

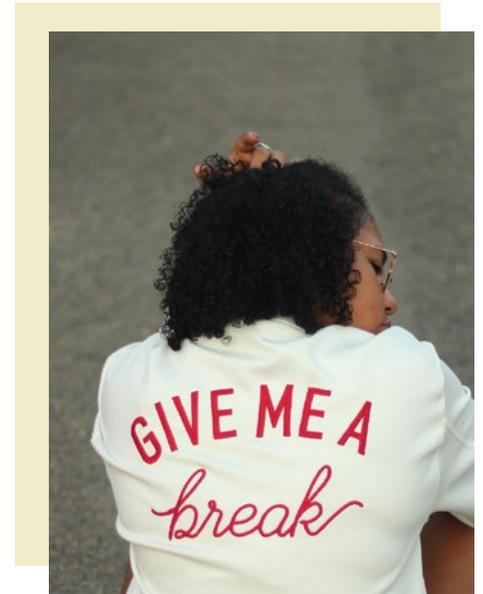
2023 Report & Recommendations

THE REST AND LIBERATION INITIATIVE



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to the survey respondents, focus group participants, and every person who bravely shared their stories and sentiments with us for consideration in this report.

We wish you wellness.

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This report was carried out with support from the McGregor Fund.



Prologue

Prologue

A LETTER FROM SHAMYLE DOBBS

To my colleagues and friends working tirelessly in the nonprofit sector: I feel you. To the community-based organizations, to the advocates, to the organizers, to the block club leaders, to the volunteers, to the community do-gooders, and especially to those shouldering the load of mission-based work without title, recognition, or pay: I see you and I thank you.

In a sector that perpetually honors hyper-visible leadership and tokenizes the struggles of those in the margins: The Rest and Liberation Initiative intends to be a straightforward approach to a not-so-simple issue. Community work is plagued with burnout. Only a privileged few organizations garner enough philanthropic dollars to invest in mental health and wellness resources, professional development opportunities, and dedicated time off for their staff.



Shamyle Dobbs, MCR chief executive officer. IMAGE CREDIT: HANNAH COLBORN

"I wish you rest today. I wish you deep knowing that exhaustion is not a normal way of living. You are enough. You can rest. You must resist anything that doesn't center your divinity as a human being. You are worthy of care. Our bodies don't belong to these toxic systems. We know better. Our Spirits know better."

Tricia Hersey, The Nap Ministry

The Rest and Liberation Initiative centers that our collective humanity and honoring what our bodies need should not feel elusive. Extended time away for personal restoration should not be constrained by PTO benefits and relegated to larger budget organizations who have the flexibility to innovate within policy regulations. Unraveling nonprofit work culture from capitalist and corporate norms should not feel radical.

“Our greatest hope to thrive and disrupt is to rest deeply and intentionally. The rest is the work. It is how the portal for liberation and a reckoning will emerge and remain open. May the portal of rest be our refuge. May we go there often.”

Tricia Hersey, The Nap Ministry

The Rest and Liberation Initiative is an act of love. It is rooted in Black joy and possibility. It is a liberation walk that will become a model for the sector. It is an equity tool designed to care for and to resource organizations—especially BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and person of color) -led organizations—that have been left behind. It is a community-building exercise that holds space for a coalition of the willing to transform work-life balance, compensation and benefits, and workplace culture in nonprofits. It is a mirror, forcing us to see the ways in which we are complicit in perpetuating cycles of exhaustion and fatigue in our sector.

It is a gift. A simple way to say, “thank you, and we see you,” to the incredible leaders serving our communities with big hearts and limited resources.

With love,



SHAMYLE MAYA DOBBS

Shamyle Dobbs serves as chief executive officer for Michigan Community Resources. She has been with the organization since 2007.



LEFT: Tricia Hersey, founder of The Nap Ministry.

IMAGE CREDIT: THE NAP MINISTRY

The Nap Ministry provides immersive workshops and performance art that examines rest as a radical tool for community healing.

The Nap Ministry centers that rest is a form of resistance and identifies sleep deprivation as a racial and social justice issue.

Learn more at thenapministry.com.

Introduction

Introduction

It started with tears. Tears fueled by extreme exhaustion became the battle cry that resulted in an email. Shamyle Dobbs, chief executive officer for Michigan Community Resources, reached out to Heidi Alcock of the McGregor Fund in an emotional plea to seek admission into the [Eugene A. Miller Fellowship Program](#).

That initial exchange led to a deeper conversation between Heidi and Shamyle about burnout, the demands of nonprofit leadership, the criteria of the Miller Fellowship, its program design, and the McGregor Fund's desire to put the initiative on pause. While discussing the accessibility of sabbaticals generally to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) nonprofit leaders, the idea emerged for MCR to leverage the leadership and experience of the Transforming Solidarity Collective (TSC)—a group of five Black and Brown women leaders of intermediary organizations serving the nonprofit sector in Michigan—to resolve some of these challenges as a capacity building effort to their served community.

The members of the Transforming Solidarity Collective coalesced around the issue. They agreed to set out together to design a sabbatical program and a suite of complementary resources to meet the specific needs of BIPOC-led organizations. The initiative would support and elevate cultures of rest and liberation within nonprofits in Southeast Michigan.

The TSC leaders could themselves relate to the feelings of exhaustion expressed by Shamyle. Each woman could understand Shamyle's feelings of leadership fatigue; in fact, the genesis of the TSC was rooted in building solidarity around feelings of burnout and leveraging connections and resources at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic.



The nonprofit leaders making up the Transforming Solidarity Collective at its formation. From left: Donna Murray-Brown, Allandra Bulger, Yodit Mesfin-Johnson, Shamyle Dobbs, and Madhavi Reddy.

IMAGE CREDIT: VALAURIAN WALLER

Given their own personal understandings of the intersections between nonprofit work stress, toxic power dynamics between philanthropy and grantees, and systemic racism, the partners were each excited by the opportunity to create something new in response to these felt needs.

United in their shared commitment to racial justice and equity, Shamyle, Donna, Yodit, Allandra, and Madhavi were also united in their shared commitment to one another. Unlike any moment before in their organizations' histories, through the TSC, these leaders strengthened their personal and professional bonds and their programmatic commitments to meeting the emerging capacity needs of nonprofits, particularly those of smaller organizations led by BIPOC leaders.

Although at first the intention was to expand opportunities for rest, the TSC leaders understood the need to address the root causes of burnout. Creating an opportunity for BIPOC leaders to experience temporary relief would not be enough. Designing a transactional program would not be enough. Providing tools and resources would not be enough.

With these sentiments in mind, The Rest and Liberation Initiative intends to shift the toxic grind culture present within nonprofit organizations that devalues the contributions of BIPOC leaders. It seeks to reshape the narrative around effective leadership and what that looks like in practice. It centers liberation with the hope of disrupting cycles of fatigue and burnout in nonprofit culture.

This body of work is emergent and necessary. The plan is simple, yet radical. The Rest and Liberation Initiative will offer an opportunity for respite to leaders for whom conventional sabbatical programs are not typically accessible: leaders from organizations with budgets under \$500,000; leaders that tend to be disproportionately BIPOC. It will offer programs and support to participating leaders before, during, and after their sabbaticals. And it will encourage sector-wide adoption of more equitable, human-centered and wellness-focused workplace norms and practices.

Participant Voices

“(Rest is) a time and space where you can stop without worry, thinking, planning, etc. This could be sitting on the couch, in a quiet room, laying in bed, on a quiet bench in a park. Rest is whatever gives you time and space to rejuvenate.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

Transforming Solidarity Collective

In 2020, the Transforming Solidarity Collective (TSC) formed as a group of regional intermediary nonprofits seeking to ensure Southeast Michigan's nonprofits, especially those serving or coming from historically under-resourced communities, have access to resources and services that advance their missions.

The collective also formed with the goal of building the capacity of Southeast Michigan nonprofits, funders, and capacity builders to create significant systemic change, together.

The founding partners of the collective included five Black and Brown leaders:

- Allandra Bulger, Executive Director of Co.act Detroit
- Donna Murray-Brown, (former) CEO of the Michigan Nonprofit Association
- Madhavi Reddy, Executive Director of Community Development Advocates of Detroit
- Shamyle Dobbs, CEO of Michigan Community Resources
- Yodit Mesfin-Johnson, Executive Director of Nonprofit Enterprise at Work

“There is a lack of cultural competency in the social justice space and lack of acknowledgement for the ancestral trauma of Black and Brown peoples. Many of us have been overserving this country for generations. Social justice spaces aren’t necessarily welcoming to our authentic selves.”

