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Racial Leadership Gap Among Detroit Nonprofits, New Survey Finds

DETROIT- Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA) in partnership with Data Driven Detroit (D3) today released the results of a first-of-its-kind survey that shows the racial leadership gap within the nonprofit sector in the city of Detroit.

The Detroit Nonprofit Leadership Census survey conducted in February 2021 sought to identify the percentage of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) nonprofit leaders in the city of Detroit and to examine the disparities that exist among the city’s nonprofits. The survey captured more than 200 responses from the estimated 1,500 nonprofits serving the city of Detroit. Of those responding organizations, 66.5% have BIPOC executive directors, while 62.6% of BIPOC executive directors are the first leaders of color in their organizations. The survey found 4.9% of white-led organizations did not have BIPOC board members while 1.6% of them have a 100% BIPOC board. Additionally, 19.6% of surveyed, white-led organizations did not have any BIPOC staff members.

“Detroit is a city that is predominately Black and it’s important to affirm where BIPOC leaders are having an impact in their communities,” said Nellie Tsai, social innovation officer at MNA. “This survey allowed us to collect and analyze data in our fight to confront and dismantle systemic racism and build more equitable workplaces in Detroit. We also sat down with the respondents of the survey and shared the preliminary results and interactive report with them first. We wanted to make sure that the data released is reflective of their lived experiences and shines a spotlight on the specific hurdles faced by leaders of color in the nonprofit sector.”

Key findings include:

- The percentage of BIPOC leaders among survey respondents is lower than the percentage of BIPOC residents in Detroit as a whole.
- BIPOC-led organizations generally have a higher percentage of BIPOC board and staff members.
- Organizations led by Black women tend to have a higher percentage of younger leaders.
- White-led organizations tend to have a higher percentage of BIPOC members on their staff team than on their board.
- BIPOC-led organizations have an average length of existence that is 4 years less than that of the White-led organizations.
- Although data is currently somewhat limited, White-led organizations appear to generally have more human and capital resources than BIPOC-led organizations, in terms of
numbers of the average board members, average staff members, owned assets, and earned revenues.

MNA collaborated with D3 to administer the survey. Co.act Detroit and Michigan Community Resources led focus groups and programming with survey respondents. Additional data support for the project was received from the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University, and funding was provided by the Knight Foundation.

The survey is the first-ever detailed dataset about the demographics of Detroit nonprofit leaders, board members, and staff as well as their connections with local funders.

“Each organization that helped administer this survey understands that the transformational change we’re seeking in the nonprofit sector begins with an understanding of depth and scope of resource inequities,” said Allandra Bulger, executive director of Co.act Detroit. “Hearing from those individuals and organizations most impacted by these inequities allows us to get an accurate picture of the challenge — and to source and amplify solutions to barriers they face.”

The survey concluded with input from focus group who weighed in on the final data and report. “Knight Foundation’s work in Detroit is deeply focused on equitable outcomes, said Nate Wallace, Knight’s Detroit program director. “That starts with doing the due diligence to balance the table.”

The *Detroit Nonprofit Leadership* survey is an intentional effort to understand the challenges faced by people of color as they strive to obtain leadership positions within the sector. We will continue the work with our partners to expand this effort statewide in the new year. Click [here](#) to view the report in its entirety.

**About MNA:**
*Michigan Nonprofit Association is a nonprofit 501 © (3) founded in 1990, to strengthen nonprofits and the communities they serve by advancing collective power, knowledge, systems, and strategy. MNA is a statewide membership organization dedicated to promoting and supporting anti-racism and social justice in the nonprofit sector. For more information, visit [www.mnaonline.org](http://www.mnaonline.org)*

**About Data Driven Detroit (D3):**
*Data Driven Detroit (D3) is metro Detroit’s community data hub. We collect, analyze, interpret, and share accessible, high-quality data and information to drive informed decision-making. Our work is focused on increasing data-driven outcomes and facilitating collaborative processes throughout metro Detroit and Michigan. For more, visit [www.datadrivendetroit.org](http://www.datadrivendetroit.org).*

**About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation:**
*We are social investors who support democracy by funding free expression and journalism, arts and culture in community, research in areas of media and democracy, and in the success of American cities and towns where the Knight brothers once had newspapers. Learn more at [kf.org](http://kf.org) and follow @knightfdn on social media.*

**About Co.act Detroit:**
*Co.act Detroit is a hub that accelerates transformative impact with nonprofit and community organizations in southeast Michigan through collaborative idea generation, cross-sector*
resources, and equitable access to world-class programming and learning opportunities. Find out more at coactdetroit.org. Co.act Detroit is an initiative launched by TechTown Detroit.

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