



The Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap in the Milwaukee Area: A *Race to Lead* Brief

Introduction

The Building Movement Project's *Race to Lead* series investigates why there are so few leaders of color in the nonprofit sector and documents the challenges people of color face as they reach for and attain senior leadership roles in nonprofit organizations. In 2019, the Building Movement Project conducted an updated national survey to assess changes in the sector compared to data collected in its original 2016 survey. This report, *The Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap in the Milwaukee Area: A Race to Lead Brief*, is part of a series of regional reports and includes findings from the more than 5,200 people who responded to the survey nationwide, the subset of approximately 220 respondents who work for organizations in Southeast Wisconsin, and focus groups that took place in Milwaukee in December 2019. The report explores:

- 1 Data reported by nonprofit sector employees regarding qualifications and aspirations to lead;
- 2 Challenges faced by people working in the sector, such as lack of role models and mentors and inadequate or inequitable compensation; and
- 3 The effectiveness of nonprofit efforts to address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Inequality in Milwaukee

This report presents a subset of data from the Milwaukee area¹ and explores challenges people of color in the region reported as employees in the nonprofit sector. The findings in this report are of particular interest given the stark inequalities that characterize the Milwaukee area. The city and its surrounding region has a long history of racial segregation and discrimination against Black people and other people of color.² Today, the City of Milwaukee has a greater population of people of color (notably, 39% Black and 19% Latinx)³ than its surrounding Milwaukee

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

As an organization, we went through our programs and did a root cause analysis [of challenges facing constituents] and it really all came back to racism and all its forms.”

—White Millennial/Generation Z
Focus Group Participant

County (27% Black and 15% Latinx), in large part due to the history of segregation policies that prevented Black residents and other people of color from moving to the city's neighboring suburbs. After decades of discriminatory housing policies and economic hardship as a result of deindustrialization, the Milwaukee metropolitan area has the nation's highest segregation rate between Black and white communities,⁴ and its racial wealth gap is one of the largest in the country.⁵ The City of Milwaukee experiences one of the highest poverty rates in the country (27%), while the rates are far lower in Milwaukee County (19%),⁶ which includes many neighboring majority-white suburbs.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

There's no generational wealth for Black folks ... the reason that we cannot make the decisions for ourselves is because ... there is no Black or Brown wealth to actually draw from.”

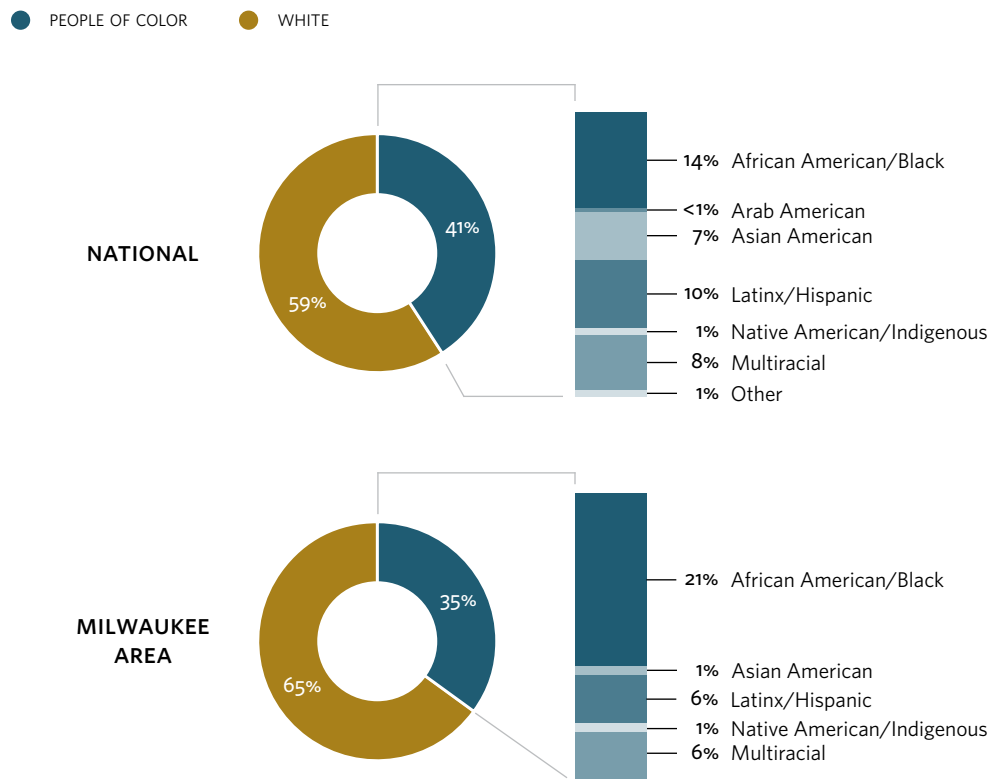
—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer
Focus Group Participant

As of this report's publication in July 2020, Black people represent 27% of the population of Milwaukee County and 44% of the deaths attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ This disparity reflects unequal health care access for Black people and people of color both locally and nationwide, and a long history of communities of color bearing disproportionate negative health impacts.⁸ As the pandemic highlights disparate health and economic outcomes in the Milwaukee metro area in the most tragic terms, it underscores the urgency for analysis and action to ameliorate these stark inequities. Although the data presented in this report was collected in the months before COVID-19 emerged, it illustrates the persistent racial disparities in the nonprofit sector and the Milwaukee area that, like the disproportionate pandemic losses experienced by communities of color, all reflect the tremendous ongoing change still necessary in the work toward racial justice and equity.

Demographics

Demographically, the Southeast Wisconsin sample had fewer people of color compared to the national sample – 65% of respondents were white (compared to 59% nationally) and 35% were people of color (compared to 41% nationally). The overwhelming majority of survey respondents from the Milwaukee area worked within the city itself, and given that the majority of city residents are people of color, the high numbers of white survey respondents suggest a disproportionate representation of white people in the nonprofit sector in Milwaukee.⁹ As shown in *Figure 1* on the following page, compared to the national sample, Milwaukee had a larger share of African American/Black survey respondents (21% compared to 14% nationally), and fewer Latinx (6% compared to 10% nationally) and Asian American respondents (1% compared to 7% nationally).

FIGURE 1 | RACE/ETHNICITY



In terms of gender identity, 75% of respondents from the Milwaukee area were women, 22% were men, and 3% identified as gender non-binary/gender non-conforming/genderqueer (see *Figure 2* on the following page). In terms of race and gender, 26% were women of color, 49% were white women, 9% were men of color, and 13% were white men. In addition, 3% were gender non-binary/gender non-conforming/genderqueer white people, and there were no people of color who self-identified as gender non-conforming.

Thirteen percent of respondents from the Milwaukee area identified as LGBTQ+ compared to 21% nationally (see *Figure 3* on the following page).

The local sub-sample had more U.S. born or children of U.S.-born parents than the national sample (86% compared to 74% nationally) and therefore fewer immigrants or children of immigrants (14% of both categories combined compared to 27% of both categories combined nationally), as shown in *Figure 4*.

