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# Redefining Success: Evaluating Decision-Making Structures and Metrics of Effectiveness in Racial Justice-Oriented, Bay Area Nonprofits

By Ariana Apostol-Dooley

In the wake of uprisings in response to the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in the summer of 2020, individuals and communities have turned to racial justice-centered nonprofit organizations to guide conversations and advocacy combating institutionalized racism. Simultaneously, historically white organizations and corporations, including some racial justice nonprofits, have been challenged to reevaluate the way they meet — or fail to meet — the needs of their Black, Indigenous, & Person of Color (BIPOC) staff and communities. The institutionalization of racial justice work into the familiar 501(c)(3) status in the last fifty years in particular, in what scholars have named the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC), can limit actual change-making into coping with symptoms, rather than addressing root causes, of racism in the United States. The co-optation of racial justice work into a nonprofit framework is marked by competition for limited external funding sources and often results in the exclusion of BIPOC in decision-making in favor of short-term solutions to perceived inequities. This study builds upon existing research exploring the structures that determine how organizational decisions are made. I present a case study of three Bay Area-based, racial justice-oriented nonprofit organizations, in which I find that organizations that practice intentionality about centering impacted identities can overcome these traditional limitations of nonprofits and excel as effective advocates of structural change. Additionally, highly effective organizations understand ‘success’ in terms of narrative shift and building power, rather than numerically centered definitions that appeal to funders without affecting change.

## I. Introduction

The summer of 2020 was both a flashpoint for the racial justice movement, and a zeitgeist of the current political and cultural moment in the United States. Nationally, we saw a resurgence of collective outrage over racial injustice in the United States in response to the death of George Floyd coupled with a pandemic that has disproportionately impacted communities of color.<sup>1</sup> Multiracial anti-racist efforts to respond to systemic inequality were countered with white supremacist rallying calls by former President Trump and his supporters doubling down on “America First” rhetoric. Patterns of racial outrage and advancement met with white backlash are nothing new — the abolition of slavery did not abolish anti-Black racism, but rather forced racialized oppression to morph into other and at times less conspicuous forms, whether through literacy tests, legislated segregation during Jim Crow, and eventually our current system of mass incarceration. Still, something about this particular movement *felt* different for many. In the Bay Area, itself a long time home for progressive ideologies and a geographic powerhouse of revolutionary thinking, previously far-fetched ideas to defund the police gained tangible momentum and expanded calls for police abolition throughout the country. While some of the newfound advocates for racial equity were undoubtedly in the movement for the trend, narratives around the police, public health equity, and systemic inequality have tangibly and permanently shifted.

In addition to the change in the general (and particularly white) population’s consciousness about the current experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), various historically white institutions are taking a renewed look at the way they meet — or perhaps more often, fail to meet — the needs of their BIPOC staff, constituents, and populations. Corporations like Amazon have placed a moratorium on the use of racist facial recognition software, Facebook pledged to increase Black leadership by 30%, and Youtube promised to support and promote the work of Black creators and artists.<sup>2</sup> As corporations, government institutions, and other organizations modify practices to shift towards equity, the nonprofit sector also grapples with its own history of exclusion and profiting off of the continued subjugation of BIPOC groups and issues. While some actively impact the lived experiences of those they serve, others superficially address problems perceived by those who are not personally impacted, sometimes ultimately doing more harm than good. In a pandemic-stricken and racial justice awakened moment, in particular, many are looking towards racial justice non-profit organizations for guidance.<sup>3</sup>

My research question seeks to understand how decision-making structures as well as definitions of ‘success’ ultimately determine the effectiveness of racial justice-oriented nonprofits. As racial justice movements and organizations gain momentum, it has become even more important to evaluate the organizations involved in racial justice work to learn more about what kinds of decision-making structures make certain organizations ‘successful’ in meeting their racial justice goals, and perhaps more importantly what *defines* success for organizations that seem successful in achieving their missions and in advancing racial justice more broadly. To understand how nonprofits make decisions and define success, I conducted case studies of three racial justice oriented nonprofit organizations in the Bay Area. Each of these organizations is medium-sized and has its own decision making structures and foci, and this geographic area has been a hub of racial justice organizing work for decades, including but not limited to its 1966 inception of the Black Panthers movement in Oakland and the 1964 Free Speech Movement in Berkeley. I conducted 23 interviews of staff, Board members, participants, stakeholders, and Executives and reviewed key organizational documents to understand what success means and how it is achieved — or not achieved — from a geographically localized, contemporary perspective.

My research also examines the current state of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC), explored in depth in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*. Defined by Rodriguez, the NPIC is “the idea that nonprofit organizations, in their current forms, have become mechanisms of repression designed to fuel the consolidation of and institutionalization of social change efforts through processes of formalization, bureaucratization, and

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1 Health Equity Considerations & Racial & Ethnic Minority Groups. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>

2 Roose, K. Social Media Giants Support Racial Justice. Their Products Undermine It. The New York Times, June 22, 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/19/technology/facebook-youtube-twitter-black-lives-matter.html>

3 Fisher, D. R. The diversity of the recent Black Lives Matter protests is a good sign for racial equity. Brookings Institution, July 8, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2020/07/08/the-diversity-of-the-recent-black-lives-matter-protests-is-a-good-sign-for-racial-equity/>

hierarchy,” and looms large over institutions claiming to alleviate social problems through their work.<sup>4</sup> Government and foundation-funded organizations are restricted in their ability to meaningfully reform or alleviate social issues by the threat of lost funding if their work threatens the continued practices of the state and historically white, elite-run foundations. I utilize this text to understand the context and implications of the NPIC and to provide an updated landscape of racial justice organizing in an era of increasingly institutionalized movements.

My findings suggest that effective racial justice oriented nonprofits in particular define success in their ability to shift narratives and build power and have decision making structures that center BIPOC and directly impact voices. More broadly, my findings can be used to determine what kinds of racial-justice organizations are worth participating in and allocating resources to, how racial justice nonprofits shape movement-building, and serve as a model for how other organizational decision-making — nonprofit or not — can create structures that are inherently anti-racist. The study will also contribute to existing literature on nonprofit management and elucidate the ways that racial justice-oriented nonprofits can have a tangible impact on the issues and populations they target through their work and situate racial justice organizing within broader cultural phenomena.

My paper will first review existing literature surrounding nonprofit structure and racial justice movement building and describe my research methods. I then explore various elements of each nonprofit, including how they define racial justice, their overarching logics and structures, the identities of their staff and members, how they decide who to serve and how, and what defines their success in meeting their mission related goals. I conclude with an analysis of my findings and a discussion of the current state of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex, additionally offering implications for nonprofits in a post-2020 racial justice landscape.

## II. Background

Existing literature surrounding nonprofit structure provides context for my research question, while failing to address the explicit role of decision-making structures and understandings of success in creating effective anti-racist organizations, leaving a gap that my research aims to fill.

### A. Definitions

#### 1. Nonprofits

The nonprofit sector, according to Salamon and Anheir’s<sup>5</sup> definition, includes the set of organizations that are (1) “Organized, i.e., institutionalized to some extent”; (2) “Private, i.e., institutionally separate from government”; (3) “Non-profit distributing, i.e., not returning any profits generated to their owners or directors”; (4) “Self-governing, i.e., equipped to control their own activities”; and (5) “Voluntary, i.e., involving some meaningful degree of voluntary participation, either in the actual conduct of the agency’s activities or in the management of its affairs.”<sup>6</sup> Each of the organizations I study is classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) organization. 501(c)(3) status allows for a nonprofit organization to be tax-exempt as well as to engage in advocacy work, so long as they do not specifically lobby or endorse specific candidates.

#### 2. Mission Statements

Nonprofit mission statements “serve to formally establish the goals and functions of an organization by defining what it does, whom it serves, how they do it, and where it does its work.”<sup>7</sup> I use mission statements in my study to understand the stated goals and mechanisms of each organization I study. Mission statements also provide background as I explore actual decision-making practices and measurements of success on both smaller and larger scales in the organizations.

4 Rodriguez, D. *The Rise of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex*.

5 Anheier, H. *Nonprofit organizations. Theory, management, policy*. London: Bay Area Equity Atlas. (2021). *Race/ethnicity*, 2005.

6 Themudo, N. S. *Nonprofits in Crisis: Economic Development, Risk, and the Philanthropic Kuznets Curve (Philanthropic and Nonprofit Studies) (Illustrated ed.)*. Indiana University Press, 2013

7 “Fundamentals.” *Racial Equity Tools*. Accessed January 31, 2021. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/fundamentals>.