FOCUS GROUP ATTENDEE

“Liberation can be both collective and personal. Personal liberation is to believe in one’s true worth as a human being and to not let our unjust systems dictate how we should lead our lives. This type of internal work cannot be done alone. It must be achieved through systems of community and mutual aid. Liberation is not possible if one does not have access to the basic resources of healthy food, water, air, housing, employment, and education. Liberation work is a multi-stakeholder effort that must put the communities most impacted by injustice at the forefront of its solution-making efforts.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

“I think a dedicated time off of work to reset is needed. When you’re in the mix, it can be difficult to really pull back and get a clear view of what changes need to be made in your life.”

FOCUS GROUP ATTENDEE

“Leaders in the sector are not provided with a chance to recharge and reassess their personal, organizational, and societal needs. Running a mile a minute for so long drains me personally and affects the work.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

Research & Design Journey

Research & Design Journey

Under the direction of the nonprofit leaders making up the Transforming Solidarity Collective, a group of motivated team members from the TSC organizations convened to push forward the vision for a responsive sabbatical program prioritizing the needs of BIPOC nonprofit leaders. Like the TSC leaders, this team was made up of nonprofit leaders of color who had their own experiences with the topics at hand. Akua Hill (Community Development Advocates of Detroit), Charnae Sanders (Co.act Detroit), and Will Jones III (NEW) joined the team facilitated by Carolyn Pruitt and Janai Gilmore of Michigan Community Resources.

This new Rest and Liberation Initiative (RLI) team coalesced around two ambitious goals. First, they aimed to create an opportunity for rest for BIPOC leaders whose organizations had budgets under \$500,000 by offering a tailored sabbatical program and complementary resources to meet their unique needs. Second, they aimed to shift nonprofit workplace culture by identifying programs, practices, and approaches that support organizations in interrupting cycles of overwork and fatigue.

Rather than designing programs or resources from scratch, the team recognized the need to conduct benchmark research and engage nonprofit stakeholders to inform the RLI's proposed design of programs and resources.

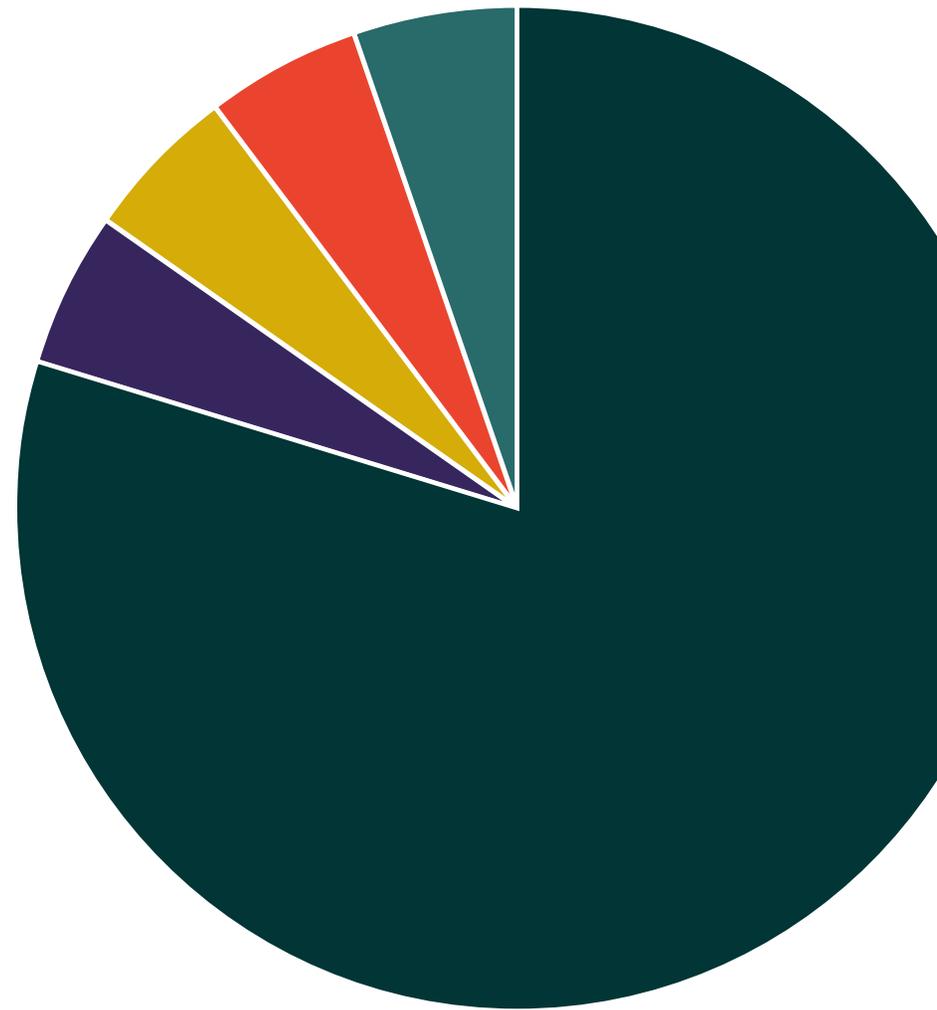
Stakeholder Engagement

As part of their research and design journey, the RLI team gathered insights from nonprofit stakeholders through a survey and four focus groups. The goal of these engagements was to identify ideas, needs, and aspirations directly from the people the initiative would aim to impact. These stakeholders included primarily BIPOC current and former nonprofit leaders, board members, and volunteers.

The RLI Survey

Seventy-five nonprofit leaders responded to the RLI survey. Survey respondent race/ethnicity is shown in the chart to the right. The survey asked questions related to:

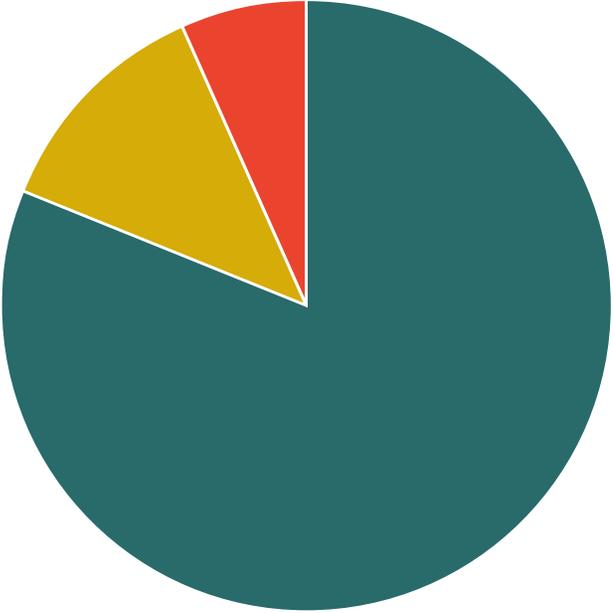
- Definitions of rest and liberation
- Experiences of burnout
- Needs, desires, and practices related to self-care and sabbaticals
- Previous sabbatical experiences



RLI SURVEY RESPONDENT RACE/ETHNICITY

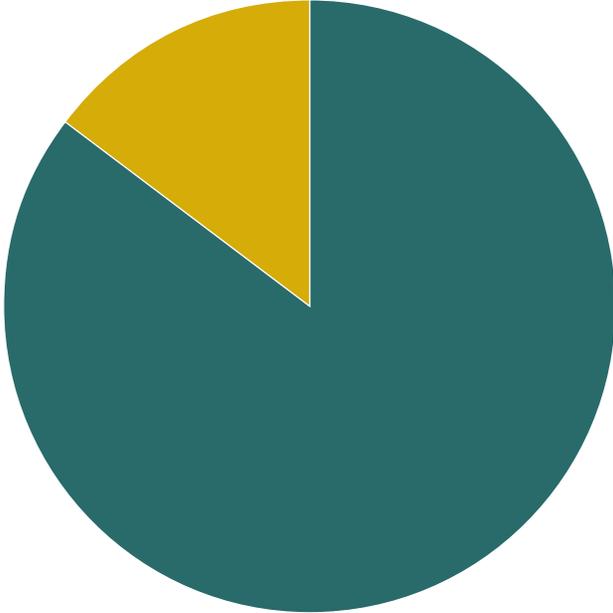
Black	– 79% (59 participants)
White	– 5% (4 participants)
Asian	– 5% (4 participants)
Latinx	– 5% (4 participants)
Other	– 5% (4 participants)

