THE LANDSCAPE PROJECT

PERCEPTIONS OF RACIAL EQUITY WITHIN METRO DENVER NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

A REPORT COMMISSIONED BY:

The DENVER FOUNDATION

THE LANDSCAPE PROJECT

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THE DENVER FOUNDATION
The Denver Foundation is the largest and most experienced community foundation in the Rocky Mountain West. For more than 90 years, the people of Denver have trusted the Foundation to steward charitable funds to meet today's needs and tomorrow's opportunities.

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The conversation has not been about how equity improves nonprofit quality... but equity is quality.

DENVER NONPROFIT LEADER

INTRODUCTION

The Denver Foundation has been taking care of the future since 1925. We have deep roots in Metro Denver, the place we call home. Throughout a century of service, the Foundation has adapted its approach to best meet today's needs and tomorrow's opportunities. While the landscape changes over time, our commitment to building strong communities remains steady.

The Foundation's understanding of diversity, inclusiveness, and racial equity has evolved in stages.

Since 2001, the Foundation has launched several initiatives to increase diversity and inclusiveness in the local nonprofit sector. We have implemented intentional practices of listening and working with community members to self-identify their assets and opportunities. We have partnered with nonprofits, funders, and community members to develop research, programs, and best practices.

In the fall of 2017, The Denver Foundation commissioned The Landscape Project to establish a baseline of the nonprofit sector's self-assessment of its diversity, inclusiveness, and racial equity work. The Landscape Project was designed by an external team of evaluation experts and included surveys, focus groups, and interviews of a broad cross-section of nonprofit leaders. The results illustrate self-identified barriers to moving beyond diversity toward inclusiveness and racial equity in Metro Denver's nonprofit sector. The recommendations included in this report—highlighting the thoughts and words of local leaders—will inform the Foundation's current and future support of the nonprofit sector.

We believe that nonprofits have greater impact if community leadership and racial equity are at the core of their programs, policies, and overall approach.

Building trust is necessary to engage in authentic dialogue. Advancing racial equity requires conversations that cross the lines of power and privilege. We are grateful to The Landscape Project's participants for sharing their experiences. We hope the findings will spark new ideas and approaches to developing and sustaining a more diverse, inclusive, and racially equitable nonprofit sector. Please share your ideas by email at listening@denverfoundation.org. We appreciate your guidance, support, and leadership.

In partnership,

LaDawn Sullivan
Director of Leadership & Equity

Stephen Seifert
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LANDSCAPE PROJECT OBJECTIVES

1. Ascertain a baseline to better understand the nonprofit sector.

2. Inform The Denver Foundation's current and future investment strategies and program responses.

3. Provide a basis for measuring progress toward a core value of The Denver Foundation.

4. Inform and influence nonprofit leaders toward practices that promote internal and external racial equity.

5. Continue to promote racial equity with peers in the field of philanthropy and work toward the cumulative impact of diverse efforts.

6. Continue to provoke an ongoing and integrated dialogue about issues surrounding community disparity and racial equity.

LANDSCAPE OF RACIAL EQUITY IN DENVER NONPROFITS

While weight and length can easily be measured with scales and rulers, there is no simple or broadly agreed measure of racial equity. The tremendous complexity involved in racial equity includes subconscious individual reactions, differing personal values and experiences, economic systems, and historic oppression. To address this complexity and gather feedback from multiple perspectives, this study used a mixed-methods design including a literature review, web-based survey, key informant interviews, and focus groups.

Many dimensions of racial equity are deeply personal and individual. To provide feedback on these individual aspects, the survey phase of this study assessed factors such as implicit bias, racial identity, and social desirability linked to race. The interviews and focus groups continued that work by addressing the racial disadvantage that is "primarily a product of opportunity structures within society.[1]"

Structural racism refers to a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing, ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with "whiteness" and disadvantages associated with "color" to endure and adapt over time[2].

