening and an awareness to say I need to truly connect with these leaders.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

Nonprofit leaders’ desire to build connections with funders speaks to the idea of social capital: the networks and relationships that help nonprofits thrive. Building relationships with foundations can benefit nonprofits directly through access to funders’ insights and

## Data sources

To examine foundations’ social support for nonprofits, we analyzed the following data (full methodology available in the Appendix):

- Private foundation grants, including data about which foundations awarded grants to nonprofits between 2016 to 2023 (based on Candid’s grant data)
- Interviews with 24 Black nonprofit leaders about their relationships with funders
- Foundation focus group, including perspectives from four representatives at foundations known to support Black-led nonprofits

experience. Indirectly, when foundations introduce nonprofits to potential partners in their network, those connections can facilitate nonprofits accessing additional resources, knowledge sharing, and collaboration they could not secure on their own. Our data revealed several ways that foundations can strengthen nonprofits' social capital through investing in social support, including providing sustained funding for multiple grant cycles, building strong funder-grantee relationships, and facilitating access to funder networks.

In this chapter, we explore the following research questions related to social support:

- What percentage of Black-led nonprofits' funding comes from existing foundation partners (as opposed to new funders)?
- How many funders do Black-led nonprofits typically have in a given year? How many Black-led nonprofits are supported by only one foundation?
- What barriers do Black-led nonprofits encounter when building relationships with funders?
- What can foundations do to foster supportive funder-grantee partnerships?

To learn more about the nature of foundations' relationships with nonprofits, we focus on two groups of funders: new funders (foundations that funded a nonprofit for the first time) and continuing funders (foundations that funded a nonprofit in prior years).

### **Definition: New vs. continuing funders**

Using our historical grants data, we analyzed two types of foundation-grantee partnerships: new funding relationships and continuing funding relationships.

- **New funders** are foundations that awarded a grant to a given nonprofit for the first time in a given grant cycle. These new relationships can offer access to different network connections and perspectives, but they may also require investment to build trust and funder understanding of the nonprofit's work.
- **Continuing funders** are foundations that have previously awarded a grant to a given nonprofit.<sup>5</sup> These longer-term relationships suggest an ongoing financial commitment to the nonprofit, since continuing funders have provided financial support for multiple grant cycles. Continuing funders have prior exposure to the nonprofit's work and may be able to offer more informed connections to potential funders or partners in their networks.

<sup>5</sup> As a subset of continuing funders, we also calculated a third group of foundations: returning funders (foundations that funded a nonprofit in the past, but not within the prior two years). Returning funders represented a small percentage of all funders (approximately 2-5%) and contributed a very small percent of nonprofits' total grant funding. As such, we did not separate findings for returning funders in report analyses, instead combining returning and continuing funders.

## Key research findings

### Small Black-led nonprofits are least likely to receive sustained foundation support.

Of the nonprofits in our sample that received foundation funding, we calculated the proportion of grant dollars that small and large nonprofits received from new and continuing funders (Figure 8). Large Black-led nonprofits received 60% of their funds from continuing funders, foundations with prior knowledge of their work that previously supported them. The remaining 40% of their funding came from new funders. This breakdown mirrored funding patterns for all other nonprofits, with most support provided by continuing funders.

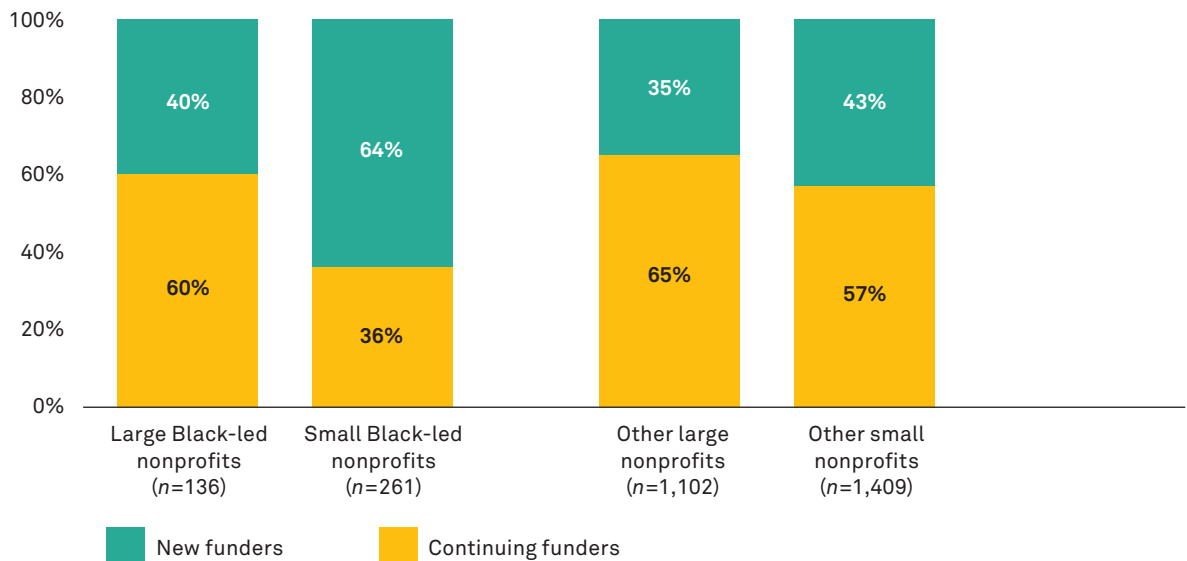
Small Black-led nonprofits, however, experienced the reverse; new funders accounted for 64% of their funding, while the remaining 36% was from continuing funders. Leaders of small Black-led nonprofits highlighted that a lack of continuing relationships with funders required them to invest substantial energy in identifying new potential funders and building trust from scratch. As one leader explained, “It is the longest dating process I’ve ever felt.... Once you finally get to the gatekeeper, once you make it to the gate, they’re like, ‘Okay, you’re here. We’re going to serve you some food, but we’re not sure if we want to eat with you.’” Relying primarily on new funders kept small nonprofits in a state of prolonged courtship, gaining some access to social support from foundations but unable to move toward deeper trust and sustained partnerships.

### Small Black-led nonprofits relied more on new rather than continuing funders, even in 2020 and beyond.

Next, we examined year-to-year funding patterns from new and continuing funders (Figure 9). Continuing funders consistently provided more than half of large Black-led

**Figure 8. Only 36% of small Black-led nonprofits’ funding came from continuing funders**

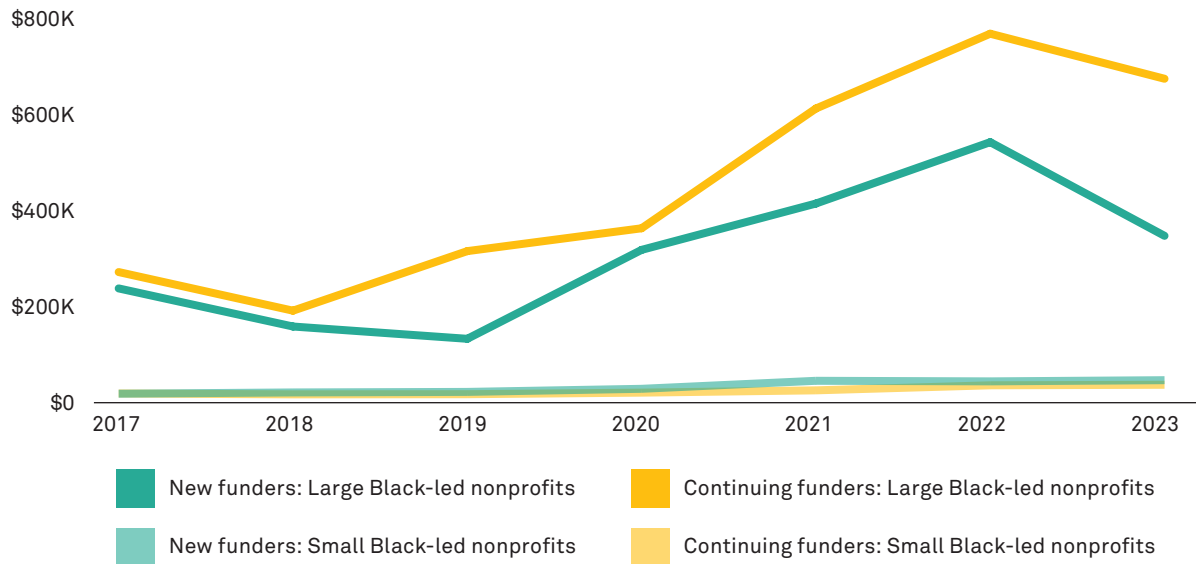
Funding groups for nonprofits, 2017–2023



nonprofits' funding, awarding as much as 72% of their total foundation support in 2019. Both new and continuing funders contributed to large Black-led nonprofits' funding surge from 2020 to 2022, suggesting that large nonprofits were able to maintain existing funder relationships while also cultivating new foundation connections.