Survey Results at a Glance



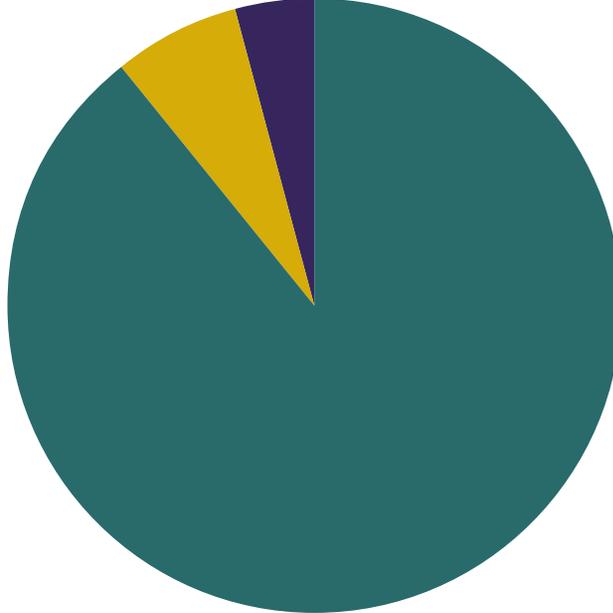
HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED BURNOUT AT YOUR JOB?

Yes – 81%
Maybe – 6%
No – 12%



HAVE YOU EVER TAKEN A SABBATICAL FROM WORK?

No – 85%
Yes – 15%



WOULD YOU BE INTERESTED IN TAKING A SABBATICAL IN THE FUTURE?

Yes – 89%
Maybe or It Depends – 6%
No – 4%

Note: See Appendix for the survey question list.

Stakeholder Engagement Outcomes

BIPOC nonprofit leaders face the same stressors commonly known to cause burnout in the nonprofit sector (for example, “too much work,” “never enough help”). RLI survey results showed that 66 out of 75 respondents (88 percent) believed they had or had “maybe” experienced burnout. Survey results and focus group discussions revealed that some of the challenges related to leadership in the sector include factors such as challenges with letting go and delegating effectively, perfectionism, setting boundaries, as well as larger systemic barriers such as nonprofit-funder dynamics, scarcity mindset, and a culture of overwork.

Inside a sector that is plagued with burnout and the stresses of nonprofit leaders having to navigate internal and external barriers to rest and liberation, BIPOC nonprofit leaders also face unique challenges stemming from the impact of systemic racism within our sector and broader society. The realities of internalized and systemic oppression impact the well-being of BIPOC nonprofit leaders, shaping how they show up as leaders in their organizations and in their lives.

Through focus group sessions, the RLI team heard that many BIPOC nonprofit leaders felt frustrated about constantly feeling the need to prove themselves in a system that does not look like or is not as supportive of them. BIPOC leaders find themselves having to not only navigate the challenges of nonprofit work, but as one focus group participant noted, “What also comes to mind is internalized oppression. We don’t recognize we’re in all of this stuff we’re fighting against on a systems level... we sacrifice our well-being.”

Race emerged as a key theme across the four focus groups. As one focus group attendee stated, “The additional stress of being leaders of color, I believe we often feel we have to be three times as good to keep our jobs; that we have little to no room for error while feeling non people of color have little to no worries about how they are perceived in their leadership roles.”

Benchmark Research

As part of the research and design journey, the RLI team gathered insights and lessons from existing sabbatical programs and from works related to topics such as self-care and countering cultures of burnout.

During this phase, the team reviewed literature on eight established sabbatical programs, including:



In addition to individual challenges prioritizing self-care and combatting burnout, BIPOC nonprofit leaders also face challenges resulting from impacts of systemic racism, as demonstrated in the RLI survey and focus group discussions. **STOCK IMAGE**

- [The California Wellness Foundation](#)
- [The Durfee Foundation](#)
- [Rasmuson Foundation](#)
- [Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust](#)
- [Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation](#)
- [The Barr Foundation](#)
- [The McGregor Fund](#)
- [R&R: The rest of our lives](#)

The team also reviewed sabbatical program studies and guides, such as [Creative Disruption: Sabbaticals for Capacity Building and Leadership Development in the Nonprofit Sector](#) by Deborah S. Linnell and Tom Wolfred (2009); [From Creative Disruption to Systems Change: A 20-Year Retrospective on the Durfee Foundation Sabbatical Program](#) by the Durfee Foundation (2017); and [Funders' Guide to Creating a Sabbatical Program](#) by the Durfee Foundation (2018).

Additionally, the RLI team drew inspiration from resources such as [The Nap Ministry](#) and [The Wellbeing Project](#).

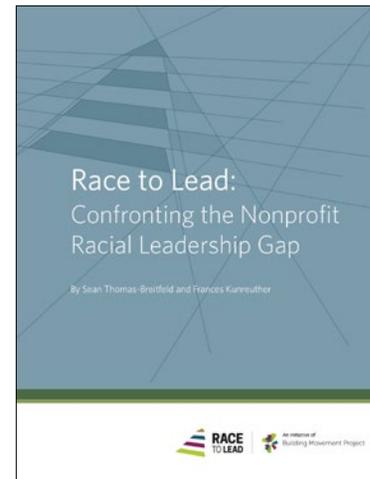
The following sections illustrate important outcomes from the RLI team's benchmark research.

Benchmark Research Outcomes

It is widely demonstrated that systemic racialized disparities in funding are a reality in the nonprofit sector. Local and national studies point to remarkable disparities in funding between white-led and BIPOC-led organizations.

In [Race to Lead: Confronting the Nonprofit Leadership Gap](#) (2016), [Race to Lead Revisited: Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap](#) (2020), [Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table](#) (2020), and the [Detroit Nonprofit Leadership Census](#) (2021), inequities and a racial funding gap have been repeatedly documented.

The 2020 article published by the Bridgespan Group [Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table](#) outlines findings from research executed by Echoing Green and Bridgespan demonstrating the racial disparity in today's funding environment. Looking at data from US applicants to its fellowship in 2019, Echoing Green found a racial funding gap of \$20 million dollars



Cover of the 2016 report *Race to Lead: Confronting the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap*, published by the nonprofit [Building Movement Project](#). **IMAGE CREDIT: BUILDING MOVEMENT PROJECT**

between white-led and Black-led early-stage organizations among its US applicants. The 396 organizations led by white applicants had raised \$61 million collectively compared to the \$40 million collectively raised by 492 organizations led by Black applicants. In an analysis of tax returns for 164 Echoing Green fellowship applicants who progressed to the semifinalist stage and beyond, white-led organizations were found to have budgets 24 percent larger than their Black counterparts. The funding gap grew deeper when looking at unrestricted funding: white-led organizations among the most competitive applicants for the fellowship were found to have 76 percent more unrestricted net assets than their Black-led counterparts.

In [*Nonprofit Leadership Census Results: Data and Trends for 2021 Nonprofit Leadership and Staff in Detroit*](#), an analysis of e-filed forms 990-N/-EZ data from 79 nonprofits revealed that while the majority of white-led organizations' assets fell between \$63,228 and \$3.6 million, the majority of BIPOC-led organizations' assets fell much lower—between \$471 and \$1.8 million. Similarly, the majority of BIPOC-led organizations' revenues range from \$3,494 to \$2.8 million, while the majority of white-led organizations' revenue range from \$231,050 to \$3.2 million. Disparities in access to funding have implications for staffing at BIPOC-led organizations—less funding means diminished ability to hire additional staff to meet capacity needs, which results in a heavier burden on existing staff.

In [*Race to Lead Revisited: Obstacles and Opportunities in Addressing the Nonprofit Racial Leadership Gap*](#) (2020), Building Movement Project's analysis of over 5,000 survey responses from nonprofit employees showed that 40 percent of white-led organizations had budgets over \$5 million, compared to only 22 percent of BIPOC-led organizations. At the same time, 39 percent of BIPOC-led organizations had budgets of less than \$1 million compared to 25 percent of white-led organizations.

In the report [*On the Front Lines: Nonprofits Led by People of Color Confront COVID-19 and Structural Racism*](#), Building Movement Project (BMP) demonstrates that of the 433 nonprofit directors and CEOs who responded to a 2020 survey on the effects of COVID-19, 53 percent of respondents had budgets under \$1 million. It is not by coincidence that 50 percent of the organizations also had fewer than 10 staff members. As BMP notes, “many POC-led nonprofits were managing with limited infrastructure and resources well before the pandemic.”