8 Meshanko, R. “What should our mission statement say?” *Idealist. Nonprofit FAQ*. 2010. <http://www.idealists.org/if/idealists/en/FAQ/QuestionViewer/default?section=03&item=21>

### 3. Racial Justice

The way that my study and these organizations understand concepts of racism, racial justice, and white supremacy substantially shape both my own findings as well as how organizations work to meet their stated goals of racial justice. My study understands these concepts using an Ethnic Studies scholarly lens, under which race, racism, and white supremacy play an integral role in all institutions as well as in the unequal distribution of resources, and which racial justice-oriented nonprofits strive to combat through their work. In this framework, race is understood as historically and socially constructed and essential to all U.S. institutions and systems, particularly as it relates to the distribution of resources and racial hierarchy.<sup>9</sup> This study understands white supremacy as a core part of the Western theorized “social contract” between the state and an individual, acting as a global political, economic, and cultural system that shapes all institutions as they exist today.<sup>10</sup> Racism, then, as defined by renowned scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”<sup>11</sup>

While much focus is paid in mainstream media to individual or interpersonal racism, which are individual acts of racism in language, beliefs, attitudes, and actions, institutional and structural racism — broad systems of racial bias that create inequitable outcomes for white people in comparison to people of color — are often ignored. For instance, while one person using a racial slur may be overtly racist, a criminal legal system in which people of color are disproportionately criminalized and incarcerated represents a much larger system of oppression. I explicitly articulate the deep and institutionalized role of race in all systems to frame the ways that racial justice organizations can either effectively or superficially work to combat racism in their communities. The Nonprofit Industrial Complex, which will be discussed in detail below, deliberately works to institutionalize racial justice work within existing systems to allow structural and institutional racism to continue while superficially working to address racism in individual terms.

### 4. Success:

My study understands nonprofit “success” in terms of whether the participants interviewed *felt* that their organization was effectively working to meet their mission. Nonprofits have long struggled to measure success, often relying heavily on measuring statistics and activity rather than mission impact to determine success.<sup>12</sup> I use interview responses to evaluate overall organizational success as perceived by staff, Executive Directors, Boards, members, volunteers, and other stakeholders. My thesis then works to understand *why* interview participants did or did not feel their organization has been successful based in particular on organizational decision making structures as well as how the organization *measures* its success. I use success and effectiveness interchangeably.

## B. Strategy & Structure

Scholarship has explored how strategy — specifically the strategic typology of prospectors, defenders, reactors, and analyzers — drives the work of an organization.<sup>13</sup> *Defenders* are organizations with a niche that do not look for new opportunities and instead focus on a relatively constant base. *Prospectors* “are organizations which almost continually search for [...] opportunities, and they regularly experiment with potential responses to emerging environmental trends.”<sup>14</sup> *Analyzers* act as defenders in stable conditions and prospectors in turbulent environments. Finally, *Reactors* do not have a consistent relationship between their strategies and structures, making adjustments only when they are pressured. When this classification is applied to nonprofits specifically and analyzed in tandem with nonprofit strategy, I found that all nonprofit organizations I study are *defenders* in the sense that their issue area and general communities they serve remain the same over time, while two are also

9 Omi, M., & Winant, H. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (Critical Social Thought) (2nd ed.). Routledge, 1994.

10 Mills, C. Wright. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

11 Gilmore, R. W. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (First ed.). University of California Press, 2007.

12 Sawhill, J. C., & Williamson, D. Mission Impossible?: Measuring Success in Nonprofit Organizations. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 11, no. 3 (2001): 371–386. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.11309>

13 Miles, R. E., & Snow, C. C. Prospectors, Defenders, Analysers. *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Strategic Management* 1, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137294678.0549>

14 Miles, R. E., & Snow, C. C. Prospectors, Defenders, Analysers.

*prospectors* in shifting their foci based on the conditions in their environment. As *prospector* organizations, they emphasize innovative programs and encourage staff experimentation, and have broad committee structures. A successful nonprofit strategy “is contingent on the appropriate interpretation of environmental conditions and organizational response to those conditions.”<sup>15</sup> Nonprofit organizations are expected to be able to understand the conditions in which they function and work to “fill the gap” of needs that government services fail to meet.

While this research allows readers to better understand the reasoning behind specific strategies within typologies, it still fails to address the specific, yet equally important, role of how these strategies to achieve nonprofit goals relate to the community served or impacted, which has a pivotal role in the success of racial justice-centered nonprofits in particular. Ketchen et al. also explicitly recommends that future research focus on the application of these strategies in a specific context, which my research aims to do with a specific racial justice lens.<sup>16</sup> Other specific case studies of other types of nonprofit organizations such as those dedicated to alleviating women’s issues and issues of homelessness exist to determine the role of these organizations in collaboration with government programs and their strategies. No such analysis exists dealing specifically with racial justice-centered nonprofits and their communities.<sup>17,18</sup>

Furthermore, Ogliastri notes that nonprofit strategies emerge or are created and implemented *either* through a deliberate process or that formal strategies are used *metaphorically* rather than literally.<sup>19 20 21</sup> While arguing that formal strategizing is useful for smaller nonprofits as they need to gain external legitimacy and funding as well as for larger nonprofits more broadly, emergent strategizing — not formally planned — can be useful to develop strategic change.<sup>22</sup> I aim to expand these understandings by researching the cohesion or tension between formal strategies listed in organizational documents and structures in the process.

The structure of nonprofit organizations, in turn, is shaped by their strategy. As detailed by Brown and Iverson, organizational structure varies in terms of division of labor and chain of command, which can vary in whether it is hierarchical or horizontal<sup>23</sup>. Rules and procedures also vary in whether and to what extent they are formalized, while the centralization or diffusion of decision-making responsibility also shapes nonprofit organizational structure. While this literature provides helpful groundwork for understanding models of decision-making, it fails to address the role of stakeholders, specifically the ‘population served’ by nonprofits, in decision-making structures and understand which potential framework is most successful in achieving racial justice-related goals. I will apply this strategic framework as background for understanding the role and importance of the involvement communities served in decision-making.

### C. The Nonprofit Industrial Complex & Contemporary Nonprofits

Literature has found that in recent decades, nonprofit organizations have become more like businesses as they work to fill gaps in government service roles rather than serve community members or social justice missions.<sup>24</sup> Willner describes this phenomenon as the New Public Management (NPM) model, also dubbed managerialism, which

15 Brown, W. A., & Iverson, J. O. “Exploring Strategy and Board Structure”

16 Ketchen, D. J., Thomas, J. B., & McDaniel, R. R. Process, Content and Context: Synergistic Effects on Organizational Performance. *Journal of Management* 22, no. 2 (1996): 231–257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639602200203>

17 Bordt, Rebecca L. *The Structure of Women’s Nonprofit Organizations*. Indiana Univ. Press, 1997.

18 Jang, H. S., Valero, J., Kim, J. W., & Cramb, K. Understanding the Diverse Forms of Nonprofit Collaborations: A Case Study of Communities in Schools of North Texas and its Partner Organizations. *Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs* 1, no. 2 (2015): 100. <https://doi.org/10.20899/jpna.1.2.100-117>

19 Morrison, J. Bart, and Paul Salipante. “Governance for Broadened Accountability: Blending Deliberate and Emergent Strategizing.” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 195–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764006295992>.

20 Harris, Erica E. “The impact of board diversity and expertise on nonprofit performance.” *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 25, no. 2 (2014): 113-130.

21 Ogliastri, E., Jäger, U. P., & M. Prado, A. Strategy and Structure in High-Performing Nonprofits: Insights from Iberoamerican Cases. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 27, no. 1 (2015): 222–248. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-015-9560-8>

22 Ogliastri, E., Jäger, U. P., & M. Prado, A. Strategy and Structure

23 Brown, W. A., & Iverson, J. O. Exploring Strategy and Board Structure

24 Congress, E., Jd, L. A., & Mba, P. F. *Nonprofit Management: A Social Justice Approach* (1st ed.). Springer Publishing Company, 2016.

presumes that “market informed strategies and practices are the most efficient and effective way to manage and structure nonprofit organizations.”<sup>25</sup> This phenomenon ties closely into the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC), which attempts to formalize and bureaucratize socially-oriented nonprofits out of any ability to create lasting social change.<sup>26</sup> Managerialism also serves to undermine the importance of field-specific skills and experience in favor of a profit-generating institutional logic, which can then, in turn, undermine the success of a nonprofit organization in meaningfully working to meet its mission-related goals.<sup>27</sup> The NPIC effectively silences people most directly impacted by injustice by privileging educated, and often white, staff and Board members over those with lived experience. The perpetuation of the NPIC can, in turn, lead organizations to focus more on maintaining funding sources and legitimacy than anything else.<sup>28</sup> Critique of the prevalence of the NPIC in hindering the mission of anti-racist organizations, in particular, is widespread, and my findings explore how organizations can counter the NPIC through community-based and measured decisions and understandings of progress.