**Figure 9. Both new and continuing funders contributed to large Black-led nonprofits' increased funding**

Total foundation funding for Black-led nonprofits by funder groups by year



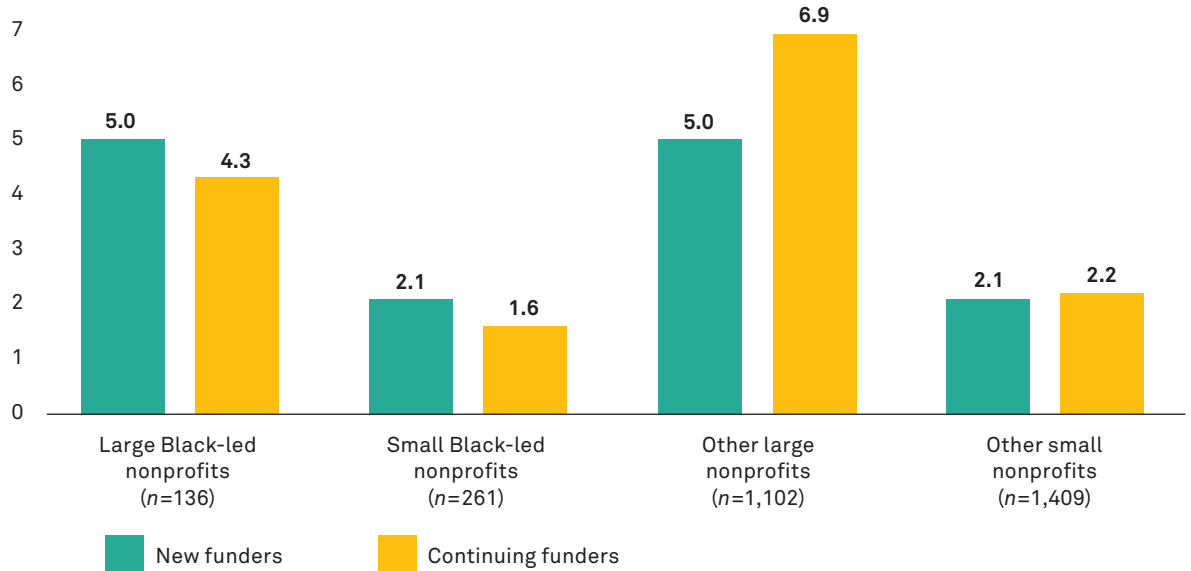
Small Black-led nonprofits experienced a different reality. New funders accounted for the majority (70-75%) of their foundation funding from 2018 to 2021, with little change in this percentage during the pandemic. Only in 2022 and 2023 did the gap narrow slightly, with new funders still providing most (58%) of their funding but continuing funders accounting for a larger proportion of grant dollars. Essentially, small Black-led nonprofits needed to start over at the beginning of each year, building new funder relationships. Moreover, given that small Black-led nonprofits saw no significant funding increase from 2016 to 2023 (Figure 5), this finding suggests that neither new nor continuing funders provided increased financial support to small Black-led nonprofits following George Floyd's murder.

**47%**  
of small Black-led nonprofits had only one funder at a time.

We also analyzed the number of nonprofits' new and continuing funders each year (Figure 10). Small Black-led nonprofits averaged two new funders and two continuing funders in an average year, which was similar to other small nonprofits. However, nearly half (47%) of small Black-led nonprofits had only one funder at a time, a greater percentage than other small nonprofits (29%). Small Black-led nonprofits also had fewer new and continuing funders annually than both Black and other large nonprofits. Large Black-led nonprofits have significantly fewer continuing funders than other large nonprofits.

**Figure 10. Large Black-led nonprofits averaged four continuing funders compared with seven continuing funders for other large nonprofits**

Average number of funders per year, 2017-2023



**Large Black-led nonprofits have significantly fewer continuing funders than other large nonprofits.**

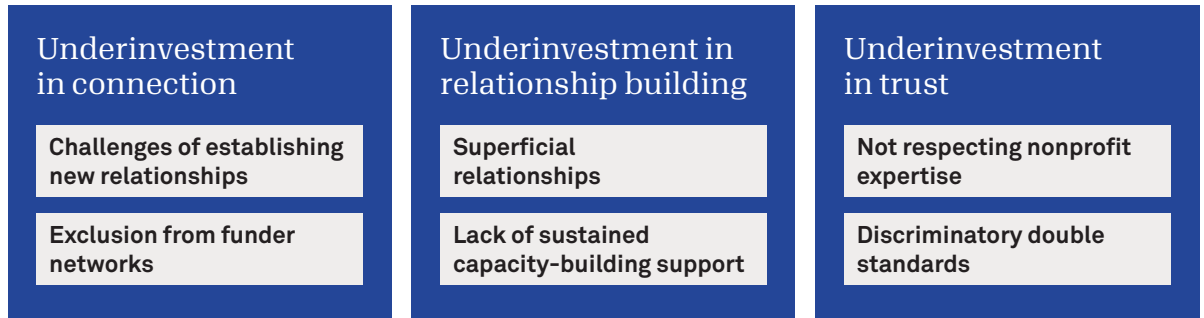
Large Black-led nonprofits averaged five new funders annually, comparable to other large nonprofits. However, they had significantly fewer continuing funders than other large nonprofits. Large Black-led nonprofits averaged four continuing funders annually, with one in five (20%) averaging one continuing funder per year. Several leaders of large Black-led nonprofits noted that having fewer continuing funders limited their ability to build networks and meet more potential funders.

**Black nonprofit leaders identified six challenges to building relationships with funders.**

To learn more about nonprofits’ experiences and provide a current perspective on the nature of funder-grantee relationships, we interviewed 24 leaders of Black-led nonprofits (see the Appendix for more information). Nonprofit leaders described common barriers to connecting with funders, broadly related to foundations’ underinvestment in connection, relationship building, and trust (Figure 11).

Large Black-led nonprofits had on average **4** continuing funders per year, whereas other large nonprofits averaged seven.

**Figure 11. Black nonprofit leaders identified six challenges to cultivating supportive relationships with funders**



**Challenges of establishing new relationships.** For nonprofits attempting to form new funder relationships, getting through the door represented a Herculean task. Cold outreach rarely succeeded; nonprofits need introductions from existing contacts, creating an impossible catch-22. As one leader noted, “Larger foundations really only want to play with people that they have been playing with all along.” Even when connections were made, organizations reported being “ghosted” after promising conversations or receiving generic rejections that provided no path forward. Without the introductions that their current funders could provide, many nonprofits found themselves having to invest monumental effort to initiate relationships and rarely succeeded. Interviewed leaders highlighted this as particularly problematic for Black-led nonprofits. “I thought entertainment was super white and then I thought tech was super white,” one leader said, “but philanthropy is the oldest, whitest institution I’ve ever tried to crack open.”

**Exclusion from funder networks.** One of the most pervasive challenges mentioned by nonprofits was systematic exclusion from philanthropic networks. Five nonprofit leaders named networking as key to receiving foundation funding. However, many Black leaders—even those with long-term funders who know their work intimately—found that funders rarely leveraged their connections for nonprofits’ strategic benefit. Nonprofit leaders reported that they remained perpetually on the periphery of funders’ networks, without opportunities to foster their own connections with other funders or grantees. One leader even named a Black organization that would not regrant to controversial or less well-known Black-led nonprofits because they were “so worried about seeming biased...[and] worried their funding will get pulled if everything they do has a Black militant spin on it.”

**Superficial relationships.** Black leaders also described shallow, impersonal interactions with funders, even in longstanding relationships. They described some funders as having a checkbox approach to interactions that prevented genuine engagement or thought partnership. When invited into philanthropic spaces, Black leaders often felt that they served as props for marketing. “People tell me that it won’t be transactional, but then it just ends up becoming a check and then they want to show up for a photo op,” one leader shared. Some Black-led nonprofits had no relationship with their funders apart from the grant application process.

Of note, superficial relationships can be apparent as early as the application process. One leader observed, “If there is a really cumbersome application process for a small grant award, that signals that they do not actually care about the people they’re funding.” Funders’ arms-length approach prevented genuine partnerships from developing, as well as deeper understanding of nonprofits’ missions.

**Lack of sustained capacity-building support.** Interviewees stated that foundations often provided one-time trainings for their nonprofits but did not arrange follow-up coaching or consider how to customize those trainings for their organizations’ specific contexts or challenges. One leader described receiving “coaching that would start the ball rolling, but there was no customizable application that helped us as an organization to continue to build on the foundation that [funders] were so gracious to give us.”

According to some leaders, generic trainings without scaffolding to ensure implementation limited the usefulness for many nonprofits. Another leader explained: “I don’t want to just get the grant. I want to sustain the grant. I want to get the grant next year, and the year after that and more grants. I want to be able to do that with excellence, but if I don’t get the support I need, that is just not going to happen.” Absence of sustained support undermined nonprofits’ development and funding stability, limiting organizations’ ability to effectively support their communities.