FIGURE 2 | GENDER IDENTITY

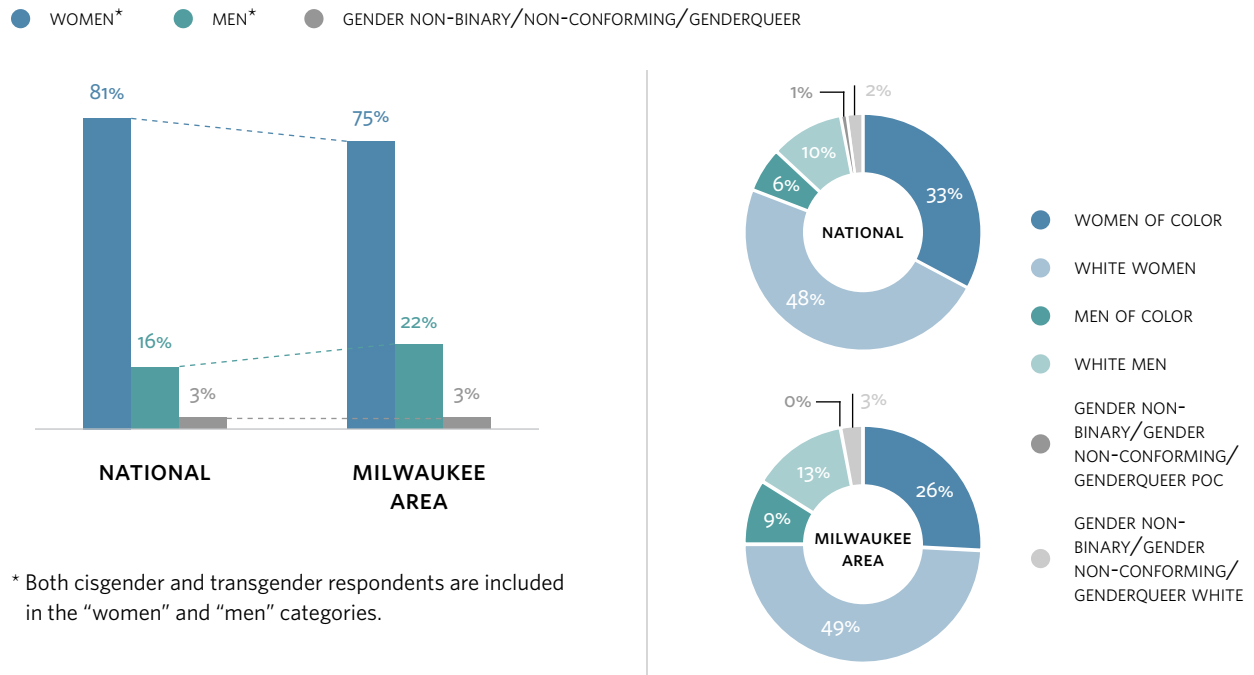


FIGURE 3 | SEXUAL ORIENTATION

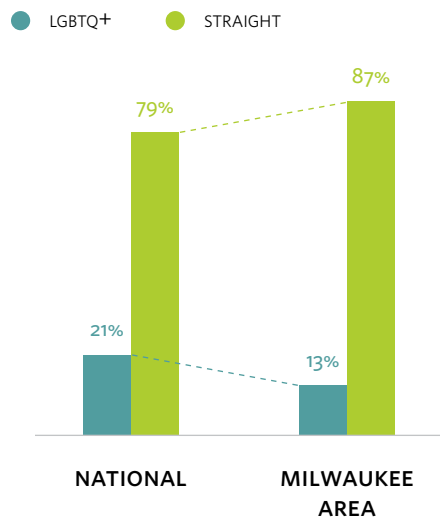
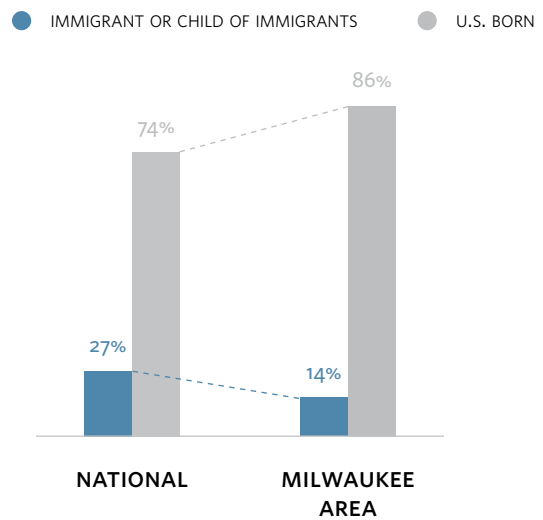
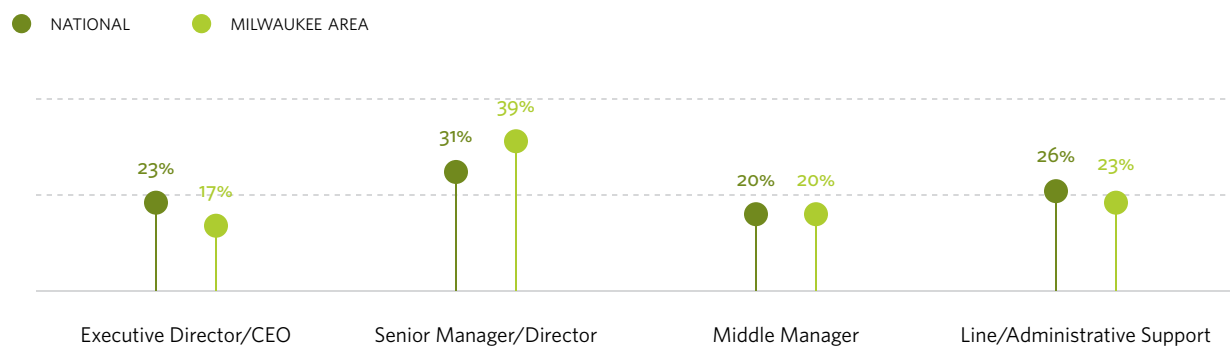


FIGURE 4 | IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE



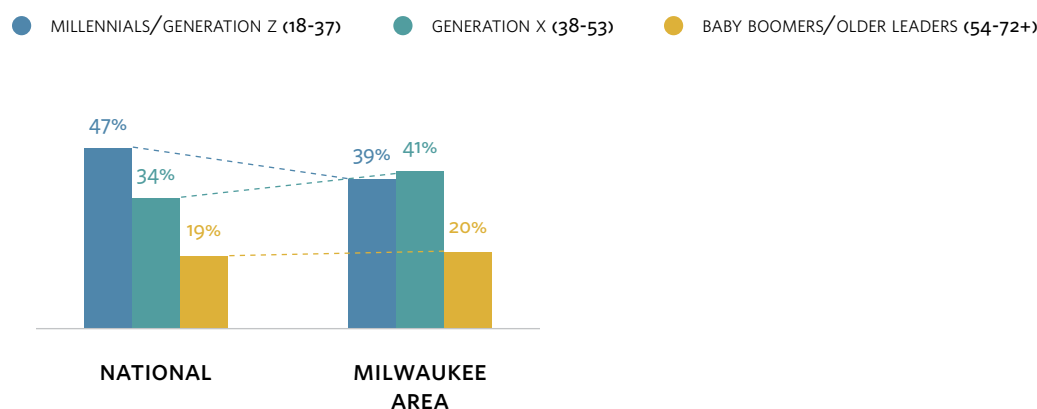
Among Milwaukee area respondents, the most common type of job role was senior manager/director (39% compared to 31% nationally). Though the proportion of senior managers was slightly larger in the area compared to the national sample, the share of executive directors or chief executive officers (EDs/CEOs) was smaller, making up 17% of the Milwaukee sample and 23% of the national sample. The proportion of middle managers (20% locally and nationally) and line/administrative staff (23% in the Milwaukee area and 26% nationally) was fairly consistent between the two samples (*Figure 5*).

FIGURE 5 | CURRENT ROLE/POSITION



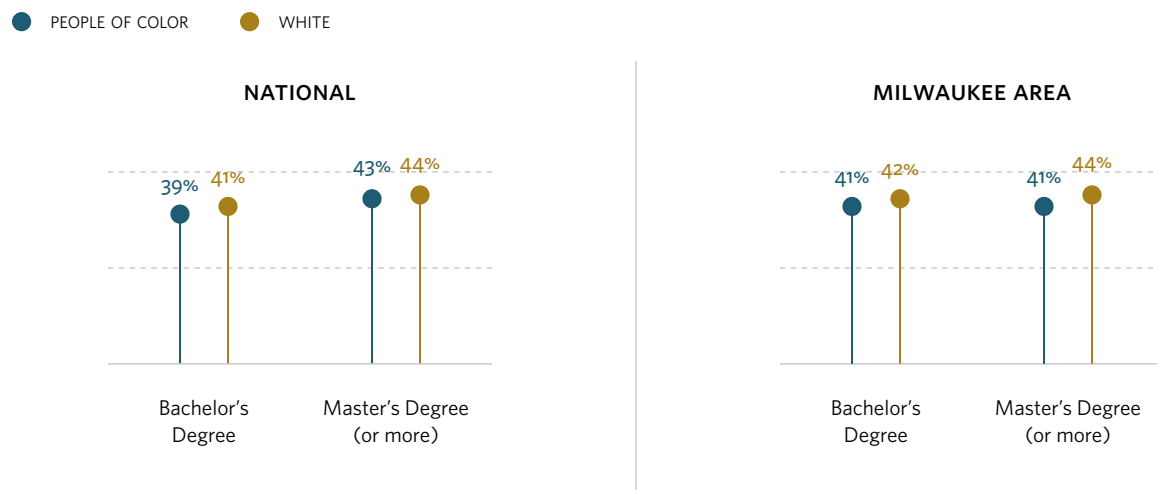
Respondents from the Milwaukee area were somewhat older on average than the national sample. By generation, 39% of the sample were Millennials/Generation Z (47% nationally), 41% were Generation X (34% nationally), and 20% were Baby Boomers (19% nationally) as shown in *Figure 6*.¹⁰ The relative age of the local sub-sample compared to the national sample may contribute to the higher proportion of local respondents who held senior management or ED/CEO positions. This difference likely also explains why survey respondents from the Milwaukee area had worked in the sector an average of two years longer than respondents from the national sample overall: 15 years locally compared to 13 years nationally.