Despite the wave of statements from philanthropy expressing a commitment to fund more equitably in the wake of 2020's racial reckoning, the [*Chronicle of Philanthropy reports*](#) that results from a 2021 national survey of 1,168 nonprofit leaders conducted by the Nonprofit Finance Fund (NFF) show that the racial funding gap continues to persist. The NFF survey results indicated that while 86 percent of white-led organizations

received foundation funding in 2021, only 82 percent of BIPOC-led organizations and 75 percent of Black-led organizations received foundation funding in 2021. This disparity deepens when looking at unrestricted funding. Results show 41 percent of white-led organizations reported receiving at least half of their fiscal 2021 support as unrestricted funding, compared to 26 percent of BIPOC-led organizations.

Participant Voices

Throughout this report, Participant Voices are featured with direct quotes from RLI focus groups and responses to the RLI survey.

“As a leader in the org I work for, I have learned that my needs sometimes come last... so unfortunately I have experienced mental burnout from juggling a number of tasks that prioritize the needs of others over mine.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

“(There is) too much to do without enough support and with no end in sight.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

“Unfortunately, we are often rewarded for working like a horse.”

FOCUS GROUP ATTENDEE



Durfee Foundation sabbatical participant Va Lecia Adams Kellum, pictured above, said, “Before applying, I didn’t think I needed time away from work. The sabbatical helped me understand that while my work... is central to my purpose, I need to find and maintain a sense of balance so that I can keep doing the work I love.” **IMAGE CREDIT: DURFEE FOUNDATION**

Expanding the Opportunity to Rest

Expanding the Opportunity to Rest

Through the research and engagement process outlined in the previous chapter, the RLI team gathered insights into BIPOC leaders' experiences of burnout, practices of resilience and self-care, and aspirations related to rest and well-being. In addition to these insights gathered through focus groups and surveys, the team also drew on a contextual analysis of cultural and systemic factors which typically make conventional sabbatical programs inaccessible to leaders from nonprofits with budgets of under \$500,000.

The results from the engagement, research, and literature review processes led the RLI team to propose the following design for a sabbatical program that is responsive to the needs of BIPOC leaders in Southeast Michigan and beyond.

In addition to providing for the needs of individual participants, a sabbatical program for BIPOC leaders serving smaller budget organizations must address the systemic barriers that overwhelmingly preclude these leaders from participating in conventional sabbatical programs. In order to offer benefits to individual leaders, organizations, and communities such as increasing organizational capacity, sabbatical programs designed for BIPOC leaders must address the impact of systemic underinvestment by investing in increasing access to rest and liberation initiatives, investing in leaders' organizations, and investing directly in leaders through and beyond a sabbatical.

I. INVESTMENT IN ACCESSIBILITY

II. INVESTMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS

III. INVESTMENT IN LEADERS



To create an effective sabbatical program that moves the needle on individual experiences of burnout and brings about systemic change across the sector, The Rest and Liberation Initiative must invest in increasing access to programs and opportunities, in organizations, and directly in individual BIPOC leaders. **STOCK IMAGE**

Investment in Accessibility

While designing a sabbatical program for BIPOC leaders, accessibility is a key concern. Through benchmarking, literature review, and engagement of stakeholders, the RLI team concluded that conventional sabbatical programs do not meet the unique needs of BIPOC and other marginalized nonprofit leaders.

In [From Creative Disruption to Systems Change](#), the Durfee Foundation outlines results from a survey of past Durfee Foundation sabbatical awardees. These results showed that only 10 percent of the 69 reporting awardees were from organizations with budgets under \$500,000. The report notes, “Durfee learned early on that very small organizations with staff of less than five are too stressed by a leader’s three-month absence and conversely expects most large nonprofits to be able to pay for a leader’s sabbatical, resulting in a pool of mid-sized nonprofits.”

This finding that a sabbatical can be more of a burden than a benefit to smaller organizations has also been observed by the McGregor Fund. While reviewing their Eugene Miller Fellowship, the McGregor Fund observed, “The leaders expressed the need to have a deeper staff bench in terms of number of staff and level of experience, to feel comfortable taking a sabbatical... Budgets of agencies who haven’t applied for this program have smaller budgets than those who participated.” Additionally, the most frequently selected reason for those who had been invited by McGregor to apply for the Miller Fellowship but did not apply was that they were unable to take extended time away from their organization or the organization’s staffing structure did not permit them to do so.

Curating space for relationship-building is a common thread across sabbatical programs, particularly through alumni networks. The report [Creative Disruption](#) showed that while the specific approaches to cultivating connection through alumni gatherings across the five sabbatical programs involved in its study varies, “desire for less structure and more time for connection runs across the programs.”

The [Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust](#) and [the Barr Foundation](#) provide models for how creating intentional space for relationship- and network-building during the fellowship year(s) can result in a strong collaborative network of local leaders post-sabbatical. Each program creates space for connection through in-person retreats, shared learning opportunities, and shared leadership development experiences over the course of their fellowships (one and two years, respectively).

As discussed in the case study, [Networking a City](#) (2012), the Barr Foundation’s approach to intentionally creating space for organic relationship-building during the fellowship has led to grantees moving away from a “hub and spoke” network model in which



While nonprofit work can be strenuous for all, BIPOC leaders face unique challenges as a result of systemic racism. **STOCK IMAGE**

the foundation is the central connector. Instead, grantees evolved into a “multi-cluster network where people connect ideas and resources, provide personal support, and take joint action from various hubs without intensive involvement from foundation staff.”

By combining the sabbatical and fellowship program models and making relationship building an integral component of the experience, the Barr Foundation has been able to foster a collaborative network of leaders in Boston. Together, they have cultivated strong relationships in which fellows “move beyond ego, turf, and ideology to generate collective courage and hold each other accountable.”

As previously noted, BIPOC leaders usually direct nonprofits with smaller budgets than their white counterparts—a byproduct of systemic oppression. Smaller budgets generally mean fewer staff and weaker internal support. Leaders in these organizations typically shoulder a disproportionate amount of responsibility.

BIPOC leaders also face more internal barriers to considering a sabbatical. The application process will likely be one of the first times that the leader and organization have to plan for the leader’s absence. Without significant investment in capacity and support, a leader’s time away can become, or be perceived as, a burden.

Additionally, leaders with marginalized identities often fear being stigmatized as “lazy,” or have internalized that their worth is tied to their productivity. It is often the encouragement of others that makes them feel they have “permission” to apply for a sabbatical.

With these realities in mind, efforts to lower barriers to access for BIPOC leaders must begin with the outreach strategy and application process. Support through readily accessible office hours for sabbatical program applicants can help lower the hurdle.

As benchmark research shows, sometimes nonprofit leaders who could benefit from a sabbatical are hesitant to nominate themselves. This is likely exacerbated when it comes to people from marginalized identities who may hesitate to apply due to internalized messaging around their worth.

While leaders may apply for the sabbatical on their own, the RLI program will also solicit nominations. Nominations can come from leaders and organizations with strong ties to BIPOC communities. This is in the hope that with encouragement and recommendation from a trusted friend or colleague, leaders who may be hesitant to apply for the program may consider it more readily.



It is clear from benchmark research that without intentional provisions, the leaders the RLI seeks to serve will not apply for the sabbatical. **STOCK IMAGE**

Investment in Organizations

The racial funding gap translates to a staffing and capacity gap for BIPOC-led organizations. This keeps BIPOC-led organizations and their leaders stuck in a cycle in which they are not able to garner the financial and human resources needed to hire staff they can equip and empower to lead in their absence. This racial funding and capacity gap makes conventional sabbatical programs virtually inaccessible to smaller budget BIPOC-led organizations.

It is clear from benchmark research that without intentional provisions, the leaders the RLI seeks to serve will not apply. The key to addressing this pivotal hurdle is to provide financial and programmatic support to organizations to build a “leadership bench”—in other words, the number of staff equipped to fill vacant leadership roles within an organization.

Research shows that conventional sabbatical programs are an effective tool to strengthen the leadership bench within nonprofit organizations. The RLI program design recognizes the need to build the leadership benches especially within BIPOC-led organizations targeted by the initiative.

By anchoring the sabbatical award on a \$100,000 investment in organizations, the RLI seeks to address the root cause of exhaustion and burnout felt by so many leaders of smaller-budget BIPOC-led organizations: systemic underinvestment. Kicking off the RLI program year with an infusion of essential financial support will allow leaders to begin the year with breathing room and build the capacity of their organizations so they are strong enough for leaders to step away for their sabbatical.