The structure of managerialism and the NPIC as a whole are explainable through the lens of Critical Race Theory, which examines “how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America.”<sup>29</sup> This theory explains the vested interest that those in power have to maintain racialized and economically disparate systems that marginalize and continually oppress Black people and other people of color, and how this interest translates into practices like managerialism.<sup>30 31 32 33</sup> Historically, white efforts to alleviate social problems facing people of color have simultaneously worked to maintain racial hierarchy both locally and abroad through imperialism, forced conversion, displacement, and coercive reeducation programs, and continued framing of white elites as ‘saviors’ of various indigenous, Black, and other People of Color.<sup>34</sup> Recent iterations of white supremacist charity use service provision, educational programs, and other forms of social work which superficially appear to be working to address racialized social problems while simultaneously amplifying white leaders, narratives, experiences, and strategies that ensure the continuation of white wealth and supremacy with the intentional perpetuation of oppressing people of color. This ethnographic study explores how racial justice organizations that use decision-making structures that center impacted communities and rely on measures of narrative shift and building power to define success undermine managerial structures.

#### D. Community Relationships

Some research has explored how the relationships of nonprofit organizations with their communities and areas influence organizational effectiveness. Risk, according to Nuno S. Themudo’s “Nonprofits in Crisis,” determines the size and scope of nonprofit organizations by highlighting game theory as a means of determining the risks and incentives that individuals have for cooperation with nonprofits, which in turn impacts an organization’s vulnerability. Themudo’s research found that reduced probability of future meetings with an organization deters present cooperation, suggesting the importance of longer-term interactions in meaningful engagement between an organization and an individual. This provides some context for my research by framing nonprofit strategy and the involvement of community members within the perspective of risk in comparison to potential gain. It also calls into question how continuous, rather than short-term, community relationships could lessen nonprofit vulnerability and ultimately, their success.

25 Willner, L. Organizational Legitimacy and Managerialism

26 Rodriguez, D. The Rise of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex.

27 Willner, L.

28 Gilmore, R. W. Golden Gulag.

29 Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement. The New Press, 1996.

30 Delgado, Richard, and Jean Stefancic. Critical Race Theory: An Introduction. New York: New York University Press, 2017.

31 Carmichael, Stokely, and Charles V. Hamilton. Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America. New York, New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

32 Willner, L. Organizational Legitimacy and Managerialism Within Social Justice Nonprofit Organizations: An Interest Divergence Analysis. *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, 41, no. 3 (2019): 225–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10841806.2019.1621654>

33 Kivel, P. Social service or social change? In INCITE! (Ed.), *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (2007): 129-150. Durham; London: Duke University Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctv11smnz6.15

34 Smith, A. “Introduction: The Revolution Will Not Be Funded.” In INCITE! (Ed.), *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (pp. 1-18). Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2007. doi:10.2307/j.ctv11smnz6.5

Marchesini da Costa evaluates what factors determine the geographic location of a nonprofit organization.<sup>35</sup> He finds that the existence of other nonprofits in an area, as well as resource availability, plays an important role in nonprofit entry. I use his findings to better understand and contextualize the success of various Bay Area nonprofits, which benefit from both a wealth of other racial justice-oriented nonprofits in the immediate vicinity as well as incredible access to resources due to the relative affluence of the Bay. Furthermore, Ostrom and Gazley argue that a reputation for being trustworthy helps organizations to collaborate with other organizations within a community because they are viewed as accountable to one another.<sup>36 37</sup> My research will add to this understanding by evaluating the role of trust in nonprofit relationships with those they serve in their geographic area and communities, rather than in intra-organizational structure.

My research question arises specifically from gaps in existing research about community roles in decision-making and success. Existing literature defines what nonprofits are, what they do, and the strategies they use to accomplish their goals. Important knowledge has already been produced about the phenomenon of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex and how it manifests in organizations, situated within seminal texts such as *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* and *Critical Race Theory*. Finally, some limited data has been produced to explore the importance of trust, sustained relationships, and geography in nonprofit effectiveness. My study will utilize this knowledge to understand the background and context of the current climate of nonprofits. I will add to the literature with my case study in several ways: 1) it will provide an analysis of the specific conditions in the Bay Area that influence nonprofit effectiveness; 2) it will produce new knowledge about decision-making structures — specifically related to who organizations serve and how they serve them; 3) it will explore how organizational *understandings* of ‘success’ influence whether a nonprofit is meeting its racial justice goals; and 4) it will provide a specific analysis of racial justice nonprofit structure that has not yet been produced.

### III. Methods

#### A. Participants

In selecting organizations for my study, I used various criteria and personal knowledge of Bay Area organizing work. I ultimately decided to focus on three medium-sized, racial justice-oriented nonprofit organizations based in the Bay Area. By choosing organizations with similar sizes — each with less than 30 employees and with membership sizes in the hundreds — I was able to better compare organizational structures. Each organization used for my case study has its own primary focus or issue area — one centers on gender justice (Organization A), another works to divest from police and incarceration (Organization B), and the final organization organizes white people for racial justice (Organization C). While for an ideal comparison, each organization would be working on the same issue, the geographic proximity of each organization creates circumstances in which each organization has a particular niche to meet a community need within a Bay Area organizing ecosystem. Still, the organizations converge on their centering of racial justice as described in their respective mission statements. The similar underlying racial justice goals allow for a strong overall comparison between organizational decision-making and success, regardless of the different aspects of racial justice that each approaches. Additionally, each organization utilizes advocacy work as a primary form of service to program participants or populations served. This takes place locally, statewide, as well as nationally through policy, projects, and campaigns. Each organization is registered as a 501(c)3 non-profit, meaning that they are classified as public benefit organizations and thus exempt from income and other forms of taxation, able to advocate for particular issues but not specific candidates or political figures, and can receive tax-deductible contributions from corporations and individuals.<sup>38</sup> Finally, the unique conditions of the Bay Area — which has long been considered a hub of anti-racist organizing work, a home to extremely

35 Marchesini da Costa, M. What Influences the Location of Nonprofit Organizations? A Spatial Analysis in Brazil. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 27, no. 3 (2016): 1064–1090. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-016-9682-7>.

36 Ostrom, Elinor. 1998. “A Behavioral Approach to the Rational Choice Theory of Collective Action.” *American Political Science Review* 92(1): 1–22

37 Gazley, Beth. “Beyond the Contract: The Scope and Nature of Informal Government-Nonprofit Partnerships.” *Public Administration Review* 68, no. 1 (2008): 141–54. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00844.x>.

38 Anheier, H. Nonprofit organizations.

diverse populations, and as holding high access to wealth — shape both the work and potential effectiveness of organizations. The similar size, geographic area, method of work, 501(c)(3) status, and underlying racial justice goals of the organizations in my case study allow me to both compare and evaluate various decision-making structures and understandings of success.

I conducted semi-structured interviews of individuals at each nonprofit throughout the fall of 2020 over Zoom to gain a more complete picture of each organization. I spoke with Board Members, Executive Directors, various staff members, unpaid organizational members, as well as participants and stakeholders. In total, I conducted 23 interviews, with an average of eight interviews for each organization. By interviewing individuals at each level of the nonprofit, I was able to evaluate uniformity in understanding of each respective organization's mission, decision-making structures specifically related to who the organization aimed to serve and how, assessments and understandings of success, and the individual's position concerning the mission and the other members of the organization. I reached out to participants individually and was also referred to other organization members during interviews. Interview participation was entirely voluntary and interview subjects were not compensated for participation in my study.

### B. Assessments and Measures

The data collected for this study came from two primary sources of evaluation: 1) Organizational documents including strategic plans, Board bylaws, and internal communications and documents and 2) 23 semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the organizations used for my case study. The case study method allows me to accurately understand and explain contemporary phenomena such as organizational structures and understandings of success.<sup>39</sup> I have chosen to keep participants as well as each organization anonymous to further protect the privacy of my participants in my evaluation and encourage honesty in interviews about success and decision-making.

I created interview questions based on evaluation of the literature surrounding effective nonprofit structure, anti-racist organizing testimonies, and resources, as well as my understanding of and involvement in racial justice organizational work. The questions I included were designed to gain information both about the individual's *perception* of the organization and its successfulness as well the organization's stated and actual work, structures, and stakeholder roles more broadly. These questions were used to guide discussion and were sometimes modified, followed-up, or added to in order to learn additional information about perceptions and each organization. Participants signed consent forms beforehand, interviews were recorded and transcribed, and notes were taken during each interview for analysis.

In order to analyze my findings, I coded interviews by hand according to ethnographic coding methods to find patterns in language, ideas, definitions, as well as overall themes in evaluating my findings. I initially completed an in-depth coding of select interviews to produce a set of codes, which I then applied to the rest of my interview transcripts to evaluate my findings and reinforce or challenge ideas found in certain interviews or organizations. A review of organizational documents allowed me to verify and complement information from interviews. These documents provided a more complete understanding of the level of formalization of certain decision-making structures and programmatic goals. Structural documents and organizational strategic plans furthermore provided me with more material for substantive analysis and comparison of findings.

## IV. Results

To better understand the decision-making structures and methods of gauging success for racial justice-oriented nonprofits, I interviewed 23 individuals from three different organizations in the Bay Area and analyzed their organizational documents. In my responses, I found that organizations with the highest levels of effectiveness as perceived by participants, staff, and other nonprofits shared several practices in their work. Below I include my Table of Findings, data from which will be referred to in subsequent sections.