FIGURE 6 | AGE/GENERATION



The education level of participants in the Milwaukee area was similar to national data, with 42% of the total sample holding a bachelor's degree compared to 40% nationally, and 43% of the sample holding a master's degree compared to 44% nationally. Respondents across race had obtained a bachelor's degree at similar rates, with 42% of white respondents and 41% of people of color reporting this as their highest level of education. Among people of color, 41% held a master's degree compared to 44% of white respondents in the area (*Figure 7*).

FIGURE 7 | EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

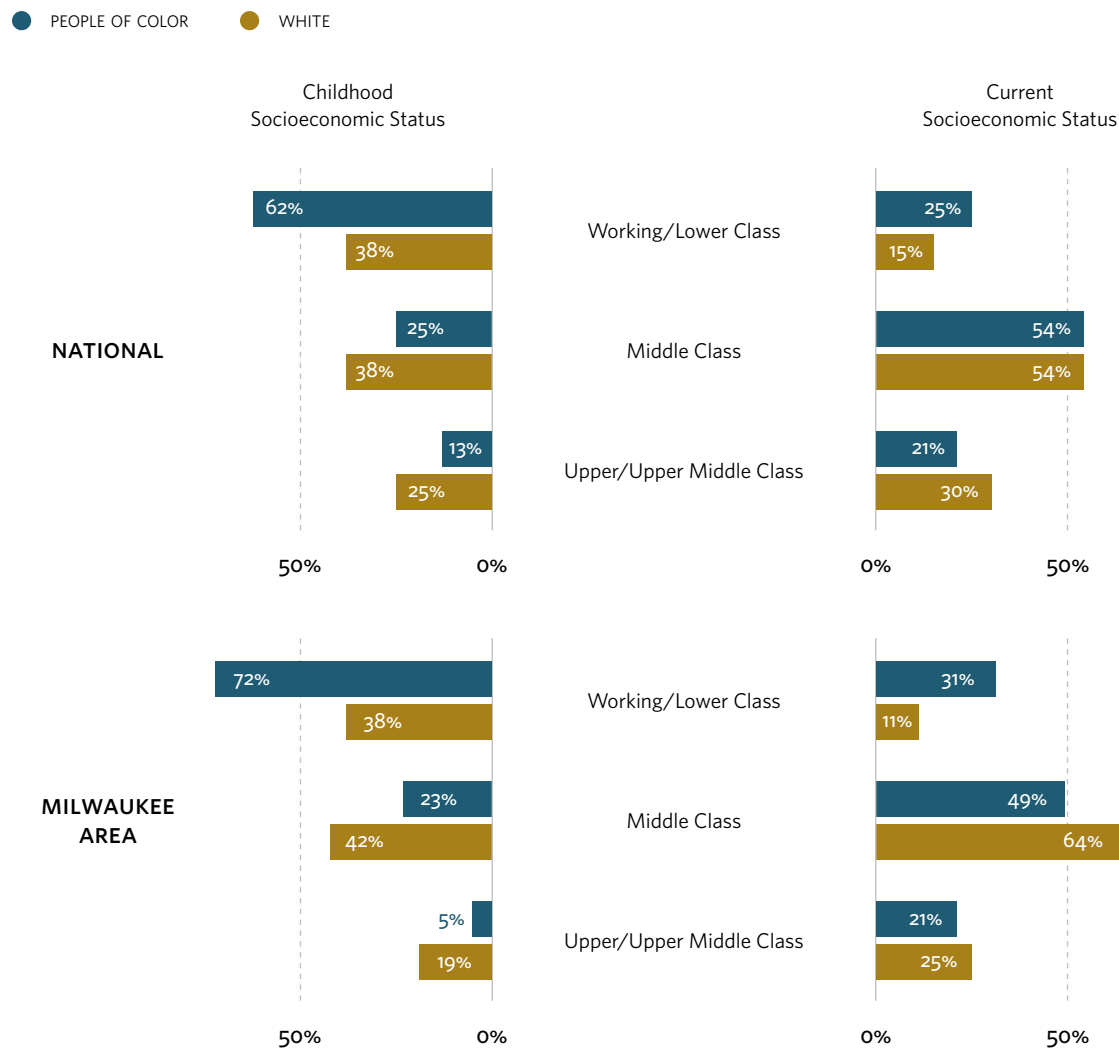


Economic Challenges

Consistent with national trends on wealth and income¹¹ illustrated in BMP's *Race to Lead Revisited* report and in extensive research about income and wealth gaps based on race, the survey found that economic circumstances for people of color were less favorable than for white people working in the nonprofit sector in the Milwaukee area.

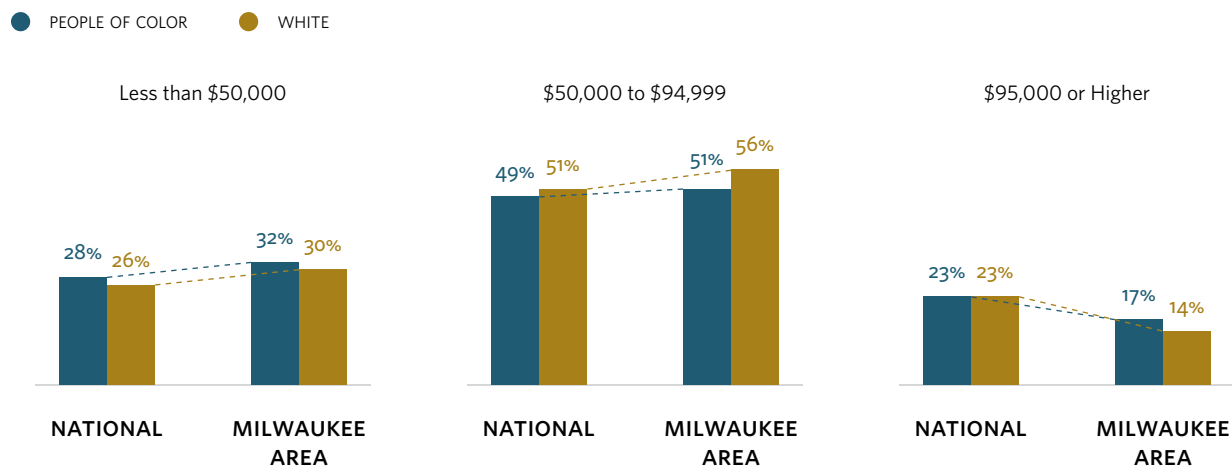
Survey respondents were asked to identify their socioeconomic class both during childhood and at present. Among the sample of respondents working for organizations in the Milwaukee area, almost three quarters of people of color reported they were working or lower class during childhood (72% locally vs. 62% nationally) compared to 38% of white respondents locally and nationally (*Figure 8*). While many respondents reported upward class mobility since childhood, people of color in the Milwaukee area were still three times as likely to report *currently* being working or lower class (31%) compared to white respondents (11%). This data illustrates an interesting divergence of Milwaukee-area survey responses from the national sample: local white respondents were *less* likely to be currently working or lower class compared to the national sample, while local people of color were *more* likely to be working or lower class compared to the national sample. The gap between people of color and white respondents on whether they identify as working or lower class was twenty percentage points in the Milwaukee area, twice as large as the gap of ten percentage points nationally.