“I don’t want to just get a grant. I want to sustain the grant... but if I don’t get the support I need, that is just not going to happen.”

**Not respecting nonprofit expertise.** Black leaders repeatedly encountered funders that imposed their own agendas while ignoring nonprofits’ community knowledge and insights. “We’ve got plenty of examples of foundations saying, ‘We think you should do it this way,’” one leader shared. “It’s this [attitude] of, ‘We’re smarter than you, so we’re going to tell you how to do this work’ that is just not helpful. It’s the antithesis of trust-based philanthropy.” Funders’ lack of respect for nonprofits’ expertise undermined the trust leaders desired as part of more fruitful partnerships.

**Discriminatory double standards.** Many Black leaders felt obligated to demonstrate exceptional competence that was not expected of other nonprofits. “White-led organizations are thought to have aptitude, competency, support, even if they don’t,” one leader stated. “They have access to funds, even if they blow those funds.” Leaders noted double standards particularly related to financial stability. One leader in a large city shared an example of their local symphony orchestra. The orchestra’s multimillion-dollar debt did not preclude foundation support, “but if I get \$20,000, \$30,000, or \$100,000 in debt, my organization is seen as not solid.”

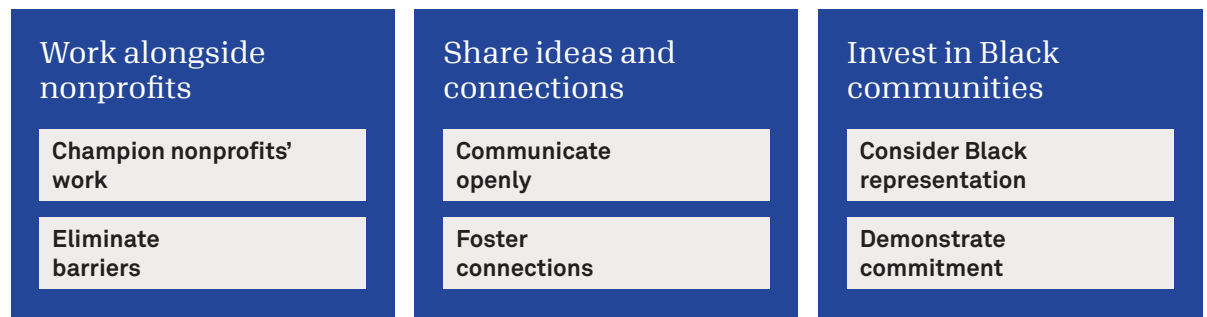
Smaller nonprofits especially felt this challenge; six interviewees believed their nonprofits had struggled to secure grants due to their size. One leader attributed lost funding opportunities to being “Black-led, Black-centered, but also because we’re small that there are questions internally. Like, ‘Do they have the capacity to actually carry out this project? Do they have the resources to be able to carry out this project after this funding expires? Can they actually do this safely?’ I think there are more questions about liability and risk when it comes to an organization like ours.”

**Black leaders shared six types of social support that signal strong funder partnerships.**

When asked about positive funder relationships, Black leaders described partners that conveyed genuine care, mutual respect, and sustained engagement that persisted across multiple grant cycles. More than half of Black leaders emphasized that their most authentic funder contacts put effort into building deep relationships, helping nonprofits feel like equal partners rather than grantees. “The genuine nature of it, the authenticity of it, comes across,” one leader shared. Another leader expressed, “We want to have a respectful, mutually satisfying relationship. We understand that we are exchanging our services for money, but it is not just that.”

Not all leaders experienced constructive relationships with foundations. However, those who did have positive connections with a funder described positive interactions, which illustrate how foundations can better support Black-led nonprofits. Leaders identified six factors across three themes that contributed to supportive and genuine partnerships (Figure 12).

**Figure 12. Black nonprofit leaders identified six factors of supportive funder relationships**



**Champion nonprofits' work.** Leaders explained that supportive funders regularly spotlighted and engaged in their work, importantly, in ways that nonprofits found helpful. One leader described how a funder demonstrated commitment to their relationship: “I have had them want us to come speak about our work to their boards. I have had them want to come to our offices and want to be engaged with our work. [They] have highlighted us on their sites, in their newsletters, as a group to look after.” This foundation consistently raised visibility of their nonprofit partners’ work through multiple channels.

Another leader described funders providing personnel to support the nonprofit’s work: “They show that they believe in our mission by providing steady volunteers. Every year they come back and they bring a large group, or throughout the year, every Monday we have one group that sends out one to two volunteers, every single Monday, so that we’re supported.” In this case, the funders’ consistent and concrete support demonstrated true commitment.

These funders also engaged with the communities their grantees served rather than remaining distant—what one nonprofit leader described as foundations “sitting on a perch as opposed to actually being in the community.” Leaders also praised funders that hosted fundraising events with foundation personnel volunteering on-site. One leader expressed that “when [funders are] willing to show up, that is their willingness to go deeper in relationship and in community.”

**Eliminate barriers.** Nonprofits praised foundations that worked to address nonprofits’ most pressing challenges. “When funders want to support your work and they truly believe in what you’re doing, they work very diligently and explicitly to eliminate barriers,” one leader stated. “They take barriers out of the way, so that there is nothing standing between you and the resource that [they’re] trying to make available to you.” Common barriers included time-intensive reporting processes, insufficient personnel, and identifying future funders. Several leaders shared examples of funders addressing their barriers, including helping them secure loans, connect with potential supporters, and access emergency funding or general operating support. These actions signaled that foundations cared about their grantees’ long-term success, not just specific grant deliverables.

“When funders want to support your work and they truly believe in what you’re doing, they work very diligently and explicitly to eliminate barriers.”

**Communicate openly.** Black leaders emphasized the impact of funders that maintained open dialogue, provided meaningful feedback, and remained approachable through all stages of the granting process. One leader described an ideal partner as “someone there who I could call and have a discussion with.... I feel like that person has actual influence, so if we bring up something that is of concern it actually gets dealt with.” Responsive and open lines of communication contrast with the distant, shallow relationships that many leaders described as one of the major barriers to building strong connections with funders.

**Foster connections.** Leaders praised partners that supported nonprofits’ professional network building, emphasizing their appreciation for funders that took the time to make strategic introductions or include them in spaces where they might not otherwise have access. The desire for “more than just this transaction of ‘Here’s the funds, your report is due this date’” reflected a hunger for funders that were willing to cultivate nonprofits’ social capital alongside providing financial resources. One leader highlighted the importance of funders that “actually follow up with you with advice on somebody to connect with, somebody to partner with. They stay in touch. They are engaged.”

**Consider Black representation.** Nonprofits emphasized the importance of Black representation among funders’ staff, board, and funding portfolio. One leader described their process for considering potential funders: “Number one, who else they fund. Number two, where they are...I go to networking things, and if they’re in the room, then that’s a signal. So where they are, who they fund, who’s on their board, and who knows people on their board.” Several leaders vetted funders by whether they fund other Black-led nonprofits; in fact, two nonprofits only worked with foundations that specialize in supporting Black and Brown communities. Others viewed Black representation among foundations’ leadership as a sign of commitment to Black communities. Still others looked for funders’ ties to Black communities.

One leader shared, “many of the other supporters that we have, either the programs themselves are led by African Americans or other people of color or they are strongly tied to our community in some way where they are trying to literally be allies and make a difference.” Just as leaders at Black-led nonprofits value the experiences they share with members of the communities they serve, they also prioritize mutual lived experience with their funders.

Importantly, multiple leaders noted that representation is necessary but not sufficient to make them feel supported. Leaders emphasized that Black foundation staff must be responsive, connected with Black communities, and empowered to make decisions. As one leader stated, “If you don’t have Black staff, it is unlikely that you are going to learn or grow accustomed to listening to Black people. And I used all of those verbs very purposely because you can have Black staff and not listen to them. You can have Black staff and not empower them. You can have Black staff who are disconnected from the Black community.” Four nonprofit leaders recounted experiences when Black foundation staff were unavailable, dismissive, or biased against their organizations, undermining trust in those funders.

**Demonstrate commitment.** Finally, leaders emphasized the importance of funders’ sustained commitment—not just funding—that weathered broader political and social changes. They looked for funders that will “stand ten toes down” to support Black communities even when it may be controversial, maintaining support when communities need it most rather than retreating with shifting trends or public opinion. One leader praised one of their funders as “a very good partner that has not wavered, like they still send emails stating their values.... They have been like, ‘These are still our values.’ They still work with us.” Lasting commitment was particularly salient to Black leaders when we interviewed them in late 2024 and early 2025.