Given the complexity of these structures—and, importantly, their interconnectedness with each other—no single cause can be linked to a single effect. Instead, factors combine in unpredictable ways to contribute to the racial equity landscape of Metro Denver's nonprofit community.
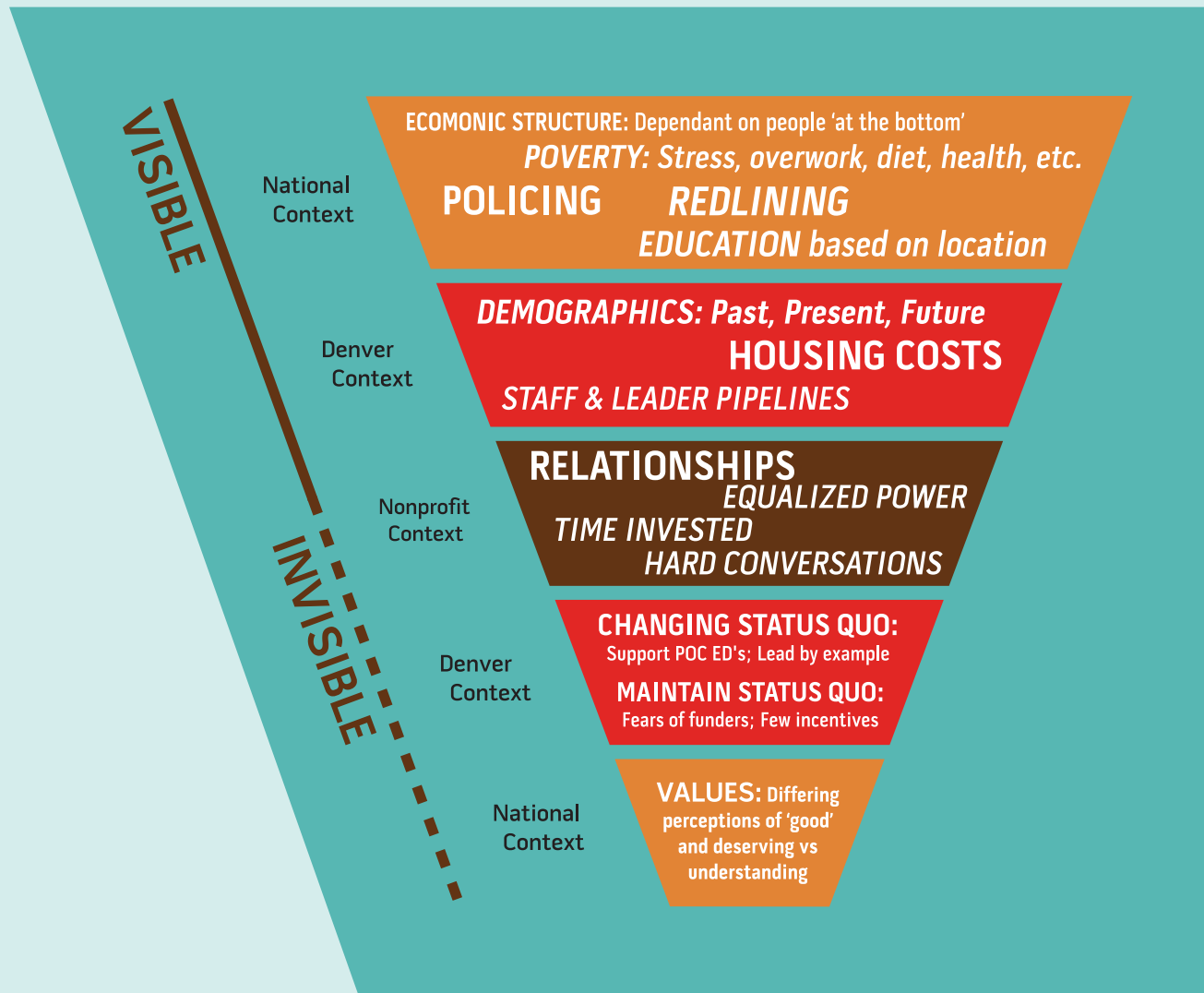
While this complexity could be used as a justification for inaction, it can also be used as an encouragement of action. Because there is not a single causal factor, varied efforts and starting points can all contribute toward change.

This systems-based approach recognizes the need for individual activity and positions it within a broader framework. The first aspect of this framework is similar to an iceberg that includes both visible factors (like housing) and invisible (like perceptions of the status quo) as well as three contexts:

- **The national context.**
- **The Denver Metro context.**
- **The nonprofit sector context.**

PRIMARY THEMES FROM FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

VISIBLE

National Context

ECOMONIC STRUCTURE: Dependant on people 'at the bottom'
POVERTY: Stress, overwork, diet, health, etc.
POLICING *REDLINING*
EDUCATION based on location

Denver Context

DEMOGRAPHICS: Past, Present, Future
HOUSING COSTS
STAFF & LEADER PIPELINES

INVISIBLE

Nonprofit Context

RELATIONSHIPS
EQUALIZED POWER
TIME INVESTED
HARD CONVERSATIONS

Denver Context

CHANGING STATUS QUO:
Support POC ED's; Lead by example
MAINTAIN STATUS QUO:
Fears of funders; Few incentives

National Context

VALUES: Differing perceptions of 'good' and deserving vs understanding

RACIAL EQUITY IN DENVER NONPROFITS

RACIAL EQUITY BENEFITS EVERYONE

The inequity of opportunity, rewards, and burdens related to race is unquestionably unjust.

Along with the deep, values-driven reasons to work toward racial equity, there is evidence that investing resources in equity benefits everyone. Studies show how social changes related to equity for one group of people ultimately creates positive outcomes for multiple groups of people.

In her influential article, "The Curb-Cut Effect[3]," Angela Glover Blackwell writes, "There's an ingrained societal suspicion that intentionally supporting one group hurts another. That equity is a zero sum game. In fact, when the nation targets support where it is needed most—when we create the circumstances that allow everyone who has been left behind to participate and contribute fully—everyone wins."

Blackwell focuses on positive effects of curb-cuts (the ramps on the corners of most sidewalks), which became legally required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, enacted in 1990. While the original motivation was to provide equity for people in wheelchairs, studies show broad social benefit: Parents pushing strollers, workers with carts, runners, and travelers with luggage.

The effort to ensure equity ultimately benefits everyone.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Nonprofit organizations in Metro Denver do not operate in isolation. Rather, they are nested within the context of the Metro Denver area, and more broadly, the nation. The many systemic factors shaping the national context are well known and heavily studied, and a few key issues are noted here:

ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

At the broadest level, the national economy is dependent—and has always been dependent—on a large number of people working "at the bottom" of the structure. Abolition ended the barbarity of slavery but not the inequity of the underlying economic ecosystem of our national context. Implicit bias and factors surrounding poverty and education (among others) combine to significantly reduce the job opportunities available to people of color.