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39 Jang, H. S., Valero, J., Kim, J. W., & Cramb, K. Understanding the Diverse Forms of Nonprofit Collaborations

Figure 1: Table of Findings

Element	Organization (Primary Focus)		
	A	B	C
	Gender Justice	Ending Mass Incarceration	Organizing White People
Structure	Hierarchical	Hierarchical	Horizontal
Primary Funding Sources	Foundations, Fee-for-service, Membership	Foundations, Grassroots	Grassroots
BIPOC/Impacted Input in Strategic Plan?	No, Board creates	Yes, staff creates w/ stakeholder input, Board approves	Yes, members create & review, committee approves
Intentional Hiring of Impacted/ BIPOC Candidates?	No	Yes (Formal & Informal)	N/A (No employees, but intentional selection of BIPOC partners)
Intentional Impacted/ BIPOC Leadership?	No	Yes, Intentional	N/A
Decision-making Structure for Projects/ Campaigns	Tradition based, sometimes staff initiated, Executive Director (& sometimes Board) approval	Staff originated, Executive Director (& sometimes Board) approval	Modified Consensus, approval from centralized committee
Percent of Staff BIPOC/Directly Impacted	50% (4 out of 8)	87.5% (14 out of 16)	N/A (mostly white membership, no staff)
Percent of Board BIPOC/Directly Impacted	40% (10 out of 25)	60% (6 out of 10)	N/A
BIPOC Executive Director?	Yes	Yes	N/A
Percent Interviewed who Perceived Org as Successful?	0% → unqualified “yes” 71% → qualified ‘yes’ (in ‘small ways’/ “sort of”/ could do more) 28.5% → “I don’t know”/no	75% → unqualified “yes” 25% → yes but getting better over time, acknowledge goals are big	62.5% → unqualified “yes” 37.5% → yes but goals are big and there’s a lot to be done

### A. Racial Justice

Each organization in my case study explicitly named a focus on racial justice in their mission statements. However, the intentionality behind and levels of understanding of what racial justice meant and looks like in organizational practice varied. Organizations B and C were premised on the understanding of racism described by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, as the “state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death”—both emerging in response to police violence against BIPOC people in the Bay Area and evolving into broader racial justice organizations with complex responses to systemic oppression. Organization A, however, added racial justice to its mission statement several decades after they initially formed as a primarily women-oriented nonprofit organization. The different organizational understandings of racialized oppression and nonprofit racial justice work directly reflect the intentionality with which the organizations both formed and

included racial justice in their mission statements.

Organization A as a whole demonstrated the least intentionality about understanding and valuing racial justice in its work. The organization, which is international, did not formally add the issue of racial justice to its work until over one hundred years after the organization's founding. It only adopted racial justice as part of its mission twelve years ago, out of an over 150 year history. This nonprofit initially focused on job training for women as well as the development of women's leadership, and began focusing on race during segregation in the United States. One Program Director commented that "adding racial justice to the mission was a f\*\*\*ing afterthought. And unless you're addressing historical harms and building that analysis, racial justice will always be an afterthought." Organization A's staff, feeling that the nonprofit lacked intentionality and a deep shared understanding of racial justice, has in recent years created and held trainings and spaces, particularly for its older board members, to be able to use and exercise deeper understandings of racism in their projects and who they serve. This specific nonprofit, at their Bay Area location, has grown in its intentionality beginning at the staff level and working its way up to the Board. However, as one staff member mentioned, the anti-racist training work

"is really staff led and driven, and what is still harmful is that it disproportionately relies on Black and Brown members to educate people. And that has a trickle down effect, when it comes to communities we serve and our analysis and practices. We as staff reflectively engage in racial justice work, but as an organization I don't think there are any policies or practices that are rooted in that. If this team of staff leaves, then who knows what would happen. We can continue to do this, but unless it's rooted in something, it won't last."

In order for a racial justice oriented organization to effectively address racial inequity in its work, then, it must practice extreme intentionality either directly from its founding or continuously and structurally as it evolves. It cannot be contingent only on specific people in the organization or added haphazardly, or it will continue to lack a deep understanding and analysis of systemic racism in its work.

Organization B, which was formed initially as a police watch organization, understands racial justice in large part as the working for the redistribution of resources from systems of incarceration into community reinvestment. The organization was built as a civil rights organization and founded by a progressive Black organizer in the Bay Area. As one staff member said, "The guiding principle to our campaigns, to our work, is divesting and reinvesting. Divesting from all of these harmful systems and reinvesting into the community, into real health affirming resources." The Executive Director highlights their main intentions as:

"The Three R's, which are reduce, restore, and reinvest. So reducing the fees and fines and costs associated with the criminal court system, restoring opportunities in terms of enfranchisement and other opportunities for formerly incarcerated people, and then reinvesting resources away from punishment, policing, and prisons toward community."

This understanding of organizational work in terms of the "Three R's," in addition to the centering of BIPOC, system impacted people leading organizational work demonstrates a deep understanding of the systemic nature of racialized oppression in the criminal legal system in particular. All eight of the people I interviewed expressed a deep understanding of the importance of centering impacted people in every part of the organization's work as integral to meeting its mission.

Organization C was founded in direct response to a call for racial justice organizing work directed at educating white people from BIPOC leaders. "Even just going back to its history and its creation," one member said, "its entire focus and reason for being was deep relationships that our elders had with Black leadership in the movement, who called on them to organize white people and do deep accountability for racial justice following their lead." This organization is rooted in the "necessity of mutual interest," and expects members to adopt anti-racism as "a part of people's identity, to replace toxic whiteness with a positive racial identity that goes really deep." To ensure that each member has a shared understanding of the deeply institutionalized nature of racialized oppression, one of the main functions of the organization is to serve as a center for political education for

members and their communities. In onboarding, members are expected to commit to a set of member agreements, ten out of sixteen of which specifically relate to racial justice work. When white folks join, they are expected to know they're "joining a culture that has a legacy that's really tied to racial justice as a guiding principle." In onboarding to a specific committee as well, people also go through an extensive orientation process to get more historical context on the organization's work and racial justice lens. This intentionality and deep work of members and the organization to grapple with systems of power and oppression in the United States demonstrate a deep understanding of racial justice that every member I interviewed articulated in some way.

## B. Organizational Logics & Practices:

### 1. Funding:

Sources of funding for nonprofits vary substantially based on their service models and have a considerable impact on the work that an organization can do.<sup>40</sup> Resource Dependency Theory stresses that "the key to organizational success is the ability to acquire and maintain resources."<sup>41</sup> The three main organizational sources of funding are 1) private contributions, specifically individual donations and foundation grants, 2) public support in the form of government grants, and 3) private sector payments in the form of user/membership fees, the sale of government products, and government contracts.<sup>42</sup>

While individual donations and fees-for-service have unrestricted usages, government and foundation funding can be hard to obtain and come with specific requirements. Foundation grants, on which the Nonprofit Industrial Complex in particular is focused, are difficult to procure and make up only 16% of charitable giving. They are often given to well-established and self-sustaining 501(c)(3) organizations with specific requirements for usage, whether they are given to support a particular project, expand programs, or meet general operating costs. The highly selective and network-based nature of foundation grants, which often accept applications by invitation only, have made it more difficult for communities of color to procure grants and limited the work that organizations are able to do with foundation funding.<sup>43</sup> In line with these circumstances, the historically white organization I studied, Organization A, utilized existing network connections to foundations to gain funding, while the BIPOC-led nonprofit, Organization B, strategically worked to build relationships with individuals at foundations over time (Interview with Staff, Executive Directors).

Each organization in my case study relies primarily on private contributions to operate — particularly from individuals, fees-for-service, and foundation grants. Organizations A and B receive a substantial portion of their funding from foundations, though both work to primarily obtain general operating funds — which are used to pay salaries, building costs, and other operating fees — so as not to limit the scope of their work based on donors. Organization A demonstrated low levels of intentionality with its funding. It relies primarily on foundation grants for general operating rather than program-specific funding, as well as funding from an endowment and private sector payments. It does not have a specific grant writer or development team, and is able to secure foundation grants primarily because of its historical relationships with certain foundations, rather than based on the quality or success of its programs. As one staff member noted, "we're able to continue getting these grants as long as we tell them the same story about the work we're doing." In line with the perpetuation of the NPIC, then, this organization benefits from access to resources predicated on white charity and generational wealth rather than member investment in its services. While foundation and revenue-based funding supports general operating costs, however, the individual programs, which carry out direct services and are mainly run by BIPOC Program Directors, receive little to no funding. Employees are expected to run programs at no cost to the organization or participants, which all Program Directors felt was a significant problem that hindered organizational success. This

40 Foster, William, and Gail Fine. "How Nonprofits Get Really Big." *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 5, no. 2 (2007): 46–55. <https://doi.org/10.48558/FD5G-HC38>.

41 Salancik, G. R., & Pfeffer, J. A social information processing approach to job attitudes and task design. *Administrative science quarterly*, 1978. 224-253.