## Implications for foundations

Results on social support suggest that Black-led nonprofits, especially small ones, were less likely to receive ongoing funding from continuing funders compared with other nonprofits. Even during the height of the pandemic and calls for racial justice, small Black-led nonprofits primarily received funds from new foundation partners, rather than securing year-over-year support, and nearly half only had one funder at a time. Findings from grants data are mirrored in reflections from the Black leaders that we interviewed. These leaders expressed a desire for funders to invest more in building connection, relationships, and trust with their organizations. They also shared their frustration at the state of some funder relationships, in which the combination of systemic exclusion, double standards, and transactional approaches forced nonprofits to work exponentially harder to secure funding and build connections. On a positive note, nonprofit leaders celebrated funder relationships characterized by collaboration, communication, and commitment.

These findings suggest several opportunities for foundations that are interested in building up the social capital of Black-led nonprofits and their communities.

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# Foundation perspectives reveal commitment amid constraints.

We also spoke with representatives of foundations with a history of supporting Black-led nonprofits. These foundations consistently funded Black-led nonprofits and continued to publicly support Black communities when we interviewed them in spring 2025 (see Appendix for more information). Given previous findings in this report about foundations' overall underinvestment in Black communities, these representatives are not intended to be illustrative of all foundations; instead, they offer insights from institutions that have expressed interest in listening to, learning from, and working alongside Black stakeholders.

Like Black leaders, these four foundation representatives acknowledged the importance of funders providing support beyond grant dollars. Several described efforts to make strategic connections within their networks, with one foundation representative emphasizing, "I would ask us grantmakers to use the privilege we have as grantmakers to make connections. Take the time to make connections. Even though our own organizations may not be able or willing to help, we as individuals can help these organizations in a much more meaningful way if we just take the time." Another representative described enjoying "informal coaching that can happen with nonprofits who have limited experiences with foundations," recognizing that "this is such a relationship-driven sector."

Although they acknowledged the importance of helping nonprofits connect with others in their networks, foundation representatives did not discuss specific methods they used to champion their grantee's work, an action that Black leaders explicitly wanted from their funders. Foundation

representatives also acknowledged that they struggle to fully leverage their networks to benefit Black-led nonprofits. While foundation staff spoke of being open to conversation with new organizations and making introductions, Black-led nonprofits described needing to navigate "the longest dating process" just to get in the door with funders.

Several foundation representatives recognized the arduous process for new grantees to connect with them, realizing that the gap between foundations' perceived openness and nonprofits' experience of exclusion was a worthwhile issue to address when establishing future partnerships. However, representatives shared few specific strategies to eliminate key barriers for nonprofits and did not discuss many of the same issues mentioned by the Black leaders that we interviewed.

Foundation representatives also shared Black leaders' desire for open communication and fostering authentic connections. However, their descriptions of current nonprofit partnerships revealed some gaps between desired intention and real-life impact. Just as Black leaders spoke of difficulty establishing new funder relationships, foundation representatives described their own struggles to identify and connect with new nonprofit partners. "We keep getting a lot of the usual characters that we already fund with our own dollars directly," one representative admitted. "We have not cracked the code on it. It is something that I literally was talking about yesterday. Where are the organizations that we are not used to funding and probably have the best expertise?"

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While representatives spoke of making introductions and being “open to conversation,” there was less discussion of how foundations could revisit and restructure their grantmaking practices to address the network exclusion, double standards, and transactional relationships that Black-led nonprofits experienced. As an exception, one representative shared a radical idea for systemic thinking, calling for “strategic investments where folks buy property and give it back to the community” to facilitate connections and asking, “How do we liberate this capital for people?” Another foundation representative shared that their organization is considering making grants “just a gift” with no reporting requirements, trusting nonprofits to use resources wisely.

Apart from these examples, representatives did not discuss fundamental ways to revise the funding process. Nonprofit leaders expressed a desire for foundations to think creatively about how to support their grantees, such as sharing nonmonetary resources. As one Black leader suggested, “If [foundations] have a marketing department or a marketing team and smaller organizations they’re working with don’t have money to hire a marketing department, you could share your capacity.”

Representatives shared their foundations’ attempts to demonstrate a deep commitment to their nonprofit partners. One foundation underwent a truth and reconciliation process examining how their founder accumulated wealth through racial covenants and redlining. Another described how their organization had invested in Black communities for 40 years and considers this commitment “part of our DNA.” Throughout these actions, foundations were attempting to acknowledge their past and develop a stronger foundation on which to build durable funder-grantee relationships. However, it remains unclear to what extent Black leaders and communities perceive foundations’ efforts as demonstrating the commitment they want to see.

Taken together, our conversations with Black leaders and foundation representatives identified several common challenges and disconnects between funders’ and nonprofits’ experiences. Foundations that are interested in partnering effectively to support nonprofits may wish to double down on factors that Black leaders identified as critical to supportive relationships and consider strategies raised by Black leaders that were not discussed among foundation personnel.

**Invest in ongoing grantee relationships.** Small Black-led nonprofits received most of their grants from new funders and nearly half had only one foundation partner in a given year. Foundations can set the stage for building supportive funder partnerships by committing to fund nonprofits across multiple grant cycles. Even if they do not financially support nonprofits every year, funders can continue to provide social capital by staying connected with nonprofit leaders, learning about their work, and capitalizing on opportunities to make strategic introductions to others in their network.

*“We want to have a respectful, mutually satisfying relationship. We understand that we are exchanging our services for money, but it is not just that.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Move beyond transactional interactions.** Black leaders' most frequently mentioned advice for effective funder-grantee partnerships was to build meaningful relationships. Foundations can cultivate strong connections by communicating frequently, respecting nonprofits' perspectives, and being responsive to their needs. Funders can also ensure that their staff are accessible for conversations about more than just reporting requirements.

*"The biggest piece is to get to know us. Build relationships with us."*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Get to know your grantees and their communities.** A 2025 survey of more than 200 nonprofits and foundations suggested that only 33% of nonprofit leaders believe that their funders have a strong understanding of what their communities need. Foundations can get to know their grantees on a deeper level by attending grantee events, connecting with community members, or volunteering with nonprofits' programs. They can also consider hosting open office hours, community gatherings, or low-barrier opportunities for nonprofits to connect more deeply.

*"A lot of funders seem really comfortable sitting behind their desks and just reading proposals and making decisions based on what they see on paper. I think there is value in getting out from behind the desk, seeing what is happening in the community, maybe being a little bit uncomfortable, and then being able to make the decision about where funding needs to go."*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Open doors to your networks proactively.** Nearly half of interviewed leaders wanted foundations to make strategic introductions with other potential funders. Foundations can support nonprofits by actively connecting them with relevant funders, peer organizations, and potential partners. They can also identify more strategic connections by learning about their grantees' work, needs, and aspirations. Spotlighting grantees in different communication channels can help amplify their work and create opportunities for network building.

*"If you want to be able to partner with Black-led organizations, invite us to the table. Invite us to the rooms where other funders are present. Tell other people about our work. Help connect us and network us."*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Eliminate unnecessary barriers and embrace creative problem solving.** Many nonprofits mentioned burdensome grant reporting requirements as a barrier to their work. Foundations can support nonprofits by exploring ways to simplify their application processes, streamline reporting requirements, and provide opportunities for nonprofits to share results of their work in novel and authentic ways. They can also consider innovative ways to support their grantees; for example, one leader suggested that funders could share marketing expertise with organizations that do not have a marketing team.

*"Excessive reporting requirements are taking somebody away from the work that actually needs to be happening. You don't really need information every quarter, it is not necessary, or every month."*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

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# Human-centered support: How do foundations reinforce the well-being of Black-led nonprofits staff?

Foundations' financial and social support are critical catalysts to facilitating nonprofits' work. Beyond grant funding and social capital, however, nonprofit leaders also voiced a desire to partner with funders that also invested in the people doing the work: their staff, volunteers, and leaders. One leader expressed the strain on many employees working with Black communities, particularly in the current philanthropic context:

*“As a people, we have always been resilient, we have always survived, and we have always pushed through. And now is just another time that we’re being called upon to do that. It is exhausting and I believe that that exhaustion manifests even in our DNA, but we don’t really have a choice.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

Beyond dollars and relationships, foundations can invest in their grantees by considering how to sustain the humans behind the mission. Human-centered support refers to the resources that nonprofit leaders and staff need to carry out mission-driven work without suffering from burnout. After all, nonprofits cannot meet their mission or serve communities if the people making that work possible are not themselves supported.

An important way foundations can enact human-centered support is by investing in grantees' “psychological capital”, which research suggests encompasses four interrelated components: hope (ability to identify a path toward a better future); self-efficacy (confidence in one's ability to succeed); resilience (capacity to manage and overcome adversity); and optimism (positive expectations about future outcomes).

## Data sources

To answer questions about foundations' human-centered support for nonprofits, we analyzed the following data (full methodology available in the Appendix):

- Interviews with 24 Black nonprofit leaders about the current moment and funders' supporting and undermining practices
- Foundation focus group, including perspectives from four representatives at foundations known to support Black-led nonprofits

Together, these elements describe the internal resources that enable nonprofit staff to navigate challenges, maintain engagement, and persist toward their missions despite systemic barriers.