POVERTY

People across the country, and especially people of color, suffer the varied consequences of poverty that flow from the inequality of the economic structure: stress, overwork, lack of transportation, etc. Poverty also contributes to poor health through factors such as limited access to healthcare and living in areas near highways or industrial areas with poor air quality and/or other environmental health hazards.

EDUCATION BASED ON LOCATION

Unlike other countries, local property taxes provide a substantial amount of the funding for schools across the United States. Wealthy areas have higher property values, so schools in affluent neighborhoods receive greater funding and provide greater opportunities to wealthy children. This funding structure combines with the historic effects of redlining and ongoing discriminatory housing practices to weave poor neighborhoods, lower rates of home-ownership, and poorer education into a net, trapping whole generations in poverty.

REDLINING

This is the name given to the historic laws, policies, and mortgage industry practices used across the country to discriminate against people of color in housing applications. This set of factors led to substantially lower levels of home-ownership for people of color, which in turn has intergenerational impact on wealth creation. The image on page seven shows the 1938 map of Denver divided into four zones based on housing desirability and corresponding favorability of mortgages. While the specific laws and policies related to redlining have changed, other discriminatory housing policies and practices still exist today.

POLICING

The law enforcement provided at the neighborhood level is the most direct experience most people have with the national legal system. Higher levels of violent and discriminatory policing, especially against African American people, is a national disgrace underscored by the "Black Lives Matter" movement. Discriminatory and sometimes fatal policing is a heavy and daily burden borne by people of color across the country.

VALUES

In addition to these broad structural issues, the invisible reality of conflicting values is another factor influencing racial equity nationally. Thoughtful reflection on how a person's own values are influenced by their lived experience can contribute to their perspective and ability to advance toward racial equity.
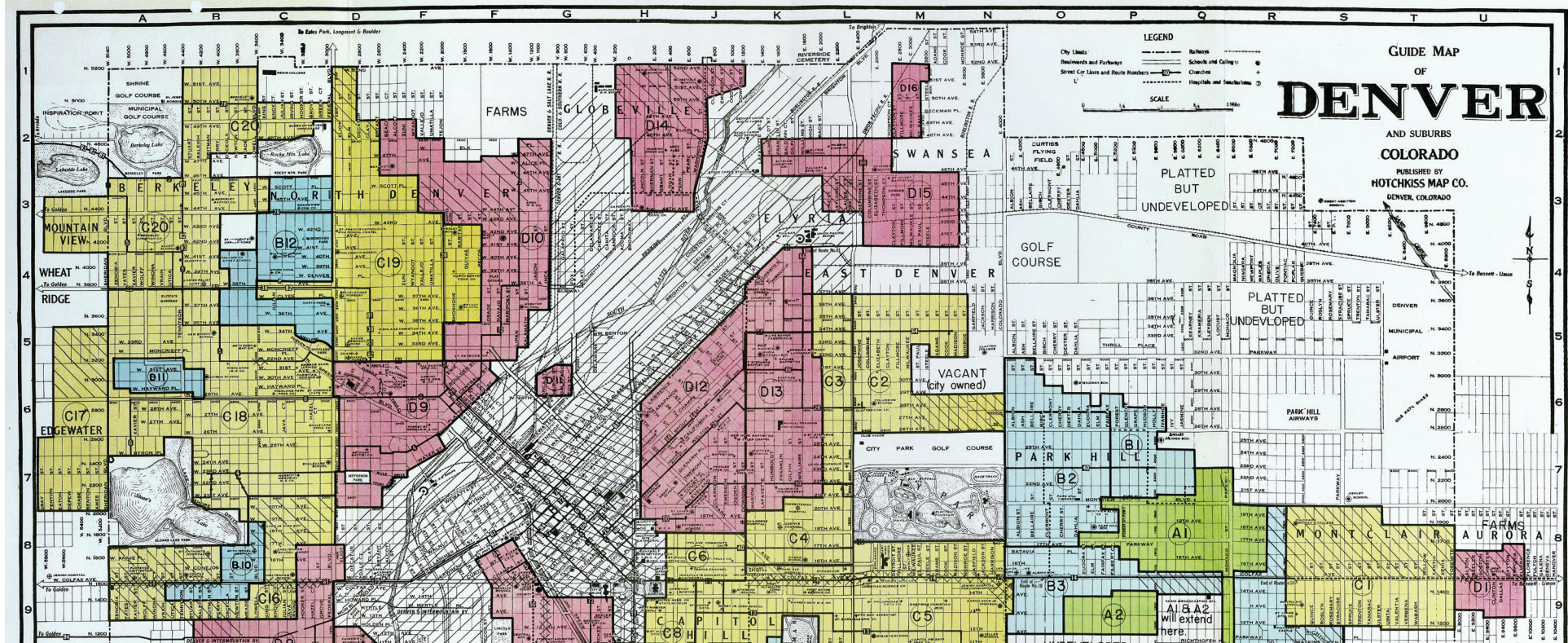
DENVER METRO CONTEXT

All factors noted in the national context are found in Metro Denver, but the region also faces unique challenges as a rapidly growing city.

Skyrocketing housing costs and new infill development are gentrifying neighborhoods and displacing communities of color, particularly in Denver and the inner-ring suburbs.

The history of redlining contributed to areas such as the Five Points neighborhood being historically African American. Other forces created communities with many Hispanic/Latinx residents, as well as pockets of immigrants and refugees.

Gentrification pressures and high housing costs disproportionately impact people of color living in these neighborhoods, as discriminatory housing practices, lack of tenant protections, and difficulty securing mortgage loans continue today.