FIGURE 8 | SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



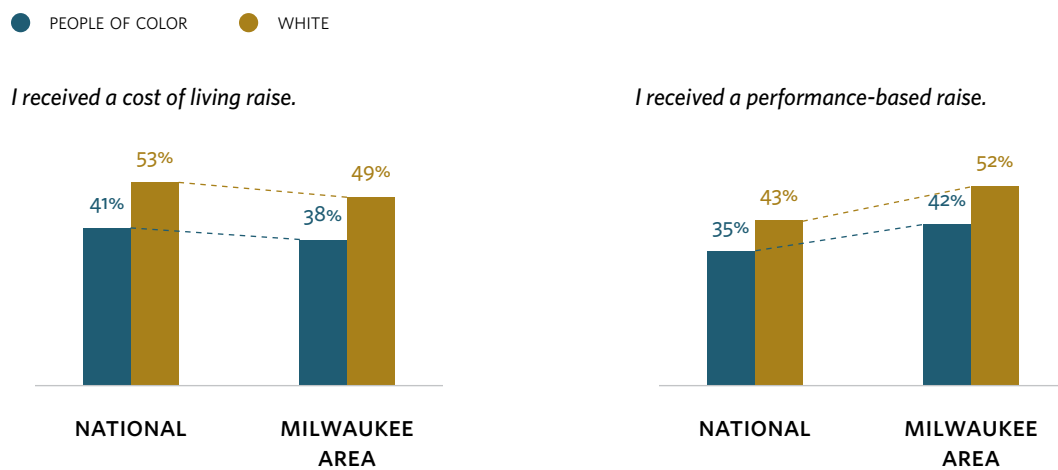
Other factors beyond socioeconomic class identification further illustrate economic disparities between people of color and white respondents in the Milwaukee area. Concerning their current income, people of color and white respondents reported fairly consistent salary rates across race (*Figure 9*). However, people of color (POC) were more likely than white respondents to say they *often* or *always* felt their salary was inadequate (53% POC locally vs. 47% POC nationally and 32% white respondents locally vs. 38% white respondents nationally). One factor that could contribute to this variation is that people of color are significantly more likely to report additional demands on their income compared to white respondents. Among Milwaukee area survey respondents, 51% of people of color (compared to 49% nationally) said they either currently or previously provided regular financial support to others outside their household. In contrast, only 25% of local white respondents (compared to 38% nationally) reported currently or previously doing the same.

FIGURE 9 | RESPONDENT COMPENSATION



The survey also asked respondents to indicate how frequently they had encountered the career challenge of having an inequitable salary, meaning they were paid less than colleagues doing the same work. Although the percentage of respondents who reported they *often* or *always* experienced inequitable salaries was lower overall in the Milwaukee area than at the national level and showed a smaller gap between respondents of color and white people, data on raises and other compensation echoes the racial disparities in national findings. Respondents of color in the Milwaukee area were less likely to report receiving cost of living raises (38% compared to 41% nationally) than white respondents (49% compared to 53% nationally).¹² Similarly, people of color in the Milwaukee area were also less likely to report performance-based raises (42% compared to 35% nationally) than white counterparts (52% compared to 43% nationally) as shown in *Figure 10*.¹³

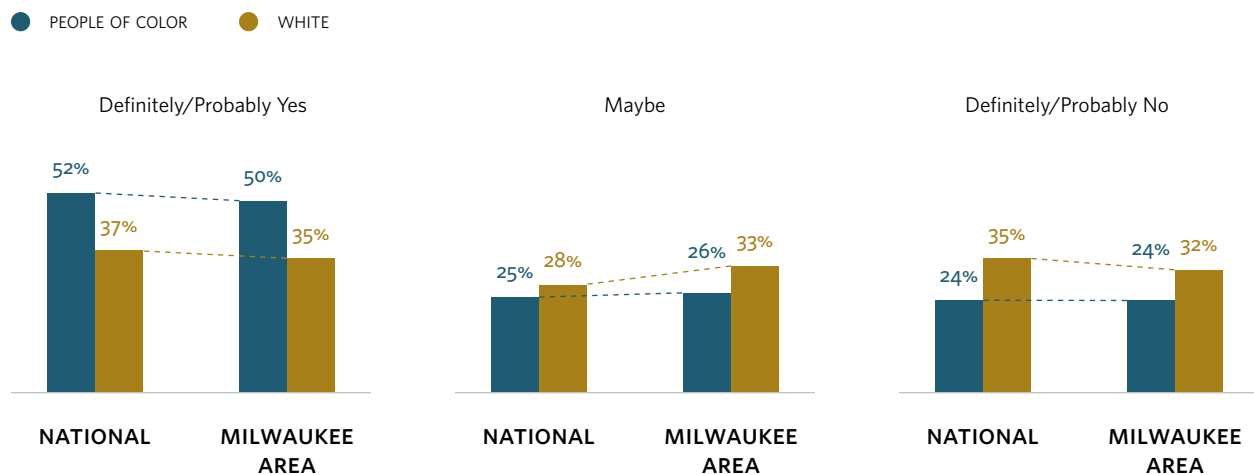
FIGURE 10 | RESPONDENT COMPENSATION



Leadership Aspirations and Barriers to Advancement

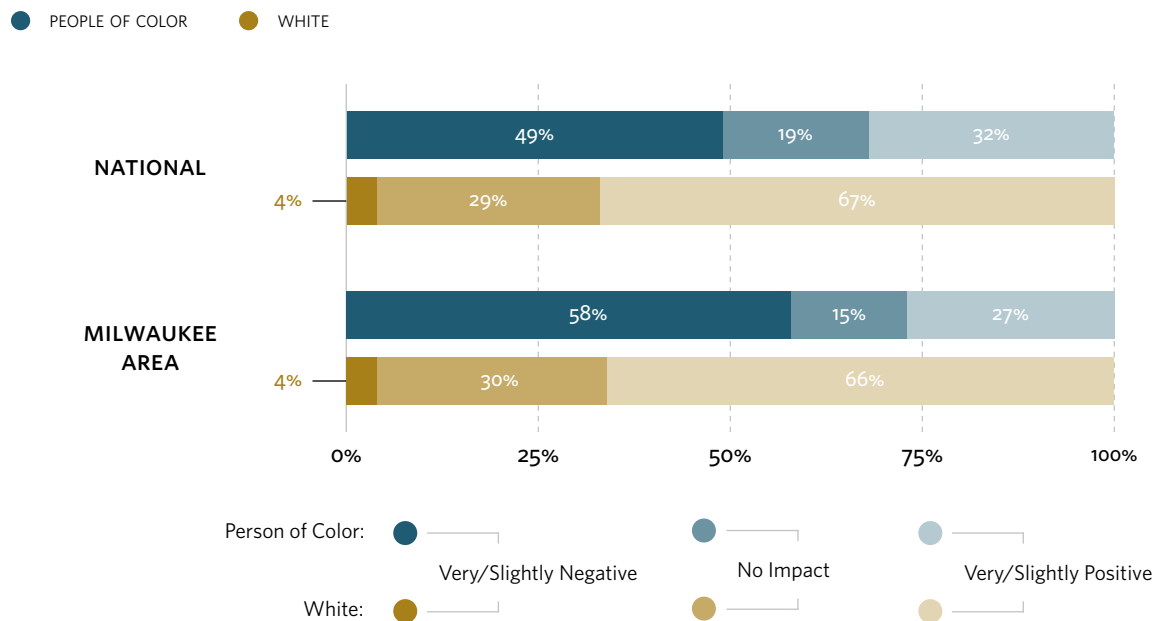
A key finding in the national *Race to Lead* report series—as illustrated both in the 2016 survey and affirmed by the 2019 findings—is that respondents of color were more interested in pursuing nonprofit leadership positions than their white counterparts. A similar pattern was found in the Milwaukee area, where half of respondents of color (50% compared to 52% nationally) selected the response that they *definitely* or *probably* wanted to hold a nonprofit executive director or chief executive officer (ED/CEO) role compared to just 35% of white respondents (37% nationally) as shown in *Figure 11*.¹⁴ Conversely, white respondents were more likely to say they were *definitely not* or *probably not* interested in an ED/CEO role (32%) than people of color (24%), consistent with national responses (35% white respondents *definitely not* or *probably not* interested compared to 24% POC).