42 Hodge, M. M., & Piccolo, R. F. Funding source, board involvement techniques, and financial vulnerability in nonprofit organizations: A test of resource dependence. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 16, no. 2. (1993): 171–190. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.99>

43 Paarlberg, L. E., McGinnis Johnson, J., & Hannibal, B. Race and the public foundation grants marketplace: the differential effect of network status in communities of colour. *Public Management Review* 22, no. 10 (2019): 1443–1463. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1635192>

nonprofit had lowest levels of perceived effectiveness out of my three case studies, and continues to operate and receive funding potentially at the expense of other, BIPOC-led nonprofits that are forced to compete for an even smaller pool of resources and continue to exist primarily because of sustained community investment.

Organization B, which is BIPOC-founded and led, practices extreme intentionality with its sources of funding. This nonprofit also gets primarily general operating funds from foundations, with a history of some specific donations for a large infrastructure project in collaboration with another organization. The primary foundations that it receives funding from are also led by BIPOC individuals and specifically work to support progressive organizational work. The Executive Director noted that “typically, a lot of foundation support comes through relationships with individuals at the foundation through conversation. [The Executive Director] does the work of outreach to foundations to tell them about our work, and then works with the development team to write the application.” An integral part of Organization B’s work is to obtain and sustain funding for its projects, and an extensive amount of resources are dedicated to building relationships and securing funding. The Executive Director is dedicated to procuring funding for their organization’s projects and operations and a three person development staff is wholly dedicated to keeping the organization financially afloat. While still relying largely on foundation grants, its success in this area has stemmed from its intentionality surrounding the dedication of resources to securing unrestricted funding and its deep connections to and investment from the community in which it operates.

As nonprofits have taken on a greater role in addressing social problems to fill the gap in government service provision, many nonprofits have begun to rely mostly or wholly on the government for revenues as well.<sup>44</sup> None of the organizations in my study rely on government funding. While A was simply too small to qualify for most government grants, members from B and C explicitly avoided government funding to avoid limiting their work in conflicts of interests. As one staff member noted when discussing Organization B’s funding:

“When I was working at [a different organization], the city was making a bunch of bad policy decisions. And my organization was very cautious about what they were going to say, knowing that if they spoke out too much, the city was going to cut their funding. [Our organization] doesn’t take any grants from government organizations, so it’s not a conflict of interest and we can be more outspoken, we can call them out, and really fight for our folks.”

Organizations with the highest levels of perceived effectiveness intentionally decided not to accept government funding and to strive to rely as much as possible on individual donors, highlighting how choices of funding can further the mission of an organization. One staff member noted:

“I think every nonprofit wants to have individual recurring donors because that’s always unrestricted money. And it’s sustainable. In comparison to other nonprofits, [our organization has a lot] of folks that donate to us every month. They believe in our mission. They believe in what we do. They’re investing in our work. “

Striving to sustain work based on individual donors and grassroots fundraising was mentioned as an important part of sustainable and effective organizing by members at all of the organizations I interviewed. These strategies not only allow for organizations to work without constraints on spending, but also build power and promote investment by and for the communities that they are serving. Furthermore, the effort to rely on individual donors rather than government or foundation grants works to counter the reliance on “private foundations as primary institutions through which to harness and restrict the potentials of US-based progressive activisms [so that] the very existence of many social justice organizations has often come to rest more on the effectiveness of professional (and amateur) grant writers than on skilled political educators and organizers.”<sup>45</sup> Every staff member I interviewed at Organization A felt that the lack of grassroots based, program specific funding was a problem

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44 Lipsky, M., & Smith, S. Nonprofit Organizations, Government, and the Welfare State. *Political Science Quarterly*, 104, no. 4 (1989): 625-648. Retrieved February 27, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2151102>

45 Rodriguez, D. The Rise of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex.

in its ability to provide services, pay interns and honorariums, and/or expand programs. The lack of fundraising structure, as described by one staff member,

“Is not sustainable. And when it comes to centering [Black, Indigenous, People of Color] and [Queer and Transgender] youth, there will always be exclusion because yes, we are offering a great experience and programs for free, but that also depends on young people having the time and capacity and financial security to be able to participate. [...] Without grassroots fundraising, we’re not going to be building a base. We’re not going to be building power. We’re not going to be bringing people in the door and we’re not going to be able to sustain our work.”

Organization C relies wholly on individual donors to operate, receiving no grants or government support of any kind. This nonprofit focuses on educating white community members and uplifting BIPOC-led organizations in its work. To that end, it donates 70% of its donations to its partner organizations and regularly fundraises at meetings, trainings, and events, retaining only the minimum amount of money needed to continue operating. For Organization C, fundraising and fund distribution serve as one of the major ways that it works to meet its goals by, as one member noted, “instilling a reparations framework and analysis within our whole organization, and that has played a really big role in [their] fundraising campaigns and ethos.”

Intentionality in funding decisions correlated closely with perceptions of success. The most effective fundraising practices are as follows: 1) for those organizations that need foundation funding, striving to use these grants primarily for general operating funds can avoid limiting or restrict the specific projects or campaigns an organization can work on; 2) Avoiding government funding, particularly in advocacy-related in racial justice work is advisable, as this also helps limit restrictions on organizational work; 3) Reliance on grassroots fundraising structures and sustained individual donors is the most desirable method of funding, as it demonstrates sustained investment in organizational work by communities, and is unrestricted to allow for the prioritization of needs most directly expressed by communities, rather than relying on institutionalized, foundation or government favoring measures of success. The efforts to prioritize and gain access to unrestricted funding and community-investment based money illuminates how decisions about fundraising contribute to organizational impact.

## 2. Structure

The organizational structure of the nonprofits in my case study shaped the way that decisions were made. Organizations A and B utilize hierarchical structures, which allow for the Executive Director to have the final say over much of the organization’s hiring and project work. Bigger oversight considerations, such as mission statements and strategic plans, must also be approved by the Board of Directors. Staff members in A and B were often responsible for executing organization-wide campaigns which they did not conceive of independently. However, they were also often able to create and shape programs, usually in direct contact with impacted communities. Organization C uses a horizontal decision-making structure, particularly using a modified consensus form of decision-making in which 80% of a committee has to approve a decision for it to pass. Broad decisions must be approved in a centralized group composed of elected representatives from all committees.

Leaders of nonprofit organizations have a multifaceted role: they must integrate the mission of the organization, acquire resources, and determine strategy simultaneously.<sup>46</sup> The decisions made in regards to strategy and resource acquisition must be in alignment with and reinforcement of the mission and vice versa. It is well understood within nonprofit literature and management that the Board is expected to establish policies, monitor programs, hold fiduciary responsibilities of the organization, in addition to overseeing the Executive Director.<sup>47</sup> The staff members interviewed in my case study were responsible for the conception and/or execution of projects and were usually the only organization members who worked directly with community members. In understanding the decision-making roles and effectiveness of oversight bodies and staff, I will later explore how racial identities and personal backgrounds related to the organizational mission are a factor in contributing to

46 Heimovics, R., Herman, R., & Carole L. Jurkiewicz Coughlin. Executive Leadership and Resource Dependence in Nonprofit Organizations: A Frame Analysis. *Public Administration Review* 53, no. 5 (1993): 419-427. doi:10.2307/976342

47 “Board Roles and Responsibilities.” National Council of Nonprofits, 2020. <https://www.councilofnonprofits.org/tools-resources/board-roles-and-responsibilities>.

perceived effectiveness. I chose not to focus explicitly on the individual *expertise* of oversight bodies, Executive Directors, and staff for this study, as it can be logically concluded that bodies with more expertise will be more effective.

### 3. Hiring

In hierarchical organizations, hiring practices were determined in large part by the Executive Director, though the Board is responsible for selecting the Executive Director. Decisions about staffing and inclusion were often emergent rather than formalized, with prioritization of BIPOC and directly impacted candidates as an underlying rather than explicit practice. Organization B has formalized inclusion by including a request for directly impacted applicants as an important quality in a candidate. Additionally, multiple individuals noted the importance of trust and sustained relationships in decisions regarding staffing and hiring. One person who received the services of the organization with emergent and formalized hiring practices for impacted people emphasized the effectiveness of doing so:

“At the end of the day, for this organization to be so diverse in their staff and hiring process shows their commitment to that equity and those values. Who they hire and embrace goes a long way, because it’s literally them practicing what they preach. They’re not just talking about being inclusive, they have every type of individual you can think of on staff.”

The decision to advertise that the organization is hoping to hire directly impacted workers had a clear impact on organizational work. Out of the sample of Organization B staff members I interviewed, all but one were directly impacted by the organization’s mission. Additionally, all had extensive backgrounds in their field. When participants felt like their identities and backgrounds were represented in the staff, they were more willing to share their experiences, their needs, and offer to volunteer. The participants I spoke to had engaged with Organization B for more than a decade, and many other participants have been actively engaged for several years.