Preparing Organizations for Rest and Liberation

Ensuring that sabbatical awardees and their organizations reap the benefits of both rejuvenation for leaders and increased organizational capacity requires key elements of support before and throughout the RLI program year.

A key component for the RLI is an application process for the sabbatical program that involves the creation of an organizational plan. This exercise will help leaders and their teams think through how responsibilities and roles can be delegated and shared so that work can continue in the leader’s absence. In essence, the application process itself provides a capacity building opportunity for leaders. This activity also offers an opportunity for leaders to consider succession planning and engage their staff and boards in that effort in a temporary way that does not create a state of emergency for the organization.

As part of the application process, leaders will be asked to create a draft organizational plan created in partnership with their staff and board. This will be an invitation to envision the type of support interim leadership would need to be successful during their leader's sabbatical. It will inform how leaders transfer their day-to-day responsibilities to interim leadership and equip them with the vision and capacity to lead.

RLI applicants will have the opportunity to talk through their plans and receive thought partnership and guidance with a coach during office hours with a program manager. Once selected, awardees will receive individual coaching to refine their draft plans, which will prepare them to equip staff to execute on the plans during their sabbatical.

Additionally, the RLI will provide support before the sabbatical program and award by offering a pre-sabbatical orientation, which will be important for supporting awardees with mentally preparing for their individual sabbatical experience. An orientation also provides an opportunity to support awardees with preparing their organizations and interim leadership for their departure.

Operations Support for Organizations

The RLI team recognizes that for organizations with budgets of less than \$500,000 to receive an investment of this size, specific support for navigating the administrative burdens posed by the award may be required. This is why the RLI will require dedicated program staff, both to support leaders during the application process and throughout the program year, but also as an essential resource for solving emergent organizational infrastructure challenges that could arise.

Investment in Leaders

Equipped with lessons learned from the literature review and its own engagement of stakeholders, the RLI program design recognizes the value of investing in leaders through leadership and professional development support in addition to direct financial support and time away granted by a traditional sabbatical program.

RLI program design also acknowledges that in order to be transformational beyond the sabbatical, support must include a focus on equipping leaders to address and heal from the impact of internalized and systemic oppression on their mental and emotional well-being. Support of RLI program participants will go beyond a sabbatical period away from work to provide wraparound support of leaders, resulting in lasting impact to the individuals, their organizations, and the communities they serve.

Additionally, leaders from smaller budget organizations are less likely to have the

salaries and access to financial resources to make needed investments in their personal well-being. A flexible stipend awarded to the individual to spend on child and elder care, mental health services, etc., provided as part of the sabbatical program could be as pivotal as the time away from work for awardees.

Flexible Time

In benchmark research, the RLI team found the most optimal period for a sabbatical is three months. While some programs require awardees to take at least three consecutive months, other sabbatical programs offer more flexibility. For example, the [Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust](#) allows for its sabbatical to be taken all at once or divided into several smaller projects or programs. Authors Deborah S. Linnell and Tom Wolfred note in [Creative Disruption](#) that two months does not seem to provide enough time for restoration, and more than four months away can create challenges for the organization without necessarily increasing the program's benefits. This conclusion was reached through a study of lessons gathered from five conventional sabbatical programs that are not designed to cater to the unique needs of BIPOC leaders from smaller budget organizations.

To inform sabbatical length and structure specifically to meet the needs of BIPOC leaders of small budget organizations, the RLI team sees value in being guided by what was heard through its own stakeholder engagement. For example, some engagement participants suggested that the program should be flexibly structured, given that each leader has unique challenges and needs. Additionally, there were diverse perspectives shared on the desired amount of time away.

Among the 11 RLI survey respondents who stated that they had participated in sabbaticals previously, program length varied from one week to two years. Within that small sample, it was evident that those who were away for at least three months were likeliest to respond positively to the question, "Were you able to get what you wanted out of your sabbatical experience?"

It was also clear that respondents who took less than one month off were not able to get all of what they wanted out of their experience.

The RLI team sought to balance diverse perspectives from participants in terms of a desire for flexibility with what was learned from those who had experienced sabbaticals, and with lessons learned from conventional sabbatical programs. Based on these takeaways, 90 consecutive days is a useful baseline for RLI sabbatical length.

Ultimately, the RLI team recognizes the new and emergent nature of designing a sabbatical program for BIPOC leaders of smaller organizations. Instead of rigidly



In addition to serving individual leaders, RLI program offerings can provide opportunities for leaders to connect around shared challenges and build a supportive, collaborative network. **STOCK IMAGE**

prescribing a three-month sabbatical, the team recommends building in flexibility for applicants who request an exception to being away for 90 consecutive days by allowing applicants to propose a plan to divide the time across their fellowship year.

Flexible Stipend

The idea behind conventional sabbatical programs is that paid time away allows leaders space and opportunity to relax, reflect, and refresh their perspectives. In reality, leaders from smaller budget organizations are less likely to have the salaries and access to financial resources to make needed investments in their personal well-being.

This is why in addition to time away, the RLI will include a flexible stipend to spend on therapy, child or elder care, transportation, travel, etc., to meet the holistic needs of participating leaders. In addition to the \$100,000 investment in organizational capacity building, \$30,000 will be awarded as a stipend to each leader directly. With a \$30,000 stipend, nonprofit leaders can invest in self-selected experiences and opportunities that will allow them to center their rest and liberation in an environment that is responsive to their unique needs.

During the focus group convenings, the RLI team heard that rest and liberation look different to everyone. Through the use of this stipend, nonprofit leaders are encouraged to seek and center joy and rest during their sabbatical on their own terms. Having a stipend that is flexible for an array of uses—whether it be traveling, writing, creating, or family care—will not only encourage nonprofit leaders to dream big, but to have agency in deciding what type of rest they most need.

Building Connections

Benchmark research showed sabbatical programs typically offer space for connection and community-building among awardees, resulting in stronger, deeper, and more sustainable connections that last beyond the fellowship year. The RLI program recognizes the value of creating intentional space for building relationships that invite leaders of color to show up as their authentic selves, connect around shared challenges and aspirations, and build a supportive, collaborative network of local BIPOC leaders.

These program offerings, through their intention of extending beyond a sabbatical to create a broader fellowship experience, respond to the desires expressed by RLI survey respondents and focus group participants. They shared that beyond a sabbatical, they want space to learn new skills, gain new perspectives, and to advocate and leverage collective power to shift the systems that perpetuate inequality.

This desire for connection and relationship-building takes on an extra layer of significance for leaders of color. The RLI team heard leaders of color repeatedly express a desire for safe space to vent, connect, and heal around shared experiences related to racial identity. One survey respondent shared, “(I would like to have) a brave space for leaders of color to vent, strategize, and support one another and really talk about the issues that are plaguing us.”

Beyond connecting around shared experiences related to racial identity, participants also expressed seeing value in intentional space for coming together to simply connect, learn, and organize. For this reason, the RLI program will offer a retreat that includes time for relationship-building in another geography with the goal of creating physical and mental distance for awardees to zoom out from familiar ways of thinking and gain refreshed perspective as individuals and as leaders.

Research findings about the central role that relationships and networking opportunities play in creating a culture of well-being for BIPOC leaders is why the RLI team is recommending a year-long fellowship program term that includes multiple components and resources for awardees beyond the typical outline of a sabbatical.

After the Sabbatical

Beyond a sabbatical, it was repeatedly mentioned that BIPOC nonprofit leaders desire space to connect around shared challenges and aspirations related to racial identity, learn new skills and perspectives, and organize to tackle big issues within the nonprofit sector. The RLI team understands that creating intentional space for relationship-building and organic network formation during the proposed year-long duration of the RLI fellowship and afterwards through alumni engagement can be powerful ways to drive equity in the sector.

Creating space for ongoing alumni engagement will lead to building a strong, collaborative network that will cultivate courage, connectivity, and support for leaders disproportionately impacted by experiences of othering and barriers to accessing funding, capacity building supports, and decision making tables. This, in turn, will lead to a more cohesive and impactful nonprofit sector.

Nonprofit leaders engaged through the RLI survey or focus groups expressed the importance of investing in creating cultures of rest and liberation beyond a sabbatical program. For example, one survey respondent suggested that beyond the sabbatical program, they would appreciate support integrating a culture of holistic well-being within their organization. Their suggestion included, “organizational training and individual coaching on how orgs and employees can ensure that they take regular



Regular “health check-ups,” including physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and financial health, was suggested by one RLI survey respondent as a way to improve quality of life for BIPOC leaders before, during, and after a sabbatical. **STOCK IMAGE**

vacations and schedule regular ‘health check ups’ as a precursor to the sabbatical program. When I say ‘health,’ I mean physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and financial, with ‘prescriptions’ to improve health outcomes.”