Several leaders noted challenges with the "pipeline" of qualified and available staff and leaders among people of color—especially in highly competitive technical fields like medicine. That said, while several Denver leaders expressed this limitation, the recently released "Race to Lead[4]" report challenges this conclusion, saying: "The barriers (to hiring people of color) are based on structures within organizations and the sector as a whole."

The interrelated realities of maintaining and changing the status quo were both mentioned by many participants as important factors within the Denver context. These factors are within the "invisible" domain, but despite being intangible they exert tremendous influence. The current status quo such as donor expectations, funding priorities, and staffing structures all create expectations that are difficult to escape.

At the same time, perceptions of change in the status quo, which include the efforts of The Denver Foundation, were reported to contribute new possibilities to address this important goal.

"Residential Security Map" from 1938. Image courtesy of Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library.

STEPS TOWARD RACIAL EQUITY

It is important to understand how racial equity fits within the broader work of racial justice and inclusion. The Denver Foundation has outlined a continuum of progress with three key milestones: diversity, inclusion, and racial equity.

Diversity is the "who" of a nonprofit.
A diverse nonprofit involves people of different races, ethnicities, and experiences. Diverse people are involved as members of the board and staff, and as volunteers and donors. Diversity is often the starting place for racial equity.

Inclusion is the "how" of a nonprofit.
Inclusion is how (or whether or not) people of color can participate fully in making decisions. Inclusive nonprofits embrace the assets, needs, and perspectives of people of color into everything they do.

Racial equity is the "why" of diversity and inclusion.
Racial equity is when advantage and disadvantage are not determined by race. Barriers to access are removed and everyone can participate and reach their full potential. Racial equity is the intended outcome of diversity and inclusion practices.

RACIAL EQUITY

Advantage and disadvantage are not determined by race. Barriers to access are removed and everyone can participate and reach their full potential.

INCLUSION

People of color can fully participate in planning and making decisions. Differences in assets, needs, and perspectives are valued.

DIVERSITY

People of color are involved as members of the board and staff, and as donors and volunteers.

FINDINGS: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

To provide an overview of perceptions on this issue, survey participants were asked to rate on a scale of 0 (poor) to 100 (excellent) how well they think their organization is doing to achieve racial equity as defined by The Denver Foundation. While clearly not an objective measure of actual racial equity, these subjective ratings provide a snapshot of perceptions, which is itself helpful feedback in the ongoing discussion on racial equity.
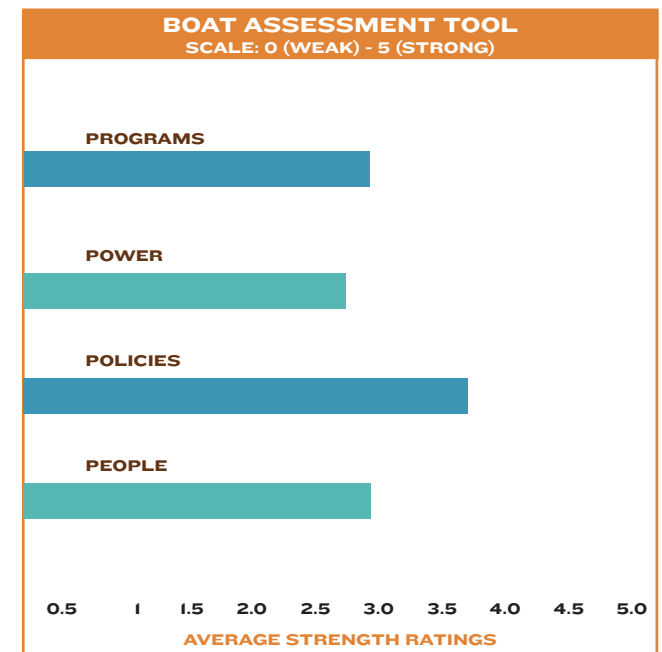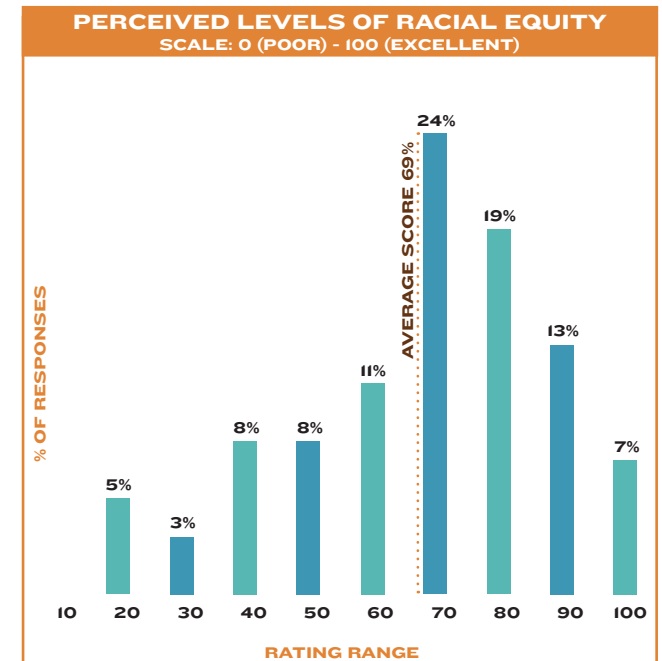
The Bridge Organizational Assessment Tool (BOAT) was used by researchers to assess the strengths and areas for further development for nonprofit organizations within four categories:

- **PROGRAMMING:** Extent to which the organization's programs intentionally includes people of color and measures success on issues of racial equity.