Organization C, while mostly white, has written guidelines that require accountability partnerships with local BIPOC-led organizations that guide the organization’s work. All of the members I interviewed felt that this organization was effective in working to meet its racial justice mission. Members, while not formally hired, are somewhat self-selected as they are asked to complete extensive orientation, onboarding, and continual participation to become full voting members. New partnerships must be approved by a centralized committee to ensure that the potential partner meets issue area and BIPOC leadership criteria. Organization C uses a modified consensus form of decision-making, in which new partners can be approved so long as 80% of the centralized committee votes in favor. This mechanism is used to ensure that the vast majority of participants are in support of a decision, while also preventing a small minority of members from blocking a widely popular decision from implementation.

In Organization A, hiring decisions were not formalized to ensure the inclusion of BIPOC or those with impacted identities. The Executive Director was responsible for most hires independently and was individually entrusted to make decisions surrounding qualified candidates. One member noted, “the majority of hires that I’ve seen have always had some proximity to our organization already, whether that be through a personal network or something else.” Promotions have historically been granted based primarily on seniority rather than with intentionality for identities and expertise. Although 71% of those interviewed were Black, Indigenous, or People of Color, A has not intentionally hired people of color even though racial justice is one of its central focus. Most members or employees that I interviewed had gotten to their current position through an unrelated job at the organization, word of mouth, or a prior interaction with or knowledge of it.

I did not find the practice of hiring or recruiting membership through existing relationships to be uncommon. Some staff or members of all organizations joined or were hired because of connections with existing members. Additionally, various studies have noted the importance of trust in organizations and their work.<sup>48</sup> Hiring within organizational or field communities where trust is already present, then, can be indicative of the level of trust

48 Creed, W. E., and Raymond E. Miles. “Trust in Organizations: A Conceptual Framework Linking Organizational Forms, Managerial Philosophies, and the Opportunity Costs of Controls.” *Trust in Organizations: Frontiers of Theory and Research*, 1996, 16–38. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452243610.n2>.

required within small organizations in their work. As one staff member of Organization B noted in my interview,

“I think we all kind of move like family, so people kind of move across organizations and then come back. Trust in this work is a very deep need in terms of how people organize together. It’s probably pretty challenging for an outside person to come in especially mid-level.”

Hiring within communities must be intentional about expertise and identities. In organizations that intentionally recruited members of existing communities, as was the case in Organizations B and C, prior relationships strengthened rather than diminished organizational work. However, when hiring within communities was used as a matter of convenience rather than intentionality, as in Organization A it may not *hurt* the quality of work but demonstrates a lack of clear purpose in organizational strategy and may result in less organizational expertise and effectiveness in projects and campaigns.

### C. Who’s involved? Staffing, Leadership, & the Role of Identities

The identities and backgrounds of staff, Board, leadership, and committee members contributed to the perceived effectiveness of the organization as a whole, according to my findings. Every person I talked to felt that intentionality about including BIPOC in their organization’s racial justice decision-making was integral to organizational success. This inclusion and involvement varied across organizations, as well as the way that organizations approached BIPOC inclusion in decision-making.

The identities of those involved in racial justice organizing work also correlated with perceptions of organizational success. Historically and contemporarily, white people have felt it was their responsibility to uplift marginalized communities out of oppression — iterated again and again from the 19th century’s “white man’s burden” to ‘modernize’ minority groups to the white savior industrial complex, in which the white savior “supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening.”<sup>49</sup> Even today, 80% of nonprofit organizations are led by white people.<sup>50</sup> The overwhelming presence of white people in nonprofit organizations is no surprise — in a white supremacist society, where white people have the most access to wealth, power, and resources, it seems an almost obvious corollary that white people would have the most access to organizations aimed at benefiting the less fortunate. As described by nonprofit leaders of color reflecting on their experiences and struggles in the sector, for organizations to see progress, “it’s not just about trusting the Black leader. It’s not just about having Black folks at the table. It’s about right-sizing those investments accordingly. It’s about us trusting Black folks to tackle Black liberation and Black solutions in a meaningful way.”<sup>51</sup>

Every person I interviewed felt that the involvement of BIPOC individuals in their organization’s decision-making was integral to the impact that the organization was able to have.

I focus here in particular on the organization with the highest levels of BIPOC, directly impacted involvement, and correlating perceptions of success. One individual I interviewed from Organization B felt that BIPOC and directly impacted inclusion

“has been fundamental to our success. Frankly speaking, there aren’t a lot of organizations in this space that are as diverse or that are led by Black Indigenous People of Color. So as a result of that, it feels like our organization is particularly successful at being in front of things that don’t necessarily need to be translated for them. There has to be some way for people in the organization to know what the group that they’re serving wants, requires, needs. Otherwise, it’s like the impacted community has to serve as a tour guide for the organization to know what it needs. For us, having directly impacted people involved at every part of the policy-making process creates a shorthand that’s helpful for communication and being more efficient and productive.”

49 Cole, Teju. “The White-Savior Industrial Complex.” *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, June 6, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>.

50 Tomkin, A.R.. *How White People Conquered the Nonprofit Industry*. Non Profit News | Nonprofit Quarterly, May 26, 2020. <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/how-white-people-conquered-the-nonprofit-industry/>

51 Tomkin, A.R.. *How White People Conquered the Nonprofit Industry*.

Those who are not part of the communities that the nonprofit organization aims to serve, then, are less able to understand and respond effectively to issues and experiences faced by them. Out of the members of B that I interviewed, which everyone perceived as successful, seven out of eight were BIPOC, and five out of eight were directly impacted in another way by the organization's work. Intentionality with and inclusion of BIPOC leadership is influential in perceptions of success. The members of the executive team of Organization B are all BIPOC and directly impacted themselves in addition to having strong organizing backgrounds within the same sphere of work as their current organization. The Board is over half BIPOC as well. One staff member noted the diversity of the staff:

“The organization is very intentional about having a staff that represents the folks we're working with. We have directly impacted people working at every level of the organization on all levels. And we have a very diverse staff on all levels, whether its gender, race, age, etcetera compared to other organizations.”

The intentionality of having directly impacted staff was complemented by the intentionality of having directly impacted leadership. BIPOC leaders in organizations keep them “in tune to what's really important and most effective to the community.” Directly impacted leadership promoted the intentional hiring of other directly impacted and BIPOC staff, undermined traditionally white supremacist power structures, and also contributed to trust within and in relation to directly impacted staff, communities, and partner organizations. One staff member of Organization B felt that “the intentionality and the required humility [of our leadership] to say that the people closest to this problem are closest to the solution [...] there's liberation in that.” Organization B's Executive Director felt that there could be no success “without people impacted leading the work. On all levels.” To them, that did not just mean centering their own ideas and perspectives as the determinant of organizational work, but also specifically giving leadership formally or informally to people directly impacted by specific problems and how to address them.

Organization C, which is dedicated to organizing white people for racial justice, relied almost wholly on BIPOC-led organizational accountability partners to shape their priorities and work. There is no formal Executive Director, Staff, or Board in this group, eliminating these elements of identity analysis. In educating white people internally, the primarily white membership allowed for members to relate to white communities and peers in ways that transformed participants' understandings of racial justice without requiring the labor-intensive work for BIPOC communities to do this for them. This further contributes to the importance of having directly impacted people responsible for decision-making related to who to serve and how. Communities may be best able to organize members of their own communities and racial groups, but racial justice work must center BIPOC voices and leadership to be truly effective.

Organization A, which is historically white and focuses on gender justice, was composed of a primarily BIPOC staff and Executive team but had a predominantly white (15 out of 25 members, or 60%) Board of Directors. While the staff noted that their individual experiences, identities, and backgrounds helped shape their programs, as a whole the organization failed to be successful because of the lack of intentionality of centering impacted people in decision-making and leadership. Rather, staff commented on the fact that many of the expectations placed on them were because “that was how it has always been done,” particularly in the nonprofits' history as predominantly white. The Board, which does not have term limits, and many members of which had served on the Board for decades, seemed tangibly out of touch with racial justice and organizing to promote equity. When asked about the inclusion of BIPOC voices in decision making, one white Board member who's been on their Board for 38 years seemed surprised I would even ask about that, stating:

“I think when the Board makes decisions, they're not overly based on who the person is or their race at all because we, it's sort of, we're just a Board and we have opinions, but I mean, I suppose, if somebody was really wanting to espouse something for a racial reason they could do that. But it doesn't seem to happen. It seems like we're all in agreement, we wouldn't be on the board if we didn't believe in the mission. Everybody's the same.”

In contrast, a Black member of the same Board who just joined last year said that they “don’t get the sense that everyone really understands what racism is in practice, or how they are supporting systems of oppression, or participating in class hierarchy. I think that there are lots of folks that really don’t understand how caste plays out in the United States.” This member, who has a background in anti-racist work, mentioned bringing this to the attention of the Board in ways that they felt hadn’t been done before they got there. While this person felt that everyone on the Board is “open to having the conversation,” it is clear that the levels of understanding are already possessed through lived experiences of members if they hold BIPOC identities in particular shapes and transforms the work that a Board can do.