FIGURE 11 | LEVEL OF INTEREST IN TAKING A TOP LEADERSHIP ROLE (AMONG NON-EDS/CEOS)



This interest in leadership persists despite racialized barriers to advancement experienced by people of color in the nonprofit sector. People of color in the Milwaukee area were more likely to say their race negatively affected their career advancement (58%) compared to people of color nationally (49%) as shown in *Figure 12*. Sixty-six percent of white respondents locally (67% nationally) said their race had a positive impact on their career advancement.

FIGURE 12 | IMPACT OF RACE ON CAREER ADVANCEMENT



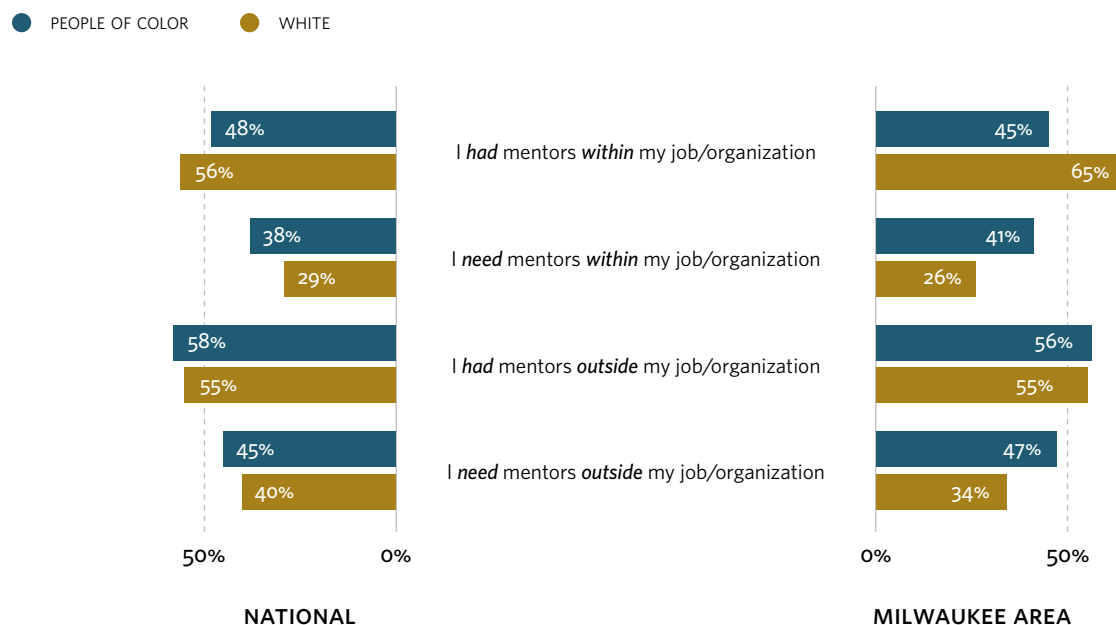
ACCESS TO ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

Survey respondents were asked about their access to role models, networks, and other forms of career support. Overwhelmingly, people of color in the Milwaukee area were more likely than white peers to say they *often* or *always* lacked role models: 43% of people of color compared to 15% of white respondents; an even larger difference than the national gap of 43% of people of color and 23% of white respondents. There was also a larger disparity between people of color and white respondents in the Milwaukee area than nationally regarding the challenge of lacking access to social capital and networks. In the Milwaukee area, 36% of people of color said they *often* or *always* faced this challenge compared to 12% of white respondents locally (a difference of 24 percentage points), almost double the national gap of 13 percentage points between people of color (29%) and white respondents (16%).

Another survey question asked if respondents had access to mentors at their current workplace. Compared to the national sample, people of color in the Milwaukee area reported similar levels of workplace mentorship (45% compared to 48% nationally). However, white respondents in the region were more likely to report having mentors at their workplace (65%) than both people of color and white respondents nationally (56%), as pictured in *Figure 13*. At both the local and national levels, people of color were more likely than white respondents to say they wanted more access to internal mentors. That gap in responses between people of color and white people was significantly larger among the Milwaukee-area survey respondents (41% of POC and 26% of white people) than nationally (38% of POC and 29% of white people). Despite the stark imbalance in access to internal workplace mentors between people of color and white respondents in the Milwaukee area, people of color were

slightly more likely to report having an external mentor both locally (56%) and nationally (58%) compared to white respondents nationally and locally (55% each).¹⁵ Although people of color were more likely than white people to report having an external mentor, they also more frequently reported that they wanted an external mentor both locally and nationally, and this gap was also wider in the Milwaukee area (47% POC vs. 34% white people) than nationally (45% POC vs. 40% white people) as shown in *Figure 13*.

FIGURE 13 | ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS



People of color in the Milwaukee area reported lower rates of mentorship and role models in the workplace than their white counterparts and higher rates of support from family and community (49% compared to 43% for white people), as well as support from self-care and wellness trainings (53% compared to 48% for white people).¹⁶

Both people of color and white respondents indicated that they receive significant support from peers, including affinity groups and online communities, which may represent efforts to create their own support when they lack internal mentorship or role models. In the national sample, people of color and white respondents reported that they had peer or affinity group support at similar rates (51% POC vs. 52% white people); in the Milwaukee area, responses to this question showed a difference of seven percentage points between people of color (49%) and white respondents (56%).¹⁷ Similarly, white people and people of color in the nationwide sample had comparable responses about whether they need peer support or affinity groups (30% of people of color and 27% of white respondents), while in the Milwaukee area 32% of people of color said they needed this kind of support compared to just 21% of white respondents. Overall, these responses suggest that people of color in the Milwaukee area face a bigger challenge in getting the support they need compared to both white peers in

the area and people of color nationwide. Although other methods of external support like self-care training do not make up for the lack of access to role models and mentors, they can play a role in building and providing necessary support systems to help people of color navigate potentially difficult workplace cultures; numerous respondents in the national survey described that they rely on these strategies to help navigate discrimination in their nonprofit careers.

BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT

Survey respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with a series of statements regarding the racial leadership gap in the nonprofit sector and the obstacles that people of color face striving for leadership roles. In response to the statement *“Organizations looking for a new executive leader who is the ‘right fit’ often rule out candidates of color,”* 77% of people of color in the Milwaukee area as well as nationally said they *strongly agreed or somewhat agreed*, compared to just 48% of white respondents locally and 52% nationally. For the statement *“People of color must demonstrate they have more skills and training than white peers to be considered for nonprofit executive jobs”* people of color in the Milwaukee area were more likely to agree (85%) than white respondents (69%), compared to 88% of people of color and 65% of white respondents nationally.

To supplement the survey responses, Building Movement Project conducted focus groups in Milwaukee in December 2019 to engage local nonprofit workers—both people of color and white people—about the racial dynamics in the local nonprofit sector.¹⁸ Members of a focus group of Generation X and Baby Boomer people of color discussed a “leadership ceiling,” in which people of color can only advance as far as senior director roles, while top ED/CEO roles remain dominated by white people despite ongoing diversity initiatives across the sector. The survey data for the Milwaukee area aligns with this dynamic, with 13% of people of color respondents in ED/CEO roles (20% of white respondents) and 42% of people of color in senior director roles (37% of white respondents).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

Go back a couple decades and see that organizational diversity, inclusion, all this work was going to be done ... It gets stalled. It doesn’t even [get] complete[d].”

—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer
Focus Group Participant

“

I’ve worked as a leader of a member organization in Milwaukee and ... of those ... member organizations, two were led by people of color. And [white people in leadership] ... had been in those roles for more than 20 years. So while the conversation occurs, there’s no real strategy around succession planning ... there’s an awareness, but the intentionality of people to move in that direction [is] slow.”

—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer
Focus Group Participant

Multiple focus group participants described frustration with how many older white leaders have held leadership roles for decades, inhibiting the diversification of the sector. As one participant reflected in the focus group for Generation X and Baby Boomer people of color, despite the nonprofit sector's recently expanded focus on discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion, many long-tenured white leaders have not developed succession plans or taken proactive steps to assure that their organizations will increase diversity after their tenure. Millennial people of color in the focus groups also described frustration with the skepticism about their abilities and age as they worked their way to higher roles in the sector.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

From my experience, when the leadership positions come up and I go out for them, there's always a question around experience ... Sometimes it's felt like it was more about the fact that I was young than about my qualifications.”