- **POWER:** Extent to which the organization includes people of color in positions of leadership and includes benchmarks around racial equity in annual evaluations.

- **POLICIES:** Extent to which the organization has policies to address discrimination and advance racial equity goals.

- **PEOPLE:** Extent to which the organization intentionally includes and supports people of color in staff and leadership positions.

The average responses within each of the four categories indicate that the participating organizations have fair levels of racial equity within each category but that more work is needed in each. The Policies score was the highest, indicating that there has been more progress in developing policies to recruit and support people of color. The Power score was the lowest, suggesting that the primary area for overall improvement relates to including people of color in leadership positions and including benchmarks of racial equity in annual evaluations.

To gather more nuanced understanding, interview and focus group participants were also asked to rate their own organization, and their responses showed a consistent pattern: Organizations with the most experience (and progress) on the issue often rated themselves lower than those with little evidence of engagement.

Similarly, many interview and focus group participants were confounded by the generally high average provided in the survey. Taken together, these responses suggest that this is an issue where many people "don't know what they don't know," and will tend to assume greater levels of success than those with greater experience, who have a deeper awareness of how far they have to go to achieve the racial equity they pursue.

PERCEIVED LEVELS OF RACIAL EQUITY
SCALE: 0 (POOR) - 100 (EXCELLENT)

BOAT ASSESSMENT TOOL
SCALE: 0 (WEAK) - 5 (STRONG)

FINDINGS: ELEMENTS OF RACIAL EQUITY IN A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

Racial equity in a nonprofit organization clearly involves many dimensions and can be conceived in various ways. Despite the complexity, four primary themes, grouped into two larger categories, emerged during focus group discussions and interviews with nonprofit staff, leaders, and board members.
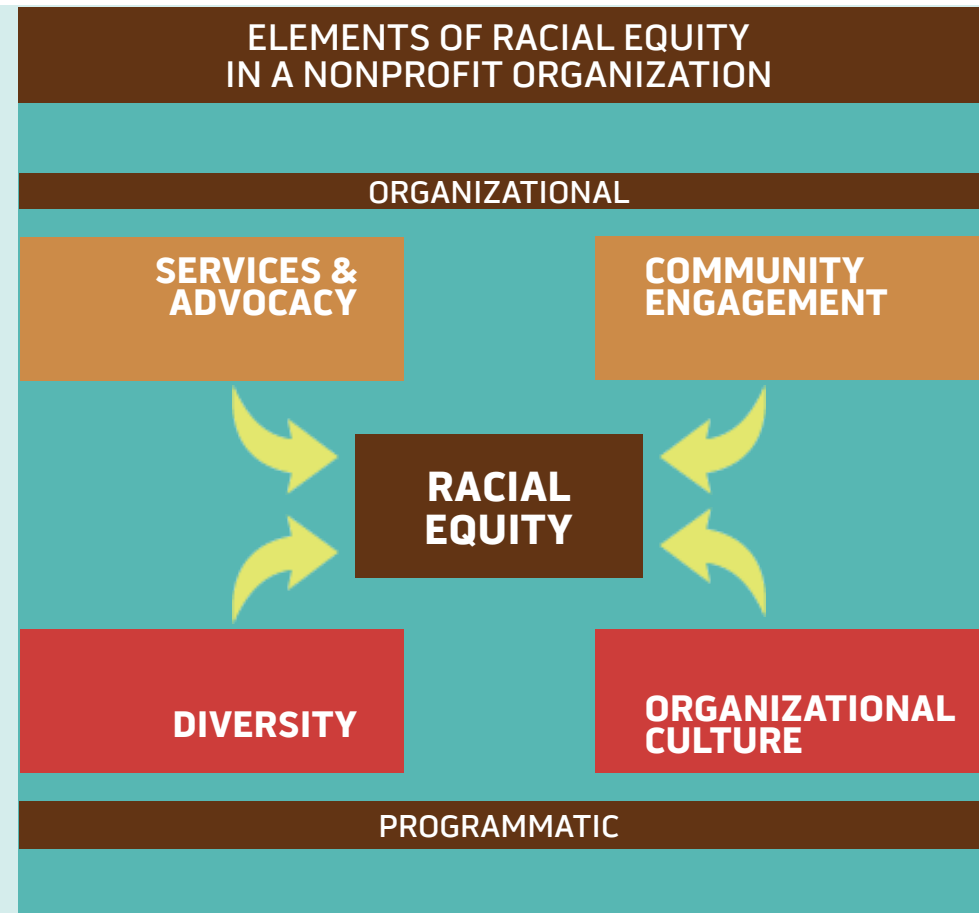
At the organizational level, the issues fit into two major themes:

1. DIVERSITY: The extent to which the board, staff, and volunteers of the organization reflect the community being served and defined by their mission statement.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE: The extent to which racial equity is anchored in the policies and culture of the organization.

At the programmatic level, the issues fit into two major themes:

3. SERVICES & ADVOCACY: The extent to which programming reaches the full population defined by an organization's mission.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: The extent to which programming is responsive to the needs of the population being served.

Within each of these organizational and program themes there was wide variation in terms of how people talked about what racial equity is, where the Denver nonprofit community currently finds itself, and what "next steps" might lead to transformational change.