Since one of the primary responsibilities of the Board is to provide oversight to the Executive Director and to approve decisions about organizational work, it is important to consider the identities of Boards and the way members are chosen. The majority of staff members that I interviewed in Organizations B and C, who had oversight bodies (such as formalized Boards or an oversight committee), did not feel that they had a strong relationship with them. Organization B was intentional about the skills, backgrounds, and identities that the Board members of the organization held, seeking out individuals with specific skills to join the Board. None of the staff I interviewed commented negatively about the role of their Board in their work - one stated that “at the end of the day, we have an Executive Director and Board, but I think for the most part our concerns are validated and in any decision-making staff input is really considered.” In contrast, Organization A primarily selected Board members based on friendships or long-standing relationships with the organization or its members. Multiple staff members critiqued the lack of intentionality in their Board — “There’s not a seeking out of voices, it just who happens to be in the room. [...] I think the Board is mostly white, and that’s problematic because if we’re saying we’re serving a population of people, then the representation needs to be higher.” Organization C, as an entirely volunteer group, did not have a formalized Board, but intentionally chose members of its oversight committee based on organizing histories and skills. These members had the primary responsibility to advise the leadership committee on potential paths, mediate conflict, and provide support. Organization B, which had the most diverse Board and the least staff contact with it, expressed general neutrality about the Board and its role; the staff I interviewed at Organization A, with the least diverse Board felt that tradition and whiteness undermined the program abilities and success that the organization had; and Organization C, with a somewhat seniority-based oversight committee, generally felt indifferent or positive about their role in guiding organizational work. This would suggest that oversight body identities, while perhaps not particularly important in intra-organizational relationships, do play an important role in how they support or hinder the work of the organization’s staff and executives.

Overall, my case study found that the identities of staff, leaders, and oversight committees impacted perceived organizational success. Nonprofits with more individuals who were directly impacted by the organization’s work, whether through race or another direct experience, and intentionally sought out impacted communities to make decisions, were perceived as more effective both internally as well as by external participants. Intentionality about selecting members increased trust in leadership and within organizations, as well as contributed to the quality of work with communities that could be done, undermining white-saviorism and promoting community-based and accountable organizing work.

#### **D. Who is Served & How? Populations, Projects, & Campaigns**

The mission statement of a nonprofit generally defines “why the [organization] exists, what it hopes to accomplish, and what activities it will undertake, where, and for whom.”<sup>52 53</sup> The content of and any revisions to the mission statement must be adopted by the Board of Directors. Each case study’s decisions on who to serve were shaped largely by the organizational mission statement, though organizations that are a branch of larger, national organizations were more likely to modify or focus on a specific part of the national mission based on their local geography and capacity. Additionally, while missions guide nonprofit work more broadly, specific decisions about which distinct communities, groups, or affiliates to prioritize in smaller-scale projects are sometimes made within the organization on a more regular basis.

52 Kirk, Gary, and Shabnam Beth Nolan. “Nonprofit Mission Statement Focus and Financial Performance.” *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 20, no. 4 (2010): 473–90. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nml.20006>.

53 “Governance Practices - IRS Tax Forms.” IRS. Internal Revenue Service, 2008. [https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/governance\\_practices.pdf](https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/governance_practices.pdf).

All organizations I studied determine the population they serve in part based on their geography and the organizations and communities that were immediately accessible to them. This is unsurprising, given that nonprofits are more likely to exist where others already do.<sup>54</sup> For Organization B, the location of their office was extremely intentional — the organization built and fundraised for its own space in an area easily accessed and located within a primarily BIPOC geographic area and close to other racial justice organizations. For Organization A, the geographic location was rooted in the fact that the organization owned a building in an area and had a history of serving members of a specific university located nearby. Even as the organization broadened the community it aimed to serve, its nonstrategic location prevented the meaningful expansion of the organization's membership. Organization C formed nationally after an upsurge in racist rhetoric and incidents after the election of Obama, and in the Bay Area specifically in direct response to the murder of a Black woman by local police and eventually growing into a much larger organization combating racism locally. It has no formal office space, but meets in public areas or based on member access to private spaces.

In addition to intentional or unintentional geography shaping who each organization serves, each case study had external stakeholders that shaped organizational work. Organization C relies intentionally on partner organizations to determine the emphases on who should be served and how. One member explained that “it's not as though our partners are directly giving us direction on how we should organize white folks, but there are instances where we're asked to intervene or support in different ways or take leadership to take some of that burden off of our partners.” In addition to supporting partners through direct asks, C also carefully considers ways to mobilize, educate, and support antiracist work in alliance with partner organizations and using internal practices of modified consensus that are approved by a centralized committee based on organizational guidelines. Organization B, which works on mass incarceration, determines which specific communities to serve in part, as one director described, by “an iterative process of getting ideas from people inside [prison or jail], getting ideas from our members on the outside” and using a community-based research report that the organization produced, which came with specific policy recommendations focusing on certain communities that directly impacted people feel are important and issues that are relevant to them. The external stakeholders, as the nonprofit's base, are an essential part of informing who it is going to serve and how. Each of the staff members I interviewed also emphasized their personal solicitation of participant and stakeholder advice on who to serve through evaluations and conversations with program members and organizations served.

Leadership bodies (whether Executive Directors, oversight committees or Boards of Directors) played limited roles in decision making to determine who the nonprofit serves and how. Though the Board of Directors is technically responsible for ensuring that Boards stick to their mission, none of my interviews of staff, EDs, or Board members themselves felt that their Boards explicitly determine who the organization served or how. Organizations B and C both have a hierarchical structure, with an Executive body of some kind at the top, but the members that I interviewed felt that their Executive bodies played supervisory, “signing off” roles on decision-making relating to who to serve and how as opposed to changing or individually deciding who their organization should focus on working with or serving. To that end, the majority of people that I interviewed from each organization felt that their core staff and members played an integral role in determining who the organization served. In Organization C, the modified consensus format of decision-making allowed for each committee member to have input in decisions about who the organization is serving and which projects should be focused on, though there are informal hierarchies in which longer-serving members can have more of a say in chapter decisions and in which individuals shape who the chapter serves by raising partner asks or bringing personal connections or involvement into decision making spaces. Staff members from Organization A did note that the communities they were expected to serve were based in part on historical relationships with communities and stakeholders rather than actively adapting to meet the needs of local communities. One person I interviewed noted that in planning a training for lower-income students, they were also expected to include some wealthier schools based on previous relationships with those institutions rather than focus solely on schools with greater need. However, all of the staff members that I interviewed from Organization A felt that they had at least some autonomy in shaping who their program or committee works to serve through direct input, utilization of personal connections and lived experience, and autonomy in targeting communities.

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54 Marchesini da Costa, M. What Influences the Location of Nonprofit Organizations?

### 1. Decision-Making for Projects & Campaigns

Nonprofits decide what projects or campaigns they intend to pursue to further their mission on both a long-term and short-term scale. Many of these processes are similar to decisions about who the organization aims to serve. While the mission determines broadly what the organization will do to meet its goals, strategic plans, meetings, and day-to-day voting on decisions are used on varying bases to determine projects and campaign efforts. Each organization in my case study exhibited overlap with and uniqueness from the other organizations. Generally, staff and/or core members played a central role in determining what projects or campaigns should be focused on in the short and long term, informed by the asks and concerns of external stakeholders. In Organization A, the staff was hired to run particular programs but expected to make most of the decisions about what their program should focus on independently, with approval from the Executive Director. Stakeholders, particularly those most directly impacted by the issue(s) that the organization aims to address, were integral decision-makers in organizations with the highest levels of perceived effectiveness. Advisory bodies such as Boards of Directors play a supervisory role in this process, approving rather than conceiving organizational projects.

Each nonprofit, in some capacity, utilized a strategic plan to determine its goals for a set period. However, as became apparent with the recent COVID-19 pandemic, strategic planning can create an illusion of control in organizational plans that is to an extent unpredictable.<sup>55</sup> Organization B's strategic plan is created in three-year increments, with extensive participation from staff with consultation from stakeholders for their thoughts and input and consultation with/approval from the Board of Directors. Their strategic plan was extremely detailed, framed by organizational history, and separated into modes of narrative, economic, political, modeling, healing and disruptive power which described each part of the mission and how the organization measures its capacity in each of these areas. One staff member described the process of creating a strategic plan:

“We were very careful to make sure that it was centering impacted folks, BIPOC folks, to give feedback. If we hadn't, we could have just said ‘Hey, member meeting. Give us feedback with all of our members. But we didn't — we were so intentional because otherwise, and especially on Zoom, we'd have like 80% white members, and that's just the reality. It might not be super formalized to do it like that, but it's definitely part of our message, to center the voices of those most impacted.”