Philanthropy has historically overlooked the human aspect of funder-grantee relationships, focusing instead on measurable outputs and financial metrics. However, human-centered support and psychological capital may be particularly important for foundations that want to partner with Black-led nonprofits during challenging times, including the current moment.

In this chapter, we explore the following research questions related to human-centered support:

- What burdens do funder practices impose on Black-led nonprofits?
- What can foundations do to support the well-being of Black-led nonprofit leader and staff?

Because financial, social, and human-centered support are interrelated, many funder behaviors that are relevant to human-centered support have already been discussed in this report. Rather than revisit the same data, we discuss how the themes raised by nonprofit leaders align with what research suggests is needed to prevent burnout and build psychological resources during challenging times: hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience.

## **Key research findings**

### **Specific funder practices deplete nonprofit staff's internal resources.**

Black leaders we interviewed identified several specific funder actions that exhausted and undermined them personally and their staff.

**Double standards erode organizational hope.** Black leaders reported having to demonstrate exceptional competence that was not expected of other nonprofits. This disparity can impact their will to pursue foundation funding and belief that getting grants is possible, which are both critical elements of hope. When the path to sustainable funding requires meeting impossible standards, nonprofits can quickly lose hope.

One leader stated that Black-led nonprofits “have to prove ourselves more” than other nonprofits. They explained, “I know organizations that just started like last year or two years ago and they’ve gotten tons of funding just right off the ground. We had to work for two years before we even got any kind of money coming in.... But other organizations come in, they’re not minority-led, and it is like, ‘Oh, we love what you’re doing.’ It could be the exact same thing that we’re doing on a larger scale and the funding doesn’t get split the same way.” Double standards communicate to Black-led nonprofits that they do not have the same pathway to success as other nonprofits, diminishing organizational hope.

Another nonprofit leader indicated that, in their county, “Black nonprofits were getting about half of what the white nonprofits were, even if you matched up and had a similar mission.” Even when pursuing similar missions, Black-led nonprofits felt less likely to be supported by funders.

**Discriminatory practices undercut organizational self-efficacy.** Overwhelmingly, Black leaders recounted facing biased or unfair experiences when interacting with foundations. Funders’ discriminatory behaviors not only affect individual leaders and staff members but can also undermine entire organizations’ confidence in their ability to effectively serve their communities and secure funding. When staff witness their leaders being dismissed despite expertise and learn that demonstrating impact does not guarantee equal treatment, it can erode organizational self-efficacy. Nonprofit workers question whether their organization can succeed within the constraints of the current philanthropic system, a system that multiple leaders characterized as biased.

Decades of research demonstrate that prior success is the greatest predictor of future confidence (i.e., self-efficacy). Leaders shared that persistently low grant success rates undermined organizational self-efficacy. The impact of failed grant proposals was affirmed by several nonprofit leaders and survey participants who said that they considered abandoning foundation funding after repeated unsuccessful submissions. One leader described reaching this breaking point: “For a while, [I was] like, ‘I’m not applying [to] anything.’”

**Repeated rejection depletes hope and resilience reserves.** Leaders often discussed their struggles to secure and maintain foundation funding. With Black-led nonprofits receiving 54% of the grants they apply for, compared with 65% for other nonprofits—and small Black-led organizations receiving just 23% in 2023—staff submitting grant applications have experienced repeated failure in the grantmaking process. Resilience, the capacity to bounce back from setbacks, requires internal resources that can be depleted by frequent experiences of rejection.

Each unfunded application represented not just lost revenue but accumulated exhaustion that made it more difficult to keep trying.

As described by Black leaders, each unfunded application represented not just lost revenue but accumulated exhaustion that made it more difficult to keep trying. The mechanical nature of rejection, often accompanied by no feedback, compounded this depletion. Nonprofit staff drain their psychological reserves guessing why proposals failed, unable to address feedback that might improve future outcomes. As one leader shared, “You don’t know [why a grant wasn’t funded]. You get a paper and it says, ‘Thank you. We had a million people who applied so we couldn’t fund everybody. We chose some other people who seem stronger.’ What do you do?”

Interacting with dismissive or disrespectful funders even led some nonprofits to turn down monetary support. “If I find that I am approaching a funder that is not giving me love and respect, I am not doing business with them,” one leader explained. “It is easier for me to not accept the money, because I do not want to deal with a problem than for me to take the money and say to myself, ‘Oh, hell! This is the worst experience in the world.’”

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# Black leaders have experienced discrimination in the grantseeking process.

Black leaders called out racial discrimination as a pervasive challenge when pursuing funding. Over half (54%) of leaders experienced some form of racial discrimination, bias, or stereotyping during the grantseeking process, with an additional 25% indicating they could not prove it but suspected it had occurred. Some leaders described an ongoing pattern they experienced “repeatedly throughout [their organization’s] entire existence.” Others described more subtle forms of bias.

Discrimination can directly impact nonprofits’ funding opportunities. “If you do not have a prior relationship or if you are trying to establish a relationship with a particular granting organization, that potential for bias is definitely going to affect whether you ever get to speak to the person or the small committee who would even be willing to ask you to apply,” one leader explained. Another observed more starkly: “Most of the time, people avoid us like the plague.”

Nearly one-quarter of leaders we interviewed experienced stereotyping or pressure to de-emphasize their Black identity. In fact, these factors were mentioned more often than any other funder action as undermining funder-nonprofit relationships. Discriminatory practices mentioned by leaders include:

- **Paternalistic assumptions.** One nonprofit leader encountered a foundation employee who stated, “Black people really need help and most of them can’t eat,” prompting the leader to remind the funder that members of underrepresented communities “actually have corporate jobs, too. They are vice presidents, too.”

- **Tokenization for optics.** At a funder event where “my team and myself were probably the only Black people,” one leader reported being approached with requests like, “Oh, my God, yes, we need to get you on camera.’.... I think they want us on camera because we’re Black.”
- **Pressure to dilute racial focus.** One leader recounted explaining their mission to supporting “Black and Brown families that have lost their homes...because they are the last to be served and the first to lose their equity,” only to have a funder respond, “Now, can we switch that to low-income communities?” The leader reflected that it was “not helpful for foundations to put their comfort level above what we know to be true.”

Discrimination operates not just through explicit rejection but also subtle pressures that require Black-led nonprofits to balance maintaining their mission and securing necessary resources. Many nonprofits have continued pursuing funding despite repeated discrimination, often through necessity and a deep commitment to supporting their organizations’ missions. As one leader summarized, “People do judge you on the color of your skin. They might think that you’re stupid.... I just make an effort to go beyond those stereotypes.”

**Resource highlight.** Given the importance and complexity of navigating race-explicit language in a changing philanthropic landscape, ABFE and Candid produced a [special report](#) on Black-led nonprofits and race-explicit work.

**Imposed theories of change damage organizational optimism.** When funders consistently overrode nonprofits' expertise by forcing alternative frameworks, leaders felt devalued. Dismissing or ignoring nonprofits' recommendations and plans can erode nonprofits' optimism about their ability to carry out their future mission-driven work. When nonprofits repeatedly received these messages, leaders described that many colleagues lost faith in the possibility of positive outcomes in the future. It can also be difficult for nonprofit leaders to maintain optimism when they perceive funders as dismissing the wealth of experience their organizations have cultivated through engaging with stakeholders.

Additionally, several nonprofits shared that pressure to modify how they describe their work to funders can be emotionally draining. As one leader shared, "I think any time that you can't be your authentic self, it's just tiring. It's tiring to have to think, 'Well, how do I present to this person?'... I walk out of that room exhausted, because I spent the whole time trying to figure out how do I relate to these people, how do I talk to them? If you think about applying that same concept to an entire organization of people, it is exhausting to them as a whole."

**Lack of flexibility and unreasonable requests erode resilience and promotes burnout.** When describing funder actions that make them feel unsupported, multiple leaders mentioned arduous tasks or unrealistic expectations. Experiences ranged from quick turnaround requests with no prior notice to foundations asking for unplanned, time-intensive deliverables. Many of these requests were accompanied by vague or unrealistic instructions and a lack of clarity about the purpose of the expected deliverables. In many cases, Black-led nonprofits' burden was compounded when foundations showed little concern for their employees' health and well-being; some funders either did not inquire about or disregarded nonprofits' current capacity, other obligations, or the state of staff overall.

One leader conveyed the impact of juggling time-sensitive funder requests during a challenging period. "For a lot of Black people—especially me, living in a community where you are right up, close, and personal with what's happening—I needed days to breathe. It was just too dramatic." Yet, funders told them, "I need you to complete this right now this second. I need this back in 24 hours.' I was like, I do not want to leave the money on the table, but the fact that you had no empathy, every time I think about it I get a little upset about it. It was this [feeling of] 'I still do not care about y'all, I'm the priority, you need to jump. We know you need this money, fill this out.'" Black leaders interpreted funders' last-minute requests as signaling lack of respect, concern, and understanding, which in turn added to burnout and undermined trust in funders' intentions.