ELEMENTS OF RACIAL EQUITY IN A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION

ORGANIZATIONAL

SERVICES & ADVOCACY

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

RACIAL EQUITY

DIVERSITY

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

PROGRAMMATIC

DIVERSITY

On a basic level, there was broad consensus among participants that racial equity within an organization is linked to the extent to which its staff, leadership, and board reflect the community, as defined by its mission statement. Yet, there was wide variation in how organizations embraced and operationalized this idea.

One challenge that many nonprofit leaders expressed was the pipeline of candidates for available positions. When asked to name the primary barriers to achieve racial equity in their organization, recruiting a more diverse talent pool was a common theme.

While the recruitment challenge is clear, several leaders expressed proactive efforts that they found effectively accomplish the goal of diversity. These include changing human resources and hiring practices, such as re-evaluating the need for a degree and instead considering life experience as effective job preparation.

While important, recruiting more diverse candidates extends beyond removing credential requirements that have served as barriers to entry. It also requires that those in leadership positions recognize and value the lived experiences of diverse candidates and their transferable skills, and cultivate growth opportunities within their organization.

Likewise, for members of a diverse staff to thrive, they need to see people like themselves within all layers of the organization, and to believe there are opportunities available to them.

Several nonprofit leaders conveyed a distinct frustration with the mindset that lack of a diverse candidate pool was sufficient reason for not achieving diversity within an organization. One nonprofit leader, for example, explained, "Some leaders say, 'It's so difficult to find people of color.' On our staff, 12 out of 15 are people of color. It's doable. We just have to be intentional."

Another leader also took a proactive approach and expanded, "If we can't find the right people, we grow them." Issues of recruitment and hiring, therefore, were not only about who was in the available pipeline, but also about the culture around and commitment to seeing opportunities for and hiring diverse candidates.

Nonprofit leadership is an area related to hiring that many people highlighted as needing more pointed attention. The issue of voice and agency—who is poised to lead in the nonprofit community—was a critical theme that emerged.

Discussions of leadership flowed directly from issues of values, including the question of who should champion the values of equity within the nonprofit community. Recalling the claim that there are not enough leaders of color because of a lack of candidates, one nonprofit leader pushed back, stating:

We have a leadership problem in the nonprofit community. Everyone wants to point to people of color as not being qualified. As everyone is embracing this idea of equity, we need to have a new conversation about what it means to be qualified. Just because you raised $500,000 at your previous job may not make you qualified to advance equity for the community. Without the right people leading and operationalizing the values of equity, they are just words on paper.

> It's about agency and the ability to have voice and influence. There is a usual template of who we want to represent on our board (lawyers, doctors, etc.) and it can be to the exclusion of others. How do we advance our mission and grow as an organization? If we have a narrow group of people coming together, we are not going to be able to scratch much of the surface on the issues. Our staff is more diverse than our board.

DENVER NONPROFIT LEADER

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

In interviews and focus groups with nonprofit staff, leaders, and board members, people talked about the importance of organizational policies and culture of working toward racial equity. There was a range of ways in which people talked about this, from being passive to more intentional in how their organizations cultivate an environment conducive to racial equity. On one side, people expressed the sentiment that their organization serves everyone, or that everyone is welcome, but had no specific policies and practices to ensure that.

Others openly questioned the idea that having the best of intentions to serve everyone was adequate. Many pointed out that serving everyone without specific attention to racial equity may result in the exclusion of certain groups. One leader stated, "Good intentions don't close the [racial equity] gap."

On the other end, organizations that were the most engaged with issues of racial equity talked about being intentional in the way they worked to build a culture of equity. Many emphasized that it was not just racial equity they were striving for, but equity for all identities.

The issue of hard conversations, shared language, and the ability to openly and safely communicate with one another were at the center of conversations around organizational culture. People stressed the importance of being able to have hard conversations as an important part of organizational health relating to racial equity. However, many expressed hesitancy or difficulty in knowing where to start. On the other hand, many people talked about needing to "change the conversation."

Over the past four years we have been doing intentional work at the level of organizational culture around inclusivity, not just around race, but all identities. We have changed a lot of organizational policies and organizational culture has shifted as a result. For example, organizational culture around communication has changed and is a lot more open now. We are able to have crucial conversations, and question and call people out when something doesn't feel right.

There was wide recognition amongst those working to change their organizational culture that commitment and consistency are key to long-term change. There was also recognition that people come to the table at different places and with different experiences, and so change takes time.

DIVERGENT NARRATIVES ABOUT RACIAL EQUITY

QUOTES FROM NONPROFIT LEADERS OF COLOR

"Of everyone there I was the only one of color. That is uncomfortable. You feel like a charity case. Here are all of these folks who don't share the same culture as me, and they're talking about this racial equity. Conversations on racial equity can feel like a top-down charity conversation. From the community, it's bottom-up. It's an issue of who is in the room. It can really feel like the charity mentality. It can feel like the poor people's movement without poor people."

"As a leader, you can have blinders on and just focus on the fundraising, but you should be open. To me it's common sense. We need to be ready and open to have those difficult conversations at lunchtime, at a meeting, across the board."

"As a person whose first language is Spanish, and has been in the States for 11 years, I was privileged enough to go to Catholic school and learn English. We are already self-conscious about our accent. You don't have to remind us. At work we have to do a presentation of self. I'm still self-conscious about my accent."

"White executive directors are getting extra coaching, support, and technical assistance, but if we make one mistake, we're done. There are no consequences for white executive directors that engage in harmful practices."