Disproportionately white and non-impacted membership in voluntary associations is well documented and unsurprising - these people are more likely to have the time, access, and wealth to participate in unpaid membership than directly impacted, BIPOC individuals and studies have found that young and middle-aged white people are the most likely to belong to social/service organizations.<sup>56,57</sup> Decision-making around the organizational foci detailed in a strategic plan, then, must *deliberately and intentionally* seek out and actively center the experiences of impacted people, rather than consulting only those stakeholders who are the most accessible, and less likely to be personally impacted.

In Organization C, the strategic plan is designed collaboratively on an organization-wide level each year more broadly as well as on a committee or subcommittee basis in which many of the campaigns or projects centered by the organization were direct asks from their partner organizations. While members give input on committee priorities and efforts, the strategic plan must demonstrate a direct alignment with the chapter's focus areas and BIPOC-centered platform. This organization's strategic plan carefully analyzes the role and goals of their work with input from all members and stakeholders. In Organization A, strategic plans are developed every other year by the Board, without input from staff or stakeholders, and read more like a broad outline of the organization than a comprehensive plan for the upcoming two years. A's plan lacked any historical framing, in

55 Mintzberg, H. Rethinking strategic planning part I: Pitfalls and fallacies. *Long Range Planning* 27, no. 3 (1994): 12–21. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301\(94\)90185-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301(94)90185-6)

56 Miner, S., & Tolnay, S. Barriers to Voluntary Organization Membership: An Examination of Race and Cohort Differences. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 53B, no. 5 (1998): S241–S248. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/53b.5.s241>

57 Hutchful, E. The Racial Wealth Gap: What California Can Do About a Long-Standing Obstacle to Shared Prosperity. California Budget & Policy Center. August 17, 2020. <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/the-racial-wealth-gap-what-california-can-do-about-a-long-standing-obstacle-to-shared-prosperity/>

depth analysis of the current climate or clear goals or measures of success. In fact, “race” as a concept was only mentioned one time in the strategic plan in a quote of the mission statement, and most of the document focused on assets and extremely broad goals with little plan to measure outcomes. Organizational planning has only recently become more intentionally created to center racial justice projects as initiated by Program Directors and staff, but is still nonexistent in the formal strategic plan of the organization.

For smaller-level decisions, staff and stakeholders of each organization were the primary decision-makers. For Organization C which relies primarily on BIPOC-led partnerships, asks from partner organizations constitute a large part of organizational work. These projects, campaigns, and other forms of involvement include phone banking, raising money, contacting legislators, supporting legislation, and showing up to partner-led events. Within Organization C, each committee uses a modified consensus of 80% to decide on projects, approved by a core supervisory committee. Internal projects and campaigns, primarily related to fundraising and education, are conceived and proposed largely based on observed need or member interest within the organization, as well as in response to less specific partner asks and expectations. At the two other organizations, staff members noted fairly high levels of autonomy in determining organizational projects. However, staff at both Organization A and B did need executive approval to move forward with a project and occasionally board support depending on the financial implications of a campaign. All of the staff members I interviewed based campaigns and projects on a variety of factors, including program participants and stakeholders’ stated interest in and need for particular campaigns; community-based research and data, support from other staff members, organizational capacities, and the efforts of/potential collaboration with other nonprofits.

### E. Geography

The conditions of Bay Area organizing work offer a unique set of circumstances that undoubtedly shaped my findings. As a historical epicenter of a variety of social movements, ranging from serving as a home to the Black Panther Party and anti-Vietnam war protests in the 60s to the more recent organization in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, it is no surprise that a plethora of social justice focused non-profit organizations are widely prevalent and well-supported in the Bay Area.<sup>58</sup> As one person I interviewed noted,

“In the Bay Area, we have so many things working in our favor. We are blessed with elders who have been doing this work for a long time, who have made mistakes and learned from them and are super generous with their time for younger organizers. The Bay also draws so many activist-type folks, who want to do that work. [...] We also have so many different partners in the area. We have an embarrassment of riches right here for a POC-led racial justice organization to partner with, and rural areas might not have access to that.”

In addition to a history of organizing, the Bay Area is also one of the most diverse regions in the country, with a majority BIPOC population.<sup>59</sup> The history of organizing work in the Bay Area has contributed to the volume of nonprofits in the area, as well as the existence and involvement of primarily directly impacted people in racial justice work, which would not be the case in many geographic areas. Another individual noted:

“I’ve lived in a lot of different communities. And one thing I could say is I don’t think I’ve ever been in a community where every day there’s a protest I could go to. There’s always something social justice-oriented, or working people are trying to bring people together to support something. I definitely think that this community is more educated in ways of organizing.”

The variety of organizations found in the Bay Area also allows for more and stronger partnerships between organizations as well as greater access to funding. Half of the folks I interviewed from Organization C explicitly mentioned that their work benefits from the wide availability of local BIPOC-led organizations to partner with,

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58 St. John, P. “How the Bay Area turned the protest movement into a way of life.” Los Angeles Times, November 19, 2017. <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-bay-protest-tradition-20170826-htlstory.html>

59 Anheier, H. Nonprofit organizations. Theory, management, policy.

which multiple participants noted as an advantage of the Bay Area's location in particular. One person I interviewed noted that they're "really lucky in the Bay Area, we have hundreds of possible partners around us" and aren't limited to just one or two as other places might be. A member of Organization B commented on how "you can't work in this field in the Bay Area, and not constantly run into people involved at an organization you've worked some for or know in some capacity." People from each of my case studies also noted that many of their staff and participants came from other Bay Area-based organizations or local personal relationships, which contributed both to the strength and size of organizing communities.

The San Francisco Bay Area is the wealthiest region in California, in a state that is the wealthiest in the country.<sup>60</sup> Organization C has one of the largest chapters of its national organization as a whole based in the Bay Area, which raises enough money to give some of its funding to other chapters in rural regions of the country. Another mentioned that "the Bay Area is such a resource-rich place that we need to distribute that to poor and rural communities." Organization B, which has a substantial amount of individual donors, also benefits from the amount of community-based financial investment in organizing work in the Bay Area that would not necessarily be possible in other geographic areas.

The Bay has, however, also faced increasing gentrification and cost of living in recent years, which has pushed out working-class communities and people of color in particular.<sup>61</sup> Some people I interviewed noted that gentrification has excluded Black people and/or working-class people in particular from organizing work, which is a challenge of organizing in the Bay Area. Three people noted that the expectation of wealth in the Bay Area could also be exclusive to those interested in organizing work but who also want to be engaged but might not have the time or resources to support a particular organization. Multiple staff members from Organization B mentioned that their organization's pay was a major draw for some folks who hoped to make a living wage doing advocacy work in the Bay Area, as low pay can be a barrier to many directly impacted people in organizational participation. Another individual who has worked at a variety of nonprofits in the Bay Area over decades critiqued the Bay Area's agreement on progressive ideas — based in historical social justice campaigns that at times tokenized in less progressive policies today through patterns of gentrification — causes gaps in real organizing work. They stated:

"I think because so many people think that we're doing good work, we get along, everything's great, we're missing a lot of the areas we're not doing well. There's a weird self-congratulatory thing we have going on in the Bay Area, and so there's not always an honest look at impact."

Geography has unquestionably shaped the landscape and conditions of current racial justice-oriented nonprofits in the Bay Area. The region is more diverse, wealthy, and contextualized by a strong organizing history than most other regions in the country. These conditions benefit organizations in terms of the inclusion of directly impacted and social justice-oriented participants, leaders, and staff; the availability of other organizations to collaborate with, and the resources to sustain movement work. However, while benefiting from geography in many ways, it has faced reasonable criticism for gentrification and cost of living increases that have excluded many from organizing work and the geographic area itself.

## F. Understanding Success

Determining how to quantify organizational success in nonprofit organizations has long been a topic of scholarly conversation. As mentioned in Robert Kaplan's widely cited text on strategic performance management of nonprofits, these organizations "lack the simple elegance of a financial measure — such as profitability or shareholder returns — used by for-profit organizations to assess their performance." Quantifications of success for nonprofits in the form of numbers of volunteers, hours of service, amounts of money raised, etcetera are used and expected widely in competition for grants from governments and foundations. Even existing research claiming to profess a new mechanism for measuring organizational success ultimately revert to numerically based understandings of effectiveness, specifically for "attracting donors [...] many foundations now demand to see the

<sup>60</sup> "Geography of Wealth." Legislative Analyst's Office, 2019. <https://lao.ca.gov/reports/2019/4093/ca-geography-wealth-090519.pdf>.

<sup>61</sup> "Gentrification Risk: Bay Area Equity Atlas." Gentrification risk | Bay Area Equity Atlas. Bay Area Equity Atlas. Accessed January 31, 2022. <https://bayareaequityatlas.org/indicators/gentrification-risk#/>.

results of their investments in nonprofit organizations and will only finance those who can give them detailed answers.”<sup>62</sup> I argue that the premises upon which these claims are made — that organizations need to use numbers that foundations will like to understand their success — is inherently flawed. By buying into state and foundational measurements of success, nonprofits are susceptible to the Nonprofit Industrial Complex’s “dynamic