**Repeated historical patterns take a cumulative toll on Black-led nonprofits' capacity.** The nonprofit sector has faced notable challenges over the past two years, especially in terms of decreased funding and racial equity backlash. However, for Black-led nonprofits, these challenges are not new. Several leaders described how the current climate and the challenges it presents reflect familiar historical patterns, not unprecedented circumstances. One leader explained, "You have to know the history of America. This is absolutely how America functions. There is that kind of holding the emotional toll of the

resurgence of your own trauma and being able to explain that and describe it to other people who are now experiencing harm that they had not maybe [ever] experienced before.” A foundation representative also acknowledged this reality: “There is this weird kind of tension with people saying this is an unprecedented time. For those of us, especially from the Black community, this is the precedent.”

The decades of abandonment experienced by Black communities can undermine nonprofits’ psychological resources in the current moment. Some Black leaders described how their nonprofits and peer organizations carry the institutional memory of broken promises: the 1960s, the 1980s retrenchment, brief hope after Obama’s election, the surge after George Floyd’s murder, and now another retreat. One foundation representative also voiced the emotional impact that nonprofits face due to fluctuating support for funding focused on Black communities, stating, “People are telling us about a lot of pain, and we are carrying that home to our families. Folks have been talking about not being able to sleep, not being able to eat.”

**Black leaders seek respect, care, and authentic commitment from funders.**

Despite facing monumental challenges, many Black leaders expressed remarkable resilience and optimism for the future of the sector and their organizations. One leader shared their perspective that the future “is going to be interesting; we’re all going to have to get creative. I hope we all make it. I mean, we will. We are just going to shift and do what we have to do.” Black leaders articulated several ways that their foundation partners can provide human-centered support for Black-led nonprofits in future interactions.

**Trust nonprofits’ expertise.** For many Black leaders, funders demonstrated support by trusting their competence without asking for extraordinary proof. Funders’ trust—

in nonprofits’ knowledge of their communities’ needs and the best approaches to supporting them—reinforced nonprofit leaders’ confidence in their strategy and optimism for a long-term, aligned partnership with their funders. “Black communities, since we’ve been in this nation, have shown that we are the best people to take care of our communities,” one leader explained. “There is something about trusting us to be able to do the work that we have already determined in partnership with community. This is what community wants and needs. There’s an invitation to make sure that grantmaking isn’t a dog and pony show. There’s a way to invest in our work without exploiting our labor.” Leaders also sought partners that would respect their ability to identify and execute the best strategy to meet their communities’ needs. One leader described a supportive funder as “always complimentary to how we get down, the way we move, and what we do.” Trusting nonprofits’ expertise can help restore nonprofits’ confidence and hope for the future.

“There is something about trusting us to be able to do the work that we have already determined in partnership with community. This is what community wants and needs.”

**Recognize nonprofits’ commitment to their missions.** Leaders also appreciated funders that recognized their commitment to serving Black communities and the sacrifices required to achieve their missions. As one leader explained, “The [funders] who are more genuine are concerned about you [and] your purpose because they know you are not in

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# Intersectionality: The compounded burdens for Black women leading small nonprofits

Women served as CEOs at two-thirds of the Black-led nonprofits in our sample, most of which were small and more recently established. Several of the women leaders we interviewed recounted the unique challenges they faced as Black women in philanthropy, including how gender bias compounded racial discrimination. Black women leaders consistently reported being treated differently than their male counterparts in funder interactions. One CEO “noticed I can bring a member or my husband or a staff person who is male and he is just received differently.”

Stereotypes about Black women created additional barriers to building trust with funders. One leader described the burden of being labeled when advocating for her organization: “Because I speak truth to power, it is this angry Black woman exception. Everywhere I go, it is always a joke of ‘Oh, here comes the troublemaker.’” Another leader identified the core issue: “The challenge, unfortunately, is just the distrust. The distrust and the perception that reflects poorly on Black women leaders.” Black women leaders faced specific stereotypes that may further nonprofit leaders’ burnout.

Foundation representatives also recognized the unsustainable pressure placed on Black women nonprofit leaders. As one funder noted: “We continually hear from Black women that they are burned out. That they are overworked or that they are in multiple spaces,” juggling leadership duties while serving as caregivers and community advocates. Another foundation representative articulated funders’ responsibility to embrace the need to humanize and support Black women leading nonprofits: “I think there is an aspect of the work to be able to articulate

the Black radical tradition that we are learning from our grantees. Then there is the other side of being able to, on the human side, humanize in particular, the Black women doing the work. This work is hard and the women are strong, but they are also soft. They are also vulnerable. They are also mothers. They are also grandmothers [who are] able to tell those stories.”

Black women also often faced additional struggles related to leading small organizations. Staff at small Black-led nonprofits—representing 76% of Black-led organizations in our sample—reported facing unique pressures that compounded their existing challenges. Six interviewees believed their size created additional funding barriers, like the pressure to constantly prove their competence while managing greater operational complexity with fewer resources. Volunteer-run nonprofits may also face the added strain of balancing unpaid work with full-time employment.

With fewer people, each person in small nonprofits juggles multiple responsibilities. One leader explained: “I’m going to work harder than if I have a whole group of people who sit around and do nothing all day because you got this big organization.... When you have one person or two people, they are really going to work to give you the product.” Foundation representatives echoed the compounded stress faced by small nonprofits as they applied for funding, with one representative reflecting, “I think there needs to be an openness and a willingness amongst the philanthropic community and, specifically, program officers, in terms of the bias that they have when they approach these calls and due diligence when assessing who is worthy of our grants.”

this to get rich.” Black leaders expressed their unwavering pledge to serving Black people and urged foundations to celebrate that commitment. One leader shared, “I would want funders to know that as an African American-led nonprofit, the first thing I am is an organization with a mission that I am passionate about. That mission and my heart for this work and my motivation to support the community should be the foremost thing that a funder is concerned about.” Funders that celebrate Black-led nonprofits’ missions can help reinforce their hope, optimism, and resilience.

**Care for nonprofit workers’ well-being, not just their output.** Unsurprisingly, many leaders we interviewed expressed that they and their colleagues were experiencing profound levels of stress. As one leader noted: “Outside of running [our] organization we are also dealing with Black life, which is something a lot of folks are not aware of that happens amongst us.... Understanding that and having grace with that” demonstrated that funders valued and cared for nonprofit workers. Leaders appreciated funders who treated them as whole people, not just grant recipients. “Some of my authentic partner funders are the ones who care about how I am doing and are not always about the work, program, and report,” one leader stated. Another leader explained that, in general, many nonprofits wanted funders that “truly want to sit down, chop it up, be together, [and] care about our well-being” rather than treating them solely as grant recipients to be managed.

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“One of the funders that we work with really just let me talk and dream of my ideal situation for [my nonprofit].”

**Build a shared future.** Some funders supported leaders by encouraging opportunities to plan for the future together. “One of the funders that we work with really just let me talk and dream of my ideal situation for [my nonprofit]. Just taking the time to bring their manpower to do that” helped one Black leader feel valued. Other funders supported leaders by expressing genuine care rather than empty affirmations. Even providing meaningful feedback communicated to nonprofit leaders that foundations cared about nonprofits’ staff. As one leader stated, “when you provide your semi-annual or your annual report, whatever feedback they’re giving you tells you how invested they are in what you’re doing and how you were stewarding their funds.”

**Tackle challenges together.** Finally, leaders lauded relationships where nonprofits could come to their funders when things got tough, and “it is clear that the decision making is not only about checking the boxes. Their door’s open if you run into any snags.” Nonprofit staff felt valued when funders were willing to take action to address stress and support the emotional and psychological burdens of the work. One foundation representative shared how they were adapting supports to meet nonprofits’ needs: “We really are thinking about what that looks like and what do folks need at this time? We are trying to figure out what the legal support and the communications safety security needs are [including] cyber security and physical security.”

## Implications for foundations

Black leaders articulated the factors that have strained their organizations, including funders' behaviors and historical waves of resistance to work centering Black communities. Encouragingly, leaders' reflections also illustrated opportunities for foundations to bolster Black-led nonprofits and signal that they valued the people that make nonprofits' work possible. Specifically, they highlighted the importance of recognizing their commitment and expertise, along with prioritizing nonprofit staffs' well-being.

Themes identified in this chapter suggest several opportunities for funders to provide human-centered support to Black-led nonprofits.

**Trust nonprofits' expertise.** Black leaders felt unsupported when foundation partners disregarded their perspective and knowledge. Foundations can show confidence in their grantees' knowledge by avoiding imposing external theories of change or recommendations without considering nonprofits' suggestions. They can also trust nonprofits' ability to design culturally appropriate programs, manage funds, and serve communities without requiring extraordinary proof.