This mirrors other responses that expressed a desire for support with shifting culture and practice within organizations by offering support to the organization’s full staff. Support to foster workplace cultures that promote rest and well-being could take multiple forms. It could look like offering a wellness consultant or coach to provide trainings for each organization or conducting an assessment for staff members to understand their strengths and growth areas as part of the investment in the organization. It could also include external facilitation or coaching for the returning awardee and their team to discuss reentry plans, integrating lessons learned on both ends, or to create a plan integrating well-being practices into daily operations at the organization (for example, by updating HR policies).

With these principles in mind, at the end of the RLI program year, leaders will be invited to continue to convene as part of annual gatherings through which alumni have space to connect, learn from one another and organically develop connections to help them continue to effect change both within their organizations and in the nonprofit industry overall.

Program Proposal Summary

In the previous section, the team detailed the typical structure of sabbatical and fellowship programs, and proposed a hybrid of these program models that will address the needs of BIPOC leaders of organizations with budgets of \$500,000 or less. This program structure is summarized below.

SABBATICAL

The RLI program will offer flexibility for leaders to schedule a recommended three-month sabbatical flexibly throughout the one-year program term to ensure maximum benefit to themselves and their organizations.

ORGANIZATION AWARD AMOUNT

The program will provide a \$100,000 award to each leader’s organization to invest as needed in capacity building and leadership development. This promotes building each organization’s “leadership bench” and encourages pro-active succession planning.

FLEXIBLE STIPEND

The program will provide each leader with a direct \$30,000 stipend they can use flexibly



A flexible stipend that leaders can use flexibly to cover a variety of expenses, including family care, allows sabbatical participants to tailor the experience to most effectively meet their own rest and self-care needs. **STOCK IMAGE**

to cover expenses such as travel, childcare, eldercare, therapy, program registration, etc. This empowers each leader to take agency of their sabbatical and identify the experiences that will most directly meet their wellness needs, ensuring long-term impact of the sabbatical and fellowship experience.

FELLOWSHIP, BEYOND THE SABBATICAL

Participants will be invited to take part in one year of programming with focus on community building and personal and professional leadership development.

LEARNING JOURNEY

The fellowship will include a retreat that offers time for relationship-building and visiting another geography. The retreat will aim to create physical and mental distance for awardees to zoom out from familiar ways of thinking and gain refreshed perspective as individuals and as leaders.

PRE-PROGRAM SUPPORT

The program will offer a pre-application orientation for applicants to engage with one another and begin to prepare for time away. The program will offer one-on-one office hours to provide application assistance.

In addition to leaders applying directly, the program will solicit nominations to allow the program to be more accessible to leaders who would not typically allow themselves time away from work to seek rest.

ALUMNI NETWORK

Following their fellowship year, participants will be invited to continue to convene through annual gatherings in which alumni have space to connect, learn from one another, and organically develop collaborations.

Shifting Nonprofit Work Culture in the Ecosystem

Shifting Nonprofit Work Culture in the Ecosystem

The RLI team gathered input from BIPOC nonprofit leaders about burnout, sabbatical programs, and the need for rest. The team heard so much more from stakeholders about the culture that leads to burnout and the need for time off in the first place. Survey responses and conversations in the four focus groups made clear: the RLI team could not focus on building out the vision for a sabbatical program without examining critical elements that perpetuate burnout and fatigue at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels.

Through the RLI research and engagement process, the team realized there must also be efforts to shift trends in the ecosystem. To promote rest and liberation, BIPOC leaders need support fostering healthier and more balanced work cultures. While RLI upholds that expanding the opportunity for more BIPOC leaders to rest is vital and can generate benefits for the leaders, their organizations, and the communities they serve, creating a sabbatical program is just one step toward a broader vision of shifting culture in the nonprofit ecosystem.

For nonprofit organizations and their staff and leaders, having time off is necessary (and oftentimes overdue) because of work stressors and other conditions that disproportionately impact BIPOC leaders in the nonprofit space. However, what is truly imperative is creating the type of work culture that does not send people back into unhealthy work environments after they felt it was necessary to take time off to remove themselves from those spaces. Without addressing root causes, cycles of



BIPOC leaders face additional cultural and systemic barriers to finding adequate rest and wellness within and outside of work. **STOCK IMAGE**

burnout are perpetuated. Programs should aim to shift toxic, burnout-inducing work cultures, not just to create a temporary “out” for employees.

Layers of the Ecosystem

As the RLI team examined the data, it became clear that there were three layers at which change needs to occur to foster cultures of rest and liberation: individual, organizational, and societal.

At the individual level, the team heard reflections on what BIPOC nonprofit leaders need to thrive, not just cope, at work. But more than that, the team heard how their lived experiences at work impacted their overall well-being as a person.

At the organizational level, the RLI team learned about policies, practices, and elements of work culture that either prevented or supported rest and liberation for employees. While leaders expressed concerns of being singled out at the individual level (for example, being labeled as “too radical,” or “an agitator”) and possibly put at risk of being let go by their employer, the organizational level seemed like a level in which it felt safer to enact change.

At the societal level, the team heard resoundingly that many of the shifts at both the individual and organizational levels felt more challenging and less sustainable without changes at the core of how work norms have been established and maintained by society. Although work culture has evolved over time, survey respondents and focus group participants reiterated that many of the concepts and practices that shape nonprofit work culture today are deeply inequitable, harmful, and do not honor employees’ humanity or support holistic well-being. This is the level where many expressed the need for deep collective reimagining of the mindsets, systems, and practices that are present in today’s overall work culture.

Each of these three layers contains unique areas of focus that can be used to inform a robust suite of offerings, including the RLI sabbatical program. It is important that solutions be generated at each level in order to bring about real and sustained change for BIPOC nonprofit leaders, which will subsequently benefit all leaders.

Current Reality: What BIPOC Nonprofit Leaders are Experiencing

Survey respondents noted the following as some of the biggest contributions to their burnout:

Burnout: Contributing Factors

WORK CULTURE

- Work culture is unhealthy.
- Overworking is glorified and rewarded.
- People are minimized to how much they can produce.
- Leaders are expected to work beyond their capacity and job description, and “wear multiple hats.”
- There is a lack of clear boundaries, or organizations do not honor boundaries.
- Leaders feel a need to be performative at work, like they can’t be their authentic selves.
- Leaders feel a need to always say yes and be agreeable.
- Leaders feel a false sense of urgency, like everything is a priority.
- Leaders feel underappreciated.
- There is a pervasive culture of “doing more with less.”

LEADERSHIP & TEAM DYNAMICS

- There is a lack of equitable representation of different identities.
- Work environments do not feel welcoming or supportive.
- There is an unbalanced distribution of work.
- Everyone has a lot on their plate; it can be hard to get additional support or coverage.
- There is a lack of capacity to have work covered while one is taking time off; leaders in turn delay taking time off, or after returning, the workload is even more overwhelming.
- Feelings of overwork and overwhelm are slammed and steamrolled.
- Western individualistic culture is pervasive; there is a lack of true team support.
- Microaggressions and other forms of discrimination are ever-present in the workplace.



In some nonprofit workplaces, leaders glorify and reward overwork and do not set clear boundaries between work and life, resulting in others not having positive examples of boundary-setting. **STOCK IMAGE**

MONEY & RESOURCES

- There is a lack of fair and equitable pay.
- There is a lack of adequate benefits.
- There is limited access to wellness resources.
- Scarcity mindsets perpetuate inequitable funding for nonprofits, especially BIPOC-led nonprofits.
- There is unrealistic importance placed on “doing more with less.”

MENTAL HEALTH AND MINDSETS

- There is a belief that BIPOC leaders must work twice as hard for the same recognition and/or compensation as non-BIPOC leaders.
- Leaders feel guilt around taking time off, because they were taught to always “go, go, go.”
- There is a lack of clear boundaries between work and life.
- Mental health is not considered an adequate reason for taking time off.
- Elements of unhealthy work culture feel ingrained; leaders feel like they don’t know other ways of operating.
- Leaders don’t know or don’t have examples of:
 - How to take care of themselves
 - How to say no
 - How to establish boundaries
 - What work-life balance should look like

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

- Time off policies are overly restrictive.
- Organizational structures are inequitable.
- Organizational policies are antiquated and not created with staff input.
- Policies are not human-centered.
- There is a lack of variation and flexibility in time off policies.
- Leaders feel they are repeatedly told to take care of themselves, but lack the time or support to do so.