QUOTES FROM WHITE NONPROFIT LEADERS

"How do I show up powerfully with what I have—not just feeling guilty or sitting back?"

"People are scared they will say the wrong thing, say something weird. Such a complicated topic and so much history, depth, pain. To start those conversations about racial equity can feel like going down a spiral."

"We had an intern from [another country] and it recently came out that the old program coordinator was not allowing him to participate in teaching, like others. He kept getting pushed off because the coordinator thought he would have a hard time explaining himself because of language and wouldn't be able to teach because of accent. He is more than capable. It was an awkward struggle."

"We have a lack of ability to support person of color (POC) staff dealing with issues at work (i.e. default responsibility for tough conversations). For example, it would be helpful to have therapeutic access for staff to help deal with the emotional toll of this. When you're a POC going to work there is a lot of added emotional work that goes on and if the leadership doesn't reflect you, you may face another layer of emotional work and stress."

SERVICES & ADVOCACY

When people talked about racial equity, it was not just about what happened inside an organization, but also about how well they served the population(s) defined by their mission statement. While most felt that they were doing a good job serving their target population(s), many also acknowledged that without being aware of and checking their own biases, they risked the potential of underserving some clients.

Many issues related to service delivery had to do with basic resources. Some, for example, talked about challenges related to communication and the frustrations and dangers of not being able to adequately talk and share information with clients.

Communication, however, was not just about being able to talk to one another and share resources, but also about the value judgments placed on how people communicate. People shared experiences of times they had seen people marginalized based on things like having thick accents.

One nonprofit leader, for example, shared her experience of having been questioned by another leader for wanting someone with an accent to speak at an event. There was concern that with an accent, the person wouldn't be "articulate enough." This experience prompted the nonprofit leader to express a powerfully simple framework for approaching values: "What values humanize people, versus what values dehumanize people?" Dehumanizing issues around bias can be found when considering the racial equity implications of service delivery.

> "
> We have to check our biases in ourselves. We have to try to find reasons to serve the clients instead of the other way around. If we listened to our biases we would find reasons not to serve them.

DENVER NONPROFIT LEADER

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

While nonprofit organizations sometimes approach their work as a service oriented for-profit corporation, some of the most effective and inspiring nonprofits have a distinctly different view of service and their relationship with the community. For many leaders, it is not enough to just provide services; they operate from a perspective of community leadership to offer services that reflect and are responsive to the expressed needs of the population being served.

This issue circles back to the importance of agency and ensuring that all voices are heard. One leader, for example, explained, "If the community feels strongly about an issue we will provide a platform for that. All our programs exist because of expressed community need—participant-driven programs."

Many prioritized community feedback, but not explicitly tied to issues of racial equity. One leader explained, "We consistently ask for feedback from participants...more general questions not specific to racial equity." For many organizations, the focus was on hearing from their constituency in order to inform decision-making and improve service delivery.

Still, many participants acknowledged that in the area of community feedback and responsiveness, they could do more. One nonprofit leader reflected on their recent experience:

We haven't done well in this area [community feedback]. Last year, with special funding, we implemented quarterly meetings with parents, students, and community members to get feedback. We have committed to continue this beyond the grant cycle and want to continue to do more outreach and community feedback.

❝

We engage in intentional feedback with recipients to ask them about racial equity. Otherwise, we run the risk of assuming that we know what is best. Cultural differences and individual differences are missed otherwise.

DENVER NONPROFIT LEADER

Beyond the four predominant themes explored previously (i.e., diversity, organizational culture, services and advocacy, and community engagement), people also talked about three other important cross-cutting issues: relationships, siloing, and funding.

RELATIONSHIPS

The centrality of relationships surfaced as the key theme of the interview and focus group feedback. Nearly everything participants discussed involved some dimension of interpersonal relationship: leader relationships with staff, organization relationships within the community they serve, networks of relationships with donors, board members or volunteers—the variety of relational dimensions is vast. The important truth this theme underscores is that advancing racial equity is both as easy and as difficult as intentionally developing new relationships.

Central as relationships are, a few related themes are important to promote needed improvements. Racial equity involves important dimensions of power, and several participants noted the need for equalized power dynamics within the nonprofit organizations themselves as well as between the organizations and people they serve. Similarly, the willingness to invest time and engage in difficult conversations to develop and nourish the needed relationships across racial and other intersecting fault lines was cited by several leaders who demonstrate the greatest progress in this issue.

SILOING

There was a strong feeling that the nonprofit community tends to operate in silos, which can exacerbate feelings of being alone in the struggle for racial equity. One nonprofit leader posed the question, "How do we start a cross-section of nonprofit conversations? How do we get the different fields interacting and supporting each other?"

Overall, people expressed that they did not feel well connected to others in the Denver nonprofit community who are also struggling with issues of racial equity. One respondent said, "Agencies aren't communicating. We are in it together, but we are fighting our own struggle."

FUNDING

Another cross-cutting theme that emerged was the issue of fundraising and the common struggle that many nonprofits face around money and budgets. One respondent explained:

Funding always feels risky and under threat, it can be jerked away tomorrow. So, we make safe decisions, or ones we think funders will be happy with…. Nonprofits are not encouraged to take risks. Risk is not rewarded by donors.

Some felt that part of the problem around funding was tied to a lack of incentive, from the donor community at large, requiring or expecting nonprofits to address racial equity as a key concern.

People talked about wanting and needing more monetary support, but at the same time they also talked about being willing to give up some of the small support they have received around inclusiveness if it meant more targeted programming and clear action around racial equity.