*“If a nonprofit is impactful enough to have warranted your attention and to have warranted your grant, trust them to do what they’re doing.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Implement flexible practices.** Leaders felt overwhelmed when funders made time-sensitive or unexpected requests especially when they disregarded nonprofits' current capacity. Foundations can respect nonprofits' available bandwidth by providing advance notice for requests, applying reasonable deadlines, explaining the reason behind deliverables, and considering the workload and well-being of staff. They can also directly ask grantees about their current capacity and what supports nonprofits need from funders.

*“[Foundations] need to be flexible with Black and Brown-led organizations because a lot of times we’re doing dope work but are definitely or probably understaffed. So, it might take more time to meet some of these deadlines and be flexible with them.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Celebrate Black-led nonprofits' efforts and commitment.** Black leaders consistently conveyed that funders rarely acknowledged their unwavering commitment to serving Black communities and the sacrifices involved in doing so. Foundations can support nonprofits by inquiring about their community-building efforts, acknowledge the challenges that employees face, and celebrating nonprofit staff and volunteer efforts. Foundations can express appreciation not just for programmatic outcomes but also honor the dedication required to serve communities daily.

*“One thing that needs to be understood is that we are literally the ones doing the hard work, the groundwork, face-to-face every day with the communities that we’re trying to serve.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

**Examine and challenge biases.** More than half of nonprofit leaders experienced some form of discrimination in the funding process. Foundations can take time to identify and address discriminatory or biased elements in their own grantmaking process, and funding decisions. They can also consider whether their systems unknowingly impose higher standards or additional hurdles that may put Black-led nonprofits, especially small and women-led organizations, at a disadvantage in the grantseeking process. As funders review their practices, they can also consider whether any processes might impact nonprofits’ hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience.

*“I think people unconsciously distrust Black people and do not even realize they do. They set the bar higher for many of us, [which] makes it more difficult, and [there are] more hurdles sometimes. I think getting rid of those blinders and keeping them off is what I would love to see happen.”*

- NONPROFIT LEADER

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# Building bridges: Where can we go from here?

This report sought to learn more about the past, current, and potential future relationships between private foundations and Black-led nonprofits. Across diverse datasets, the pattern of results was clear: Black-led nonprofits are under resourced when it comes to financial, social, and human-centered support.

There are persistent inequities in the amount of funding provided to Black-led nonprofits. Compared to other nonprofits, Black-led nonprofits were less likely to receive foundation grants. Of those that did receive funding, they were awarded significantly fewer grants than other nonprofits. This gap prevailed over the eight-year period we analyzed and was especially stark for small Black-led nonprofits. Interviews with nonprofit leaders indicated that Black-led nonprofits continued to see less support through the end of 2024.

Small Black-led nonprofits were also less likely to form long-term relationships with foundations, which left them financially vulnerable; small Black-led nonprofits had to constantly seek new sources of support and were at risk if their single funder did not provide ongoing funding. Furthermore, in terms of the quality of relationships, Black leaders described funder interactions that were characterized by a lack of connection, relationship building, and trust. In fact, several nonprofit leaders reported no positive relationships with foundations.

Together, the challenges of building relationships and securing funding created cascading impacts that affect the well-being of Black leaders and their staff, eroding hope for sustainable futures and depleting resilience through repeated rejection.

When asked about aspirations for future relationships, however, Black-led nonprofit leaders were ready to imagine a better future. They articulated a vision of authentic partnerships with funders built on trust, respect, and sustained commitment. They imagined a future where their expertise is trusted without requiring extraordinary proof, unnecessary reporting barriers are removed, and nonprofit staff are treated as humans first rather than simply vehicles for program delivery. Nonprofit leaders envision a better future where funders actively open doors to their networks, foster strategic introductions, and include Black-led nonprofits in spaces where relationships form naturally. They hope for partnerships where foundations show up, not just for photo ops but for genuine engagement with nonprofit staff and the communities they serve.

## **The path forward requires collective commitment.**

Throughout this project, it became clear that building stronger bridges between foundations and Black-led nonprofits involves not only grant funding but also social and human-centered support. Building stronger bridges is also not just about forming individual relationships but requires systemic change in how philanthropy operates. As one foundation representative observed, “Something equally bold needs to be done to course correct.” Systemic changes will indeed require bold action, such as addressing the historical extraction of wealth from Black communities, dismantling the barriers that keep Black-led nonprofits on the periphery, and fundamentally reimagining philanthropic relationships.

Current challenges in the philanthropic landscape inevitably make systemic change more difficult, but also more urgent. While foundations navigate legal risks around language use and funding priorities, Black-led nonprofits face existential threats to their identities and missions. The question is not whether to continue supporting nonprofits that work with Black communities—but how to do so effectively and sustainably.

The vision that Black leaders articulated in interviews is achievable: partnerships built on trust rather than superficial interactions, respect rather than paternalism, and sustained commitment rather than fleeting support. When foundations provide not just financial support but also social and human-centered support, recognize Black-led nonprofits as experts rather than supplicants, and use their power to protect rather than retreat, lasting transformation becomes possible.

The bridges we build today will determine the path laid out for the next generation of Black leaders and communities. They can either face the same barriers documented in this report, or they can inherit a philanthropic sector that more authentically and consistently values their contributions. This report is an invitation—to foundations interested in supporting Black communities and Black-led nonprofits committed to their missions—to build lasting bridges together.

# Appendix: Research methodology

## Study purpose and design

The goal of this report is to better understand the burdens, challenges, and experiences of Black-led nonprofits aiming to secure foundation support. Critically, we sought to understand Black-led organizations' relationships with funders by listening to Black-led organization representatives directly, coupled with hearing foundation representatives' perspectives, collecting information from other nonprofits, and analyzing historical grants data. Since funding is not static over time and to represent the rich, diverse experiences of Black-led nonprofits, we considered different organizational characteristics (e.g., organization location, size, age) and their influence on funder-grantee relationships. We also looked at trends across time, specifically grants data from 2016 to 2023. This is a critical slice of time because it provides data several years before and after the COVID-19 pandemic and increased attention to supporting Black communities (most often connected with, but not limited to, the response to George Floyd's murder).

## Nonprofit survey and historical grants data methodology

**Survey questions.** Responses to the following questions were analyzed for this report:

- Approximately how many grants from foundations and/or nonprofits did your organization apply for and receive over the last three years [2021, 2022, 2023]?

**Historical grants data.** Grantmaking data was based on Candid's transactions database as of May 19, 2025. The primary source of this data is IRS Forms 990-PF. Some foundations also contribute data to Candid directly, and Candid collects additional data via public sources (e.g., websites, newsletters).

The dataset consists of all transactions (primarily cash grants) awarded by U.S. private foundations to nonprofit survey respondents in fiscal year end 2016 through 2023. Candid identified an additional 351 Black-led nonprofits (that did not complete the survey) whose transactions were included in the analyses.

### **Black-led nonprofits descriptive statistics.**

Descriptive information for our sample reflects nonprofits with available organizational data (e.g., annual expenses, location, ruling year). Because sample sizes varied for report analyses based on available data, we reported the number of valid cases for each analysis. Reflective of the broader group of Black-led nonprofits in the United States, Black-led organizations in this sample tended to be smaller than other nonprofits. Of the Black-led nonprofits with available expenses data (587 organizations), more than three quarters (76%) had annual expenses below \$1 million, compared with 62% of the other organizations in this sample. Additionally, Black-led nonprofits tended to be younger: 68% of Black-led nonprofits received their tax-exempt status in 2010 or later, compared with 41% for other nonprofits in our sample. In terms of geographic location, nearly half of Black-led nonprofits in the sample were located in the South (48%), though organizations were also represented in the Midwest (17%), Northeast (16%), and West (19%). Other nonprofits in the sample also had the greatest proportion of organizations in the South (35%) and West (28%), with smaller proportions in the Midwest (19%) and Northeast (19%).

**Analytic approach: Quantitative analyses (survey, historical grants data).** For the purposes of this report, analyses focused primarily on Black-led nonprofits. Organizations were categorized based on their responses to survey questions regarding the racial identity of their CEO, majority of their board members, and the communities they predominately support. To be identified as Black-led, organizations

must have had a Black CEO(s), 51% or more of their board members identifying as Black, and 51% or more of their community served identify as Black. All other survey participants were categorized as “other nonprofits.” The data in this report have not been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of all U.S.-based nonprofits. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated. All sample surveys may be subject to multiple sources of error, including but not limited to sampling error, coverage error, and measurement error. For all relevant analyses (i.e., repeated measures ANOVAs and MANOVAs), we conducted supplemental analyses to statistically control for differences in organizational characteristics between Black-led and other nonprofits. Results and statistically significant differences were analogous to analyses presented in the report.