BIPOC leaders often feel guilty taking time off, because they were taught their worth is tied to their productivity. **STOCK IMAGE**

Reimagining the Ecosystem

The section below outlines aspects of the ecosystem that would support and sustain BIPOC nonprofit leaders and complement the sabbatical program. Based on what the RLI team heard from focus groups, surveys, and conversations, the following themes emerged as important considerations for cultivating a healthy ecosystem.

Human First

Many engagement participants lifted up the need for clearly defined boundaries in order to achieve work-life balance. They want leaders that create and uphold human-centered policies and culture in the workplace, even when it may look different than how peer organizations operate. It is essential to have people leading by example when exploring how to treat employees like human beings first. Humans need adequate time away from work, not just reflected in policies for PTO, but also in flexibility around taking breaks throughout the day. This also includes flexibility regarding working from home and other types of time away that honors human needs outside from work.

THEMES:

- Boundaries
- Work-life balance
- Workplaces that honor humanness
- Time off/away from work

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

When it comes to team dynamics, participants shared that they would like to experience more of a culture of belonging at work. People expressed desires to be seen, heard, respected, and valued for who they are and their contributions to their organizations. Representation in leadership as well as among peers was also raised up as important to participants, so that they did not feel isolated or like “the only one.” Being able to collaborate and lean on team members when there is a need for support or extra capacity also emerged. Overall, participants wanted to feel like a part of a healthy and cohesive team where distribution of work is equitable.

THEMES:

- Peer support and collaboration
- Representative leadership



Nonprofit employees want leaders that create and uphold human-centered policies and culture in the workplace, even when it may look different from how peer organizations operate. Pictured: Madhavi Reddy, executive director for Community Development Advocates of Detroit.

IMAGE CREDIT: VALAURIAN WALLER

- Culture of belonging
- Capacity and support
- Peers that look “like us”
- Healthy and cohesive team

Dollars and Sense

While it may seem obvious, many participants shared that having fair compensation for the work they do would be a significant improvement. This is tied to nonprofits organizations receiving equitable funding from philanthropy, especially those led by BIPOC leaders. Additionally, having access to alternative benefits and other resources that support the holistic well-being of employees was also identified as an important shift participants would like to see.

THEMES:

- Fair compensation/salaries
- Equitable funding for organizations
- Access to resources that support well-being
- Adequate benefits

For the Culture

Reflections and ideas related to work culture came up frequently. Ultimately, culture is the soil within which policies, systems, and practices either grow or wither. While culture is not always easily tangible or measured, it is clear that there is work to be done to shift unhealthy work environments that lead to burnout. This will take releasing outdated and toxic elements of work culture and reimagining supportive, yet productive work cultures.

Engagement participants spoke of wanting to feel more spaciousness at work rather than reacting to false urgency where every task is a priority. Some participants shared wanting to feel more trusted at work, leading to increased agency and flexibility on how their workload is managed. Additionally, participants want more supportive team cultures that allow for coverage of teammates when they need to care for themselves, promoting both individual and organization-wide wellness.

THEMES:

- Reimagined work culture



While it may seem obvious, fair compensation would provide nonprofit employees with a far better experience and allow them to better provide for their own health and wellness needs. **STOCK IMAGE**

- Agency, flexibility, and trust
- Spaciousness—redefining urgency
- Supportive team culture

Mind Over Matter

Working in a toxic environment takes a toll on employees' mental health over time. Through the engagement process, the RLI team heard themes related to unhealthy work mindsets passed down over generations to mental health stressors linked to the day-to-day expectations at work. Participants wished to see organizations prioritize the mental health of their teams and support their well-being by connecting them to relevant resources or programming. Many participants expressed interest in resources that could help them unlearn toxic mindsets and support new thought patterns. They seek not only awareness of these resources, but access, possibly even provision by employers.

THEMES:

- Mental health and well-being supports
- Undoing unhealthy work mindsets and habits
- Awareness of and access to resources
- Prioritized mental health—shift toward more healthy mindsets

Walking the Walk

Participants shared the necessity of the above changes being reflected in policies and systems. It is not enough to say these are the changes we'd like to see; more progressive policies must be codified in the documents that inform the ways workplaces operate. This may look like creating new time off policies or examining and redeveloping staff handbooks to be more equitable and to better meet the needs of staff members. It may also look like putting systems in place to ensure staff are not working beyond their capacity, and protocols that support team members with their workloads when they need a break.

THEMES:

- Structures, systems, processes, and policies that inform a healthy workplace
- New time off/time away from work policies
- Capacity and support

The previous section reviewed the things that need to change in the larger ecosystem of nonprofit work. Many of these things contribute to the overall need for sabbatical that BIPOC leaders have, and addressing these factors will contribute to a healthier, more sustainable way of working and being for everyone.

The next section will explore other ways BIPOC leaders can access the support they need to preserve their well-being while doing nonprofit work that complements sabbatical programs.

Beyond the Sabbatical Program: Developing Supports for BIPOC Leaders

During the engagement phase, the RLI team heard valuable reflections, insights, and ideas. Below are recommendations for programmatic supports, resources, and workplace culture-shifting initiatives beyond the sabbatical program outlined above.

While a sabbatical program provides an opportunity for BIPOC nonprofit leaders to take time off to care for themselves, it does not necessarily imply change in the larger ecosystem. Leaders may still be returning to inequitable, toxic workplaces where burnout is inevitable. This cycle can only be stopped if changes are made throughout multiple layers of the ecosystem.

As such, the following ideas are being proposed as complementary pieces to the RLI sabbatical program. These suggestions offer support to more than just executive leaders. They aim to move the needle on the culture shifts needed to create a healthier work-life balance across the sector as a whole.

Recommendations: Gathering in Community

LEARNING COMMUNITY

Create a community of peer nonprofit leaders partnering to learn more about ways to practice healthier boundaries, promote work-life balance, exchange best practices for shifting work culture, and explore examples of flexible workplace practices.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Create a cohort of practitioners willing to execute flexible workplace practices and discuss successes and challenges.

PEER SUPPORT NETWORK

Create a cohort of nonprofit leaders and sector decision makers willing to explore

new workplace models and tangible ways to make workplaces healthier and reduce staff burnout.

BENEFITS TO GATHERING IN COMMUNITY

- Cultivates cultures of belonging
- Enables collaborative experimentation and exchange
- Encourages putting theory into practice
- Participants can exchange experiences, observations, and lessons learned
- Encourages thought partnership to develop culture-shifting strategies
- Increases buy-in from stakeholders and co-creation of solutions
- There is power in numbers, resulting in more support for policy and culture shifts
- Strengthens existing sector networks

Recommendations: Accessible Resources and Supports

SERVICE DIRECTORY

Create a directory of wellness services, resources, and mental health supports that can be referenced by individuals and activated by workplaces.

EVENTS CALENDAR

Share up-to-date information about available wellness events and programs.

WELLNESS WORKSHOPS

Offer workshops hosted by therapists, counselors, and other mental health professionals to educate and promote cultures of rest and well-being in the workplace.

PROFESSIONAL COACHING

Support one-on-one professional coaching rooted in principles of healthy work-life balance to support nonprofit leaders.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Provide tools and resources for conflict resolution to promote healthy communication and positive work culture.

FUND ACCESS

Provide funding opportunities that allow participants to access a wider range of wellness supports and programs, beyond benefits provided by their employer.



Creating space for nonprofit leaders to gather in community cultivates cultures of belonging and strengthens existing networks, among other benefits. **STOCK IMAGE**

PUBLISH RECOMMENDATIONS

Develop a list of recommendations and related trainings for organizations who want to prioritize wellness and shift their work culture.