—Person of Color Millennial/Generation Z
Focus Group Participant

Addressing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Milwaukee Organizations

The survey asked respondents about the racial composition of the nonprofits where they work and the efforts of their organizations to become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The data shows that, much like the national sample, organizations in the Milwaukee area are more likely to have white people in leadership roles while people of color are more concentrated in non-leadership staff roles and among the community served.

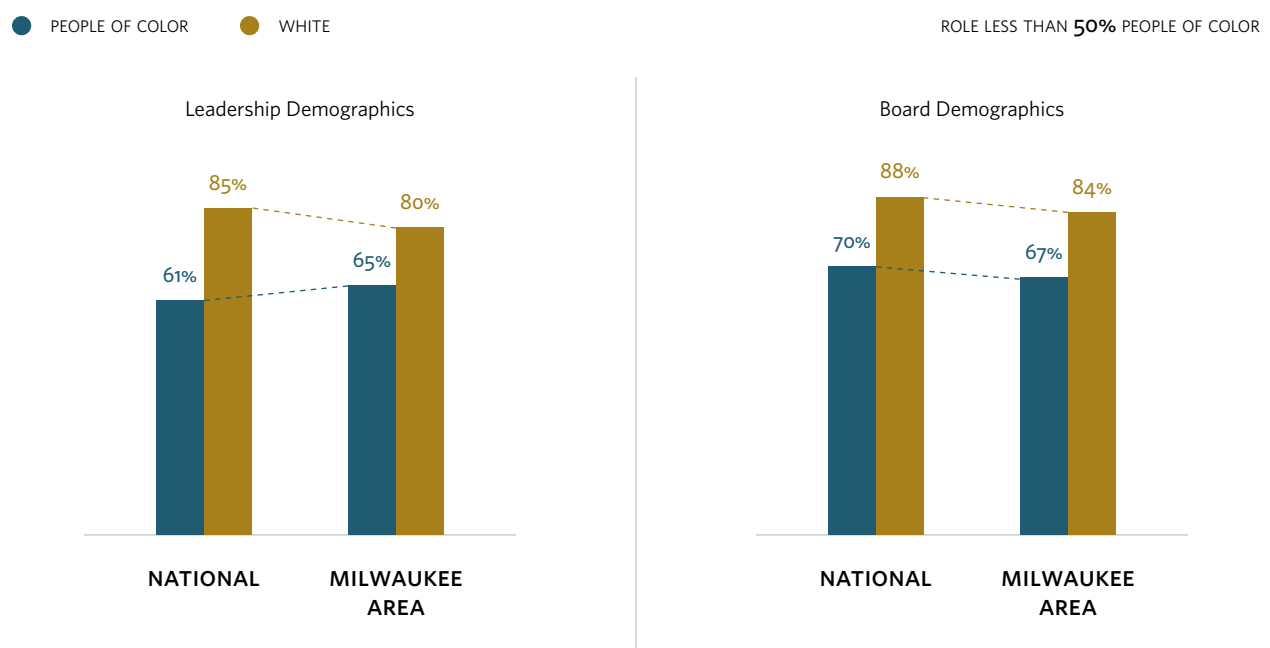
THE COMPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONS

Survey respondents reported the racial composition of their nonprofit organization by indicating how many people of color were represented among the board of directors, staff in top leadership roles, staff outside of leadership, and the community served by the organization using a scale with four percentage categories: less than 25%, 25-49%, 50-74%, and 75-100% people of color.

Local respondents reported much higher percentages of people of color among staff not in leadership roles and the community served than in staff leadership roles or in the board of directors, and the percentage of respondents for whom that was true was much higher locally than at the national level. For example, in the Milwaukee area 37% of white respondents and 66% of people of color worked at organizations where the staff outside of leadership was at least half people of color, compared to 29% of white people and 57% of people of color nationally. Likewise, 70% of white respondents in the Milwaukee area (compared to 55% nationally) worked at an organization where the community served was majority people of color, as did 89% of people of color (compared to 77% nationally).

The majority of respondents in the Milwaukee area (65% of people of color and 80% of white people) work for organizations with less than 50% people of color in leadership (compared to 61% of people of color and 85% of white people nationally), as shown in *Figure 14*. Given that almost all the local survey respondents worked within the City of Milwaukee, where people of color are the majority, the percentage of respondents working at organizations with predominantly white staff in top roles illustrates the inadequacy of leadership diversity in relation to the area's demographics. Local survey takers shared that assessment: 91% of people of color and 84% of white respondents indicated that they agreed with the survey prompt *"One of the big problems in the nonprofit sector is that leadership doesn't reflect the diversity of the United States."*¹⁹

FIGURE 14 | RACIAL COMPOSITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP



Milwaukee area survey respondents reported similar disparities among the board of directors of their organizations. The majority reported working at organizations with less than 50% people of color on the board of directors, with white respondents (84% locally and 88% nationally) more likely than people of color (67% locally and 70% nationally) to work at organizations with this board breakdown (see *Figure 14* above). Similarly, as noted above large percentages of survey respondents worked for organizations with majority-white leadership. Increasing diversity in these measures is critical — but expanding the racial composition of leadership should not be the full extent of diversity goals. People of color in Milwaukee focus groups emphasized that organizations cannot consider their diversity efforts successful simply when they add people of color to the staff leadership and board of directors; instead, organizations need to set goals that both diversify staff and bring on influential leaders who create lasting change in their organizations.

RACIALIZED STAFF EXPERIENCES IN NONPROFITS

The 2019 *Race to Lead* survey asked respondents to rate their level of agreement on a scale of 1 (*completely disagree*) to 10 (*completely agree*) with three positive statements about their happiness, voice, and opportunity within their nonprofit organization (*Figure 15*).

Overall, people of color in the Milwaukee area responded with lower levels of agreement to positive statements about their current organization than white peers both locally and nationally. In response to the statement “*I would be happy if I worked at this organization three years from now,*” white respondents in the Milwaukee area had a higher average level of agreement (7.5) than people of color (6.9), as shown in *Figure 15*, both of which are slightly higher than the national averages (7.4 for white respondents and 6.5 for people of color). A similar disparity between white respondents and people of color holds true for agreement with the statement “*I feel I have a voice in my organization.*” The average response of people of color in the Milwaukee sample was 7.0 (7.2 nationally) compared to 7.8 for white respondents (7.9 nationally). In focus groups with people of color, participants described limitations on feeling heard in their organization: often, they felt acknowledged only when they agreed with someone in a position of power, when their perspective was being invoked for someone else’s benefit, or when they convinced a white colleague to speak on their behalf.

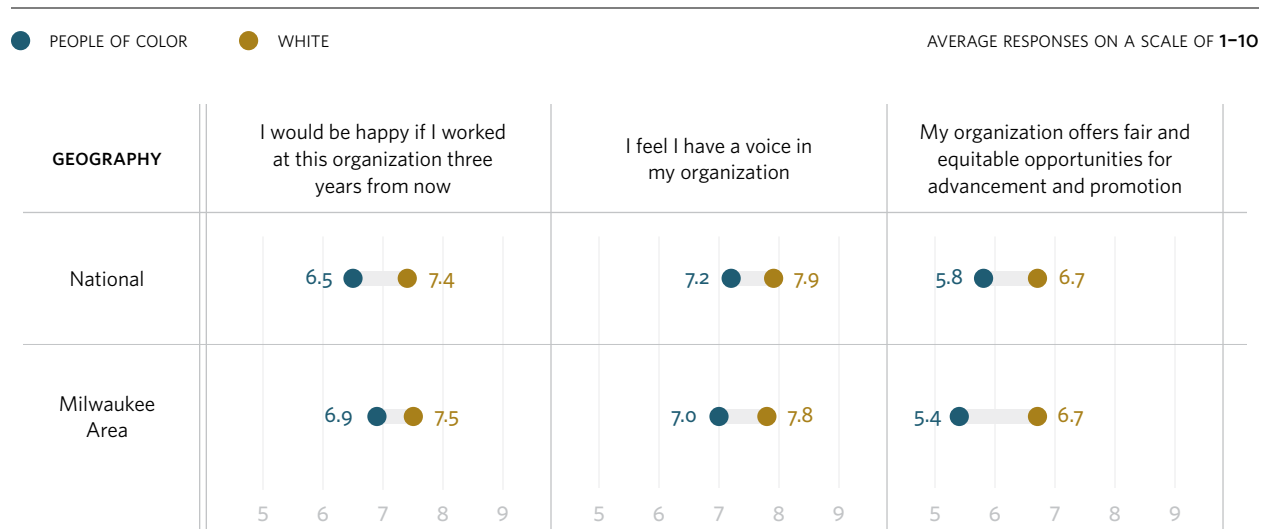
IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

I think it goes back to ... being able to check a box and say, ‘We have this percentage of people of color on our board’ and feeling like that’s enough ... It has to be more than checking a box. It has to be who is that person of color and how are they using their background or their diverse knowledge to influence the ... work that the organization is doing?”