Several different analytic approaches were used throughout the report. To determine whether there were significant differences in responses among different groups in our survey sample (Black-led vs. other nonprofits, small vs. large nonprofits), we conducted chi-square tests of independence. Chi-square analyses compare observed frequencies across different groups and indicate whether any patterns are significantly different than expected if the groups were the same—in other words, whether Black-led and other nonprofits or small and large nonprofits showed different patterns across variables of interest (e.g., number of nonprofits that received a foundation grant). Adjusted standardized residuals +/- 2.0 were used to identify significant differences—in this case, places where observed counts were substantially higher or lower than expected. When appropriate, we used a Bonferroni correction to lower the significance value for chi-square analyses; this ensured a more conservative approach to determining which tests indicated significant differences between groups of interest.

To examine changes in foundation funding amounts over time across different types of nonprofits, we conducted repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVA). Repeated measures ANOVA is

a statistical technique used to compare means across multiple time points for the same subjects or groups, accounting for the correlation between measurements taken from the same entities over time. This approach is more statistically powerful than separate independent tests because it controls for individual variation and focuses specifically on within-subject changes across time periods. Repeated measures ANOVAs were used to assess whether funding amounts changed significantly over time and whether these temporal patterns differed between nonprofit groups of interest: Black-led versus other nonprofits and small versus large nonprofits. The repeated measures factor was time (funding between 2016 and 2023), while nonprofit type (nonprofit size, Black-led vs. other nonprofits) served as between-subjects factors. This allowed us to test three key questions: 1) whether funding amounts changed significantly over time overall (main effect of time); 2) whether funding amounts differed between nonprofit groups overall (main effect of group); and 3) whether the pattern of change over time differed between groups (time-by-group interaction effect). When the sphericity assumption (that variances of differences between time points are equal) was violated, as indicated by Mauchly’s test, we applied Greenhouse-Geisser or Huynh-Feldt corrections to adjust degrees of freedom and produce more accurate p-values. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni corrections were conducted when significant main effects or interactions were found, allowing us to identify specific time points or group comparisons that drove overall significant results while controlling for multiple comparisons. To ensure we represented the average experience of nonprofits and did not skew findings, we excluded nonprofits that received statistically significantly greater amounts of foundation funding than other nonprofits over multiple years (i.e., three or more years; 2.5 standard deviations above the mean). These nonprofits were considered outliers. In our sample, there were three Black-led and 15 other nonprofits identified as outliers.

Finally, to examine differences in grant success rates (as well as supplemental analyses for number of grants applied for and received), we conducted

Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVA). Like repeated measures ANOVAs, MANOVAs are a statistical technique that compares mean differences between distinct groups for multiple outcomes at once. If the overall MANOVA analyses are significant, researchers then investigate univariate results for individual outcomes. MANOVAs were used to determine whether grant success rates along with number of grants applied for and received (in separate analyses) differed between nonprofit groups of interest: Black-led versus other nonprofits and organization size (based on annual expenses). Based on initial descriptive statistics, sector precedent, and research on the association between grant applications and organization size, we divided small nonprofits into more distinct groups of annual expenses: less than \$50,000, \$50,000-\$100,000, \$100,000-\$500,000, and \$500,000-\$1 million. MANOVAs allowed us to assess whether grant success rate significantly differed: 1) between Black-led and other nonprofits; 2) among different-sized nonprofits; and 3) as an interaction between nonprofit type and nonprofit size. We followed the same procedures as for repeated measures ANOVAs in evaluating post-hoc analyses and p-value corrections.

## Interview methodology: Black-led nonprofit leaders

**Interview procedure.** From November 2024 to January 2025, Marga Inc.'s founder and president (David Maurrasse) and Marga Inc. staff conducted one-on-one interviews with leaders from Black-led, Black-serving nonprofit organizations that had participated in the survey and volunteered to be contacted for further conversations. We selected leaders from organizations representing diverse regions and subsectors and deliberately oversampled small organizations. This sample allowed us to focus on the experiences of small Black-led nonprofits—which represent the majority of Black-led nonprofits in the U.S.—while also representing the diversity of experiences these nonprofits face. After reaching out via email to 36 volunteers, 24 participants were interviewed (67% participation rate). Participation was optional,

and ABFE and Candid researchers did not have any interaction with interviewees once they were recruited to participate; all communications were initiated by Marga Inc. staff.

The ABFE, Candid, and Marga Inc. teams collaboratively created the interview protocol that guided the interviews. The interview guide consisted of four major categories: 1) code-switching; 2) the use of the word Black and other identifiers; 3) experiences with applying for and/or securing grant funding and other resources; and 4) advice related to effectively partnering with Black-led, Black-serving nonprofit organizations. The Marga Inc. team conducted all interviews via Zoom. Sessions typically lasted 45-60 minutes. Participants were made aware that the interviews were confidential and all quotes that were used in the final report would be anonymized. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

**Interview questions.** Responses from a subset of questions from the interview protocol were analyzed for this report:

- As a Black-led, Black-focused organization, do you think there are certain things related to race that you have to do—or not do—to secure funding from large foundations? Are there any additional challenges, burdens, or advantages you have as a Black-led, Black-focused organization when it comes to securing foundation funding?
- As a Black-led, Black-focused organization, do you feel like you have experienced racial discrimination, bias, or stereotyping in the grantmaking process? If yes, what does that look like? What happened? How did you handle it? Are there subtle, unintentional forms of racial bias that you've noticed in conversations with potential grantmakers? If so, what? Are there things that you do or say—or don't do or say—to try to mitigate or avoid potential racial bias against your organization?
- What do funders do or say that make you feel truly included, valued, and supported? What signals to you that they are an authentic

partner? What are signals that it is safe for you to authentically describe your organization, its work and its community?

- Conversely, what do funders do or say that makes you think your organization is excluded, undervalued, and unsupported?
- What would you want funders to know about how to partner with Black-led, Black-serving nonprofits? What advice do you have that they may not have heard before?
- How central is serving Black communities to your organization’s mission?

For a summary of interview question coding, see the [report supplement](#).

**Interviewee descriptive statistics and analytic approach.** The sample and analytic approach for the interviews portion of this report are identical to that used in our last report, [Holding the Line: Black-Led Nonprofits and Race-Explicit Work Amid Backlash](#). Please see the appendix of that report (pp. 30-31) for full methodological details.

## Interview and focus group methodology: Foundation representatives

**Interview and focus group procedure.** From January to March 2025, Marga Inc.’s founder and president (David Maurrasse) and Marga Inc. staff conducted one one-on-one interview and one focus group with representatives from four private foundations that had a history of funding organizations that work with and serve Black communities. We selected representatives from foundations that were not meant to be representative of the broader field but instead demonstrated a sustained commitment to supporting Black-led and Black-serving nonprofits. Participation was optional, and ABFE and Candid researchers did not have any interaction with

interviewees once they were recruited to participate; all communications were initiated by Marga Inc. staff.

The ABFE, Candid, and Marga Inc. teams collaboratively created the protocol that guided each session. Both the interview and the focus group followed the same set of questions, organized into four major categories: 1) political context; 2) language about race; 3) experiences with Black-led nonprofits; and 4) perspectives on the future of philanthropy. The Marga Inc. team conducted the sessions via Zoom. Sessions lasted 45-60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. Participants were made aware that the interviews were confidential and all quotes that were used in the final report would be anonymized.

**Interview/focus group questions.** Responses to the following questions were considered for this report:

- Are you/is your organization concerned about the potential legal or reputational “risks” of supporting Black-led, Black-serving nonprofits or continuing to do race-explicit grantmaking in 2025? What do you see as potential risks?
- Has your organization continued, discontinued, or never had a grantmaking portfolio or focus explicitly on racial justice, racial equity, or race-explicit work? Why?
- How do you approach discussions of race and race-explicit grantmaking in your grantmaking processes and communications with grantees? What factors influence these decisions?
- Tell us about your organization’s interactions and relationships with Black-led nonprofits over the past five years. Has there been an evolution or changes? How is your organization currently investing in Black-led organizations or in racial equity or justice?
- Has there been a shift in support of Black leaders—from the CEO to program officers?

- Are you anticipating changing your grantmaking strategies or priorities related to supporting Black leaders and communities in 2025? If so, what do you anticipate changing?
- How can your organization be more supportive of Black-led nonprofits during this political climate?
- What do you think Black-led nonprofits need to know about the funding landscape in this moment that they don't already know? What is your advice to them now?

For a summary of focus group transcript coding, see the [report supplement](#).

**Foundation representative descriptive statistics.**

Participants were representatives from three independent foundations and one corporate foundation. They held various leadership positions within their organizations. Foundations were geographically located throughout the United States.

**Analytic approach: Qualitative analyses**

**(interviews, focus groups).** Initial coding was conducted by Marga, Inc. and resulted in a report provided to ABFE and Candid. Supplemental analyses applied the same multi-phase, human and AI-assisted coding process used with transcripts of interviews with Black-led nonprofit leaders (see [Holding the Line](#), pp. 30-31).

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