One respondent said, "I don't see cash removing bias." Another stressed, "If you get money, what are you going to do with it? It's about implementation." Thus, while there was an expressed need for more targeted, coordinated, and sustained financial support for efforts to advance racial equity, there was also strong recognition that money alone won't solve the challenges being faced.

DENVER FOUNDATION ORGANIZATIONAL NEXT STEPS

In response to the feedback provided by the nonprofit community in this study, the leaders of The Denver Foundation have identified the following steps to continue their work toward racial equity within their own organization:

1 Foundation leaders and staff throughout the organization will continue to work with an external consultant and an internal Inclusiveness and Equity Committee to uncover implicit bias and find practical ways to advance racial equity for both the internal operations of the Foundation and external programming.

2 The Denver Foundation will continue to target strategic investments toward encouraging leaders of color and strengthening relationships within networks of people of color. The immediate next steps toward this end will include launching discussions at two levels:

► Strategic discussions about the next steps with executive directors of color and the local racial equity consultants that have deep experience in this area.

► Convening a group of Denver-area donors and funders to review the findings of this study and establish coordinated efforts toward systemic change.

3 Questions of racial equity will be advanced within the framework of Foundation priorities as essential to core questions of nonprofit quality as well as justice.

4 Dimensions of racial equity will have increasing influence when considering funding decisions.

PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The leadership of The Denver Foundation has not finalized the details for specific programmatic responses to this study. These will be developed during upcoming discussions with executive directors of color, racial equity consultants, and funders in Metro Denver. The following ideas were suggested by nonprofit leaders during interviews and focus groups and are offered as a starting point for these planning efforts:

1 Several nonprofit organizations within Denver have demonstrated considerable progress toward the goal of racial equity. Just as a fire can spread out from a single spark, The Denver Foundation could help create the right conditions to better share these examples of success. Inspiration and practical guidance may help other organizations move along the continuum toward racial equity.

2 The Denver Foundation could do more to address the nonprofit staff and leader 'pipeline' limitations noted by many. For example, the impact of the Foundation's Nonprofit Internship Program (NPIP) could be amplified by requiring recipient nonprofits to hire or help place interns of color.

3 Some nonprofit board members are reluctant to hire executive directors of color because of a fear that they might have decreased ability to successfully fundraise. To address this concern, The Denver Foundation could work with other funders to develop a pooled fund to provide a dedicated source of support for organizations led by leaders of color.

4 Consistent with the principles of collective impact, a clarified method for providing feedback on progress toward racial equity (potentially based on the elements of racial equity listed on page 10) could provide the common progress measures needed to promote greater unity and coordination between all organizations working toward needed systemic change.

5 Funding or organizing broader systemic efforts to provide training or other support to the Denver Police Department to help address concerns around security and local law enforcement.

6 Address the systemic issues surrounding housing discrimination and education by potentially expanding efforts to address the 'school to prison pipeline' and affordable housing needs.

7 Encourage nonprofit organizations to expand hiring policies beyond education levels only to value lived experience and transferable skill-sets.

TODAY'S OPPORTUNITY

One of the organizations that has established the highest levels of racial equity both in their organizational operations and programming shared an insight that is very encouraging: They found that the hardest effort was required at the beginning…. But over time they found the recruitment and retention of diverse staff and vibrant organizational culture was much easier to maintain.

This intuitively makes sense. Diverse staff are attracted toward organizations that already demonstrate diversity, and organizational cultures that have long experience navigating difficult discussions are less threatened when the next one comes up. In much the same way, the past investments of The Denver Foundation and other leaders have clearly demonstrated initial momentum toward advancing racial equity.

The opportunity for today is to make the strategic investments that will accelerate the frustratingly slow pace of change, and to be encouraged in the confidence that less effort will be needed in the years to come as today's efforts bear fruit.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
ORGANIZATIONS

CHANGE Philanthropy works to unify identity-focused philanthropic affinity groups into an empowered coalition to integrate diversity, inclusion, and social justice into philanthropic practice, transforming the sector's culture to be one that embraces equity.

CFLeads supports community foundations to build strong communities by advancing effective practices, sharing knowledge, and galvanizing action on critical issues of our time.

Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity (PRE) works to increase the amount and effectiveness of resources aimed at combating institutional and structural racism in communities through capacity building, education, and convening of grantmakers and grantseekers.

PUBLICATIONS

AWAKE to WOKE to WORK: Building a Race Equity Culture
ProInspire

Building Organizational Capacity for Social Justice: Framework, Approach & Tools
Nat'l Gender & Equity Campaign by Asian Americans/ Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy

Confronting Racial Bias at Work
Race Forward: The Center for Racial Justice Innovation

PowerMoves
National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) and Philamplify

Race To Lead
Building Movement Project

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ENDNOTES

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[4] Thomas-Breitfeld, S., & Kunreuther, F. (2017). Race to lead: Confronting the nonprofit racial leadership gap. Building Movement Project. Available online @ http://www.buildingmovement.org/pdf/RacetoLead_NonprofitRacialLeadershipGap.pdf. Retrieved 4/26/18.

LEARN MORE

To receive the full Landscape Project Report, including a summary of methodology, theoretical and academic frameworks, survey design, and useful resources, please call The Denver Foundation at 303.300.1790 and request to speak to a member of the Leadership & Equity team, or request a digital copy via email at *landscape@denverfoundation.org*.

THE LANDSCAPE PROJECT

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