—Person of Color Millennial/Generation Z
Focus Group Participant

FIGURE 15 | WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES



People of color in focus groups expressed related frustration about not being heard and recognized both in their organizations and in the process of seeking new opportunities. Many noted that they often were asked to interview for positions but were rarely offered the job, making many feel that recruiters were using them to present “diverse” candidates while organizations gave no serious consideration of their fit for the position.

A similar sentiment was illustrated by survey data, in which people of color in the Milwaukee area were less likely to indicate that they had “*fair and equitable opportunities for advancement*” at their organization (5.4 average for people of color compared to 6.7 average for white respondents). White focus group participants in the Milwaukee area also acknowledged the biases held by white leaders in hiring people of color and the potential barriers to promoting people of color at their organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)

Many nonprofits in the United States are taking steps to become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces, and this trend is apparent in the Milwaukee area as well. Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents in the area (compared to 74% nationally) reported that their organization is engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. While white respondents nationally were slightly more likely to say their organization engaged in DEI work (75% compared to 73% for people of color), in the Milwaukee area sample, people of color were slightly more likely to report that their organization had DEI activities (75%) than white respondents (70%).²⁰ The survey asked those respondents whose workplace had DEI efforts to rate their level of agreement—on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*)—on what they perceived as their organization’s motivation for engaging in DEI

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

I have a voice when it’s convenient and the person with the power has said, ‘Now you listen to her.’ But then it’s abruptly taken back after the moment has passed that that voice needs to be heard.”

—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer
Focus Group Participant

“

I have to find an ally and tell them what to say.”

—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer
Focus Group Participant

“

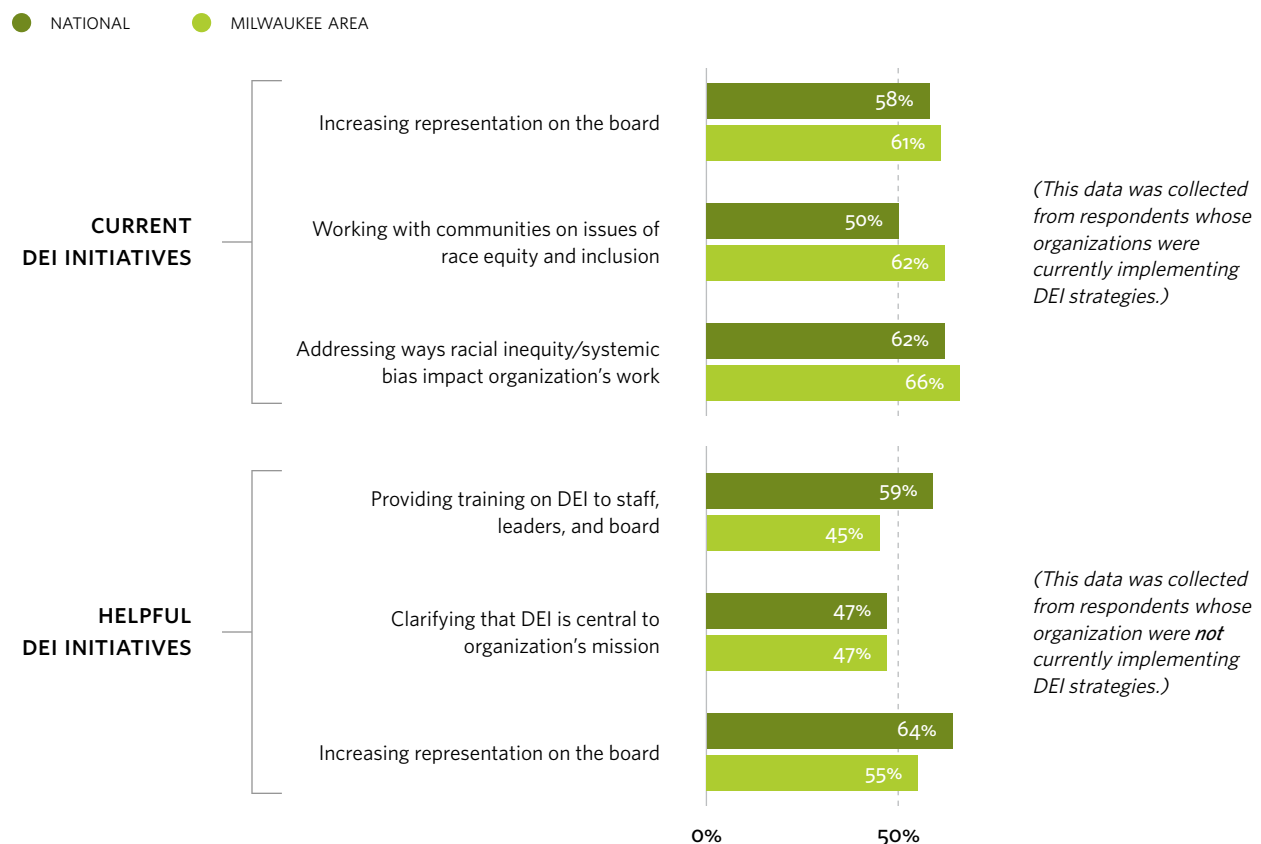
Some of it’s very conscious and some of it’s very subconscious about who [white leaders are] comfortable holding the mic, communicating with the board, that are going to be able to keep funders happy ... ‘This person of color would do a really wonderful job.’ But would everyone be comfortable with it?”

—White Generation X/Baby Boomer
Focus Group Participant

initiatives. Respondents in the Milwaukee area most strongly agreed that workplace DEI efforts were motivated to improve the organization's performance and impact (average level of agreement 7.6 for people of color, 8.4 for white respondents, and 8.1 overall), followed closely by the motivation to be more responsive to people of color at the organization (average level of agreement 7.3 for people of color, 7.6 for white respondents, and 7.5 overall).

Survey respondents whose organizations had active DEI initiatives selected from a list of potential strategies being pursued. Most frequently, respondents across races in the Milwaukee area said their organizations were addressing ways that racial inequity or systemic bias impact the work of their nonprofit (66% compared to 62% nationally), followed by working with the community on issues of race equity and inclusion (62% compared to 50% nationally), and increasing representation on the board of directors and advisory committees (61% compared to 58% nationally) as shown in *Figure 16*. For those who said their organization was not currently engaged in DEI work, they were asked to indicate which initiatives would be most helpful. The most frequently selected options for the Milwaukee area sample were increasing representation on the board of directors (55% locally and 64% nationally), clarifying that DEI is central to the organization's mission (47% locally and nationally), and providing training on DEI to the staff, leadership, and board of directors (45% locally and 59% nationally) also shown in *Figure 16*.

FIGURE 16 | ORGANIZATION DEI EFFORTS



Participants in Milwaukee focus groups emphasized the need for funding dedicated to diversity, equity, and inclusion work to encourage organizations to focus on these efforts. In some cases, they noted that DEI efforts were undertaken in response to requests from funders. People of color in the Milwaukee area were somewhat more likely to agree that DEI initiatives in their organization were motivated by being responsive to organizational funders (average level of agreement 5.5) compared to white respondents (5.2). Though this response generated lower levels of agreement than other motivations that respondents more strongly identified as driving organizational DEI work, focus group participants' repeated references to DEI efforts in response to funder expectations indicates the significant role funders can play to encourage organizational initiatives focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Training was also a common strategy for Milwaukee area survey respondents whose organizations had DEI initiatives, with 53% reporting that they had participated in training, compared to 65% nationally. Survey participants who reported their organization had conducted DEI training were asked to identify the training topics that had been provided. Respondents in the Milwaukee area most frequently reported learning on topics including *understanding terms* (70% locally vs. 68% nationally) and *implicit bias* (70% locally vs. 63% nationally). Many focus group participants expressed misgivings about the effectiveness of training. Although trainings can provide perspective and education to nonprofit stakeholders on issues like white privilege and the lack of equity in the sector, participants emphasized that training is only a first step toward achieving equity. If organizations fail to plan for ongoing DEI work, they risk treating the training as a way to check diversity off an organizational to-do list rather than a meaningful investment in changing practices and policies that affect people of color.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

I think 'Okay, we're trained in something, but what is the follow up?' I think maybe we're making steps, but I don't see this as a priority.”