BENEFITS TO ACCESSIBLE RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS

- Synthesizes information so that it is easy to access
- Offers opportunities to learn from experts in the field
- Provides tools for individuals and workplaces
- Greater access and resources means money is less of a barrier to access wellness resources, and more BIPOC nonprofit leaders can benefit
- Minimizes time and possible discomfort, embarrassment, or shame of looking for resources and support

Recommendations: Space for Restorative Practices and Improving Well-Being

OFFER A GATHERING PLACE

Activate a physical space for folks to convene and have an outlet. Activities in the space could include:

- o *Events that center joy, laughter, and play*
- o *Relaxing group activities*
- o *Reimagining work culture*
- o *Embodied practices like meditation, breathwork, yoga*
- o *De-stressing techniques*
- o *Learning and processing together*
- o *On-site amenities like nap pods, meditation rooms, etc.*

BENEFITS TO SPACE FOR RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

- Offers a safe space for leaders to break from work and show up as their authentic selves
- Offers space to relax, cultivate joy, and build community
- Offers an outlet for leaders to express thoughts, feelings, and experiences, serving to cultivate connectivity with peers
- Offers space for leaders to take part in wellness activities alongside people who look like them, which will help to combat feelings of isolation and build solidarity around shared experiences



Offering a physical space for nonprofit leaders to gather with the sole purpose of taking a break from work in community with other leaders helps leaders find respite and build solidarity with others facing similar challenges. **STOCK IMAGE**

Recommendations: Intentional Exploration, Processing, and Reimagining of Concepts

HOST COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Offer community conversations in which participants can further unpack and process concepts such as:

- o *Guilt*
- o *Urgency*
- o *Martyrdom*
- o *Glorification of hard work*
- o *Grind/hustle culture*
- o *Spaciousness*
- o *Prioritization*
- o *Boundaries*
- o *Balance*

In these conversations, invite speakers to share best practices and how they have shifted to healthy approaches to work.

SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Offer leadership and professional development opportunities around creating healthy workplace culture. Encourage professionals to explore new practices and ways of thinking, such as:

- o *Establishing healthy work boundaries*
- o *Honoring personal health and well-being while also serving others*
- o *Asking for what you need in professional settings*

BENEFITS TO INTENTIONAL EXPLORATION, PROCESSING, AND REIMAGINING OF CONCEPTS

- Increases awareness and understanding of concepts, including how they show up and why
- Brings light to power dynamics that prevent people from asking for what they need at work
- Provides real examples of alternative practices
- Instills healthy mindsets and behaviors that can be applied at work



Hosting community conversations on relevant topics like hustle culture and finding balance can provide leaders with new ideas about how to promote healthy practices and approaches to work. **STOCK IMAGE**

- Allows for opportunities to process as a group
- Encourages new ways of thinking and doing

Recommendations: Develop Advocacy Practices

ADVOCATE FOR WELLNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Lead conversations and invite and encourage nonprofit leaders to participate in conversations for local, state, and federal policy that encourage:

- o *Equitable salaries and other compensation*
- o *Health and wellness benefits, stipends*
- o *Healthy time off policies and work expectations (ex: shorter work week, breaks, work from home, mental health days, flex hours, bereavement policies, work boundaries)*
- o *Human-centered leadership, policies, and practices*
- o *Incorporating on-site amenities that promote rest and wellness (nap pods, meditation room, etc.)*
- o *Adequate capacity on teams and reasonable work distribution*
- o *Employee wellness check-ins*
- o *Wellness resources or programming provided by employers*
- o *Funding that invests in the organization and staff, not just programs*
- o *Expanded leadership, including leadership that is representative; pipeline development, succession planning, alternative leadership models (for example, diffused leadership)*

BENEFITS TO DEVELOPING ADVOCACY PRACTICES

- Ensures more deeply rooted and sustainable shifts through policy and culture change, and more widespread impact
- Elevates the voices of those most impacted by toxic work spaces
- Brings about new norms and standards
- Sets examples of courageous and transformative leadership
- Encourages better work-life balance and healthier professional experiences for BIPOC nonprofit leaders

Recommendations: Other Non-Sabbatical “Time Away from Work” Offerings

PROVIDE NON-SABBATICAL OPPORTUNITIES TO REST

Offer non-sabbatical opportunities to rest, take time off, or engage in restorative activities.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS DAYS

Standardize regular Mental Health and Wellness Days in the workplace (for example, a monthly paid day off to prioritize mental health).

FLEXIBLE OR UNLIMITED PTO

Standardize flexible or unlimited paid time off for employees, including vacation, sick, and holiday time.

BENEFITS TO NON-SABBATICAL TIME AWAY FROM WORK

- More than just executive leaders can take part, making this accessible for all staff members of an organization to participate and benefit
- Helps to prevent burnout
- There is a higher chance of approval and fewer capacity implications for regular shorter time off than for a long sabbatical

This section reviewed specific policies and practices that can be offered beyond a sabbatical program for BIPOC nonprofit leaders. These proposed changes can have tangible benefits for BIPOC individuals working in the nonprofit sector, and can complement a sabbatical program as a temporary form of respite and restoration. Taken all together, the RLI sabbatical and complementary recommendations for change in the culture of nonprofit work orient the ecosystem on a path toward liberation.



Encouraging non-sabbatical time away from work, like regular Mental Health Days or unlimited paid time off, helps to prevent burnout in the workplace. **STOCK IMAGE**

Conclusion & Reflections

Conclusion & Reflections

Inside a sector that is plagued with burnout and the stresses of nonprofit leaders having to wear multiple hats, sabbaticals can provide an opportunity for rest and rejuvenation.

As lessons from well-established programs illustrate, through sabbaticals, nonprofit leaders are able to reclaim time to step away from daily work routines to rest and rejuvenate their minds, bodies, and souls. They also find space within themselves where they can deeply reflect and breathe in new creativity.

The RLI team coalesced around the vision of designing a sabbatical program and a set of complementary supports that are responsive to the needs and aspirations of Black, Indigenous, and people of color leading smaller budget nonprofits. Typically, these leaders face numerous structural barriers to participating in conventional sabbatical programs.

Through sabbaticals, nonprofit leaders are able to reclaim time to step away from daily work routines to rest and rejuvenate their minds, bodies, and souls.

Looking more deeply, these same structural barriers are manifestations of the systemic racism that adds an extra layer to the stress and strain of leadership for BIPOC individuals working in the nonprofit sector.

It is for these reasons that the RLI team designed a sabbatical fellowship program that includes an \$100,000 direct capacity building investment in BIPOC-led organizations with budgets of \$500,000 a year or less; a direct investment of \$30,000 in the BIPOC leaders of those organizations to use on personal and professional development; a self-selected, dedicated three months away from work that allows leaders to rest; supportive program staff who can offer application, planning, and resource assistance; and supportive cohort and alumni networks to engage leaders within and beyond formal program activities.

As the team gathered input from BIPOC nonprofit leaders about sabbatical programs and the need for rest, stakeholders shared about the work culture that leads to burnout and necessitates time off in the first place. In response, the RLI program guidelines could not only focus on the vision for a sabbatical program without examining other critical elements of the ecosystem.

Looking at this larger ecosystem, the team determined that it would not be enough to only design a sabbatical program, there must also be efforts to shift the larger ecosystem and develop complementary programming and support to create a healthier and more balanced work culture for BIPOC leaders to thrive.

This report found a need to reimagine nonprofit work culture with a focus on cultivating belonging, valuing rest, and modeling alternative forms of decentralized leadership. This report proposes opportunities to create communities of practice in which experimentation is encouraged, lessons are shared across the sector, and practitioners support and encourage one another through successes and failures.

Additionally, to achieve real, systemic change, there is a need to support the formation of coalitions to advocate for cultural shifts within workplaces in the nonprofit sector, such as equitable compensation, PTO policies that honor time for rest, and access to well-rounded healthcare and retirement benefits.

This report and the proposal for a sabbatical fellowship are just the first steps on the path to a culture of liberation. In the immediate term, funding for implementation of the program this report designed is needed; additional resources to pursue opportunities to explore the other findings and recommendations is needed; partners and collaborators looking to support this program or design and implement their own programs to address the structural issues contributing to overwork and burnout identified here are needed.



Providing a sabbatical fellowship program is just a first step toward a widespread culture of rest and liberation in the nonprofit sector. **STOCK IMAGE**

In the long term, space, capacity, and support to build momentum and connect a movement toward a culture of liberation are the calls to action for people at all levels of the broader philanthropic and nonprofit ecosystem to join this effort.

“The urgency (for) rest and care is imperative. The need to measure out our responsibilities because the work is long and hard as we continue to deconstruct and abolish things long held. A sabbatical needs to reinforce that while you are taking time off, coming back to the same thing is not an option; changes need to be committed to beforehand and (followed through on) upon return.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT

“This is about more than naps... Rest pushes back and disrupts a system that views human bodies as a tool for production and labor. It is a counter narrative. We know that we are not machines. We are divine.”

Tricia Hersey, The Nap Ministry