—Person of Color Millennial/Generation Z
Focus Group Participant

“

And there is this trend that's occurring. ... Even on standard [funding] applications, they will ask about the diversity of your board ... Because of the issue of equity, you're seeing more of it, [though] it's slow moving.”

—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer
Focus Group Participant

“

[Diversifying board composition] lends itself to 'you hire who you know, you hire in your network,' so if you know different people, if your leadership is willing to provide opportunities for advancement, then, obviously, that's seen as a path forward for ... people of color.”

—White Millennial/Generation Z
Focus Group Participant

Reflections on DEI Strategies

The 2019 survey asked respondents to rate five potential strategies for increasing the diversity of top-level nonprofit leaders on a scale of potential effectiveness from 1 (*not effective at all*) to 10 (*extremely effective*). Some of the potential strategies included diversifying boards of directors, strengthening anti-discrimination laws, and increasing funding for organizations led by people of color. The strategy with the highest support was diversifying the board of directors, with an average level of agreement of 8.3 in the Milwaukee area and 8.6 in the national sample. Focus group participants were pleased that more funders are implementing metrics to track board diversity, which encourages organizations to prioritize those efforts, if still at a slower pace than many think is necessary. Participants also noted that diversification of the board of directors can facilitate hiring people of color at the organization if board members have access to more diverse networks.

Milwaukee area respondents and national respondents had similar levels of agreement about the potential for strengthened anti-discrimination laws to improve leadership diversity, with an average level of agreement of 6.5 locally compared to 6.7 nationally. Across the board, both people of color and white people in focus groups reflected that although stronger anti-discrimination laws were a critical check to regulate organizational policy, the process of seeking redress through legal avenues is still profoundly challenging for those that look to these mechanisms to seek accountability. Moreover, respondents noted that laws are not equipped or designed to change the engrained culture of workplaces or society at large, both of which require much broader systemic changes.

Overall, survey respondents in the Milwaukee area indicated high levels of agreement that increased funding for organizations led by people of color would help

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“

That’s one of the issues with anti-discrimination laws, ... The person has to bear the burden of going against an entity that has far more resources ...

I feel like if we want better enforcement we need to have some sort of support for people who are trying to ... hold a company that is discriminating accountable, and you can’t do it on your own. You have to have resources behind you.”

—White Millennial/Generation Z
Focus Group Participant

“

As the first Black executive director there, if I hold you accountable for being a racist, I’m also putting myself in a vulnerable position: then all the jobs go away that are paid for with [the funder’s] money.”

—Person of Color Generation X/Baby Boomer
Focus Group Participant

increase nonprofit sector leadership diversity, although local survey respondents had a lower average level of agreement (7.9 for people of color, 7.6 for white people, 7.7 overall) than respondents nationwide (8.6 for people of color, 7.7 for white people, 8.1 overall). Focus group participants discussed the need for increased funding for people of color-led organizations, particularly when those organizations often have the deepest relationships and understanding of the communities being served. One participant in the focus group for Generation X and Baby Boomer people of color mentioned the constraints related to fundraising, noting that holding grantmakers accountable for discriminatory behavior can put organizations at risk of losing necessary support. Given the scarcity of reliable and adequate funding for POC-led organizations doing vital work in communities across the country, the challenges expressed by focus group participants suggest the many people of color in leadership roles consistently weigh pushing for accountability and change against the potential financial losses for their organization and community.

Opportunities for Change

The nonprofit sector's widespread investment in DEI activities provides an opening for change on racial equity. One overarching recommendation is that nonprofits take on the challenging work described below with peer organizations with similar goals. For more in-depth descriptions of the change efforts outlined below, see *Race to Lead Revisited: Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap*.²¹

OPPORTUNITY 1

Focus on Structures and the Experience of Race and Racism

Structural analysis of race and racism, especially for white-dominant groups, is a critical foundation for race equity work. This must be coupled with efforts to understand and validate the individual and collective experiences of people of color in nonprofit organizations.

OPPORTUNITY 2

Policies Have Meaning ... If Enforced

Groups committed to DEI efforts must examine and change organizational policies to reflect the organizational commitment to equity. A realignment of policies and practices is only effective if they are acted on consistently and universally.

OPPORTUNITY 3

Put Your Money ...

Organizations led by people of color simply need more funding. To interrupt the cycle of replicating the inequities the sector is committed to fight, funders need to examine their own practices and ensure people of color-led groups receive the resources needed to thrive.

OPPORTUNITY 4

Reflecting the Community: Racial Diversity in Action

Recruiting and retaining racially diverse staff and board leaders takes a sustained investment in time and resources. It also requires shifting power by listening to staff and board members of color and changing organization policies and practices accordingly.

OPPORTUNITY 5

Responsibility and Results

Organizations committed to DEI must establish thoughtful and measurable ways to assess progress based on a widely-shared plan for what should change, who is responsible, and how results will be documented and reviewed annually.

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Endnotes

- 1 Ninety-three percent of respondents in the Southeast Wisconsin sample worked in ZIP codes within the City of Milwaukee. The remaining 7% worked in ZIP codes in the suburbs of Milwaukee, Waukesha, Ozaukee, Racine, and Kenosha counties.
- 2 Powers, J. (2017, March). *How Segregation Impacts Milwaukee's Latino Community*. WUWM.
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- 3 United States Census Bureau. *Quick Facts: Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; Milwaukee City, Wisconsin*.
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- 4 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/12/17/black-white-segregation-edges-downward-since-2000-census-shows/>
- 5 Vega, T. (2016, August). *Milwaukee's Staggering Black-White Economic Divide*. CNN.
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- 7 Armas, G. (2020, May). *UWM Study Finds Racial Divide in Coronavirus Spread in Milwaukee*. UWM Report.
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- 8 Greer, D.M., Baumgardner, D.J., Bridgewater, F.D., Frazer, D.A., Kessler, C.L., LeCounte, E.S., Swain, G.R., Cisler, R.A. (2013). *Milwaukee Health Report 2013: Health Disparities in Milwaukee by Socioeconomic Status*. Center for Urban Population Health: Milwaukee, WI. <https://www.cuph.org/milwaukee-health-report.html>
- 9 See endnote 1.
- 10 Generations are categorized based on birth year as follows: Generation Z (1998 or later); Millennial (1982-1997); Generation X (1966-1981); and Baby Boomer (1947-1965).
- 11 Hamilton, D., Darity, W., Price, A.E., Sridharan, V., Tippet, R. (April 2015). *Umbrellas don't make it rain: Why studying and working hard isn't enough for Black Americans*. New York: The New School.
<https://assetfund.org/resource/umbrellas-dont-make-rain-studying-working-hard-isnt-enough-black-americans/>
- 12 Differences in this report are statistically significant unless otherwise indicated. Despite large differences in percentages, due to sample size and statistical power, we did not detect a statistically significant difference in this comparison. Additionally, due to rounding, some percentages that appear in the figures throughout the report may not precisely reflect the absolute numbers or add to 100%.
- 13 See endnote 12.
- 14 See endnote 12.
- 15 See endnote 12.
- 16 See endnote 12.
- 17 See endnote 12.
- 18 Focus groups took place in December 2019 organized by the following demographic categories: Millennial and Gen Z people of color; Gen X and Baby Boomer people of color; Millennial and Gen Z white people; and Gen X and Baby Boomer white people.
- 19 See endnote 12.
- 20 See endnote 12.
- 21 Kunreuther, F. and Thomas-Breitfeld, S. (2020, June). *Race to Lead Revisited: Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap*. Building Movement Project.
<https://racetolead.org/race-to-lead-revisited/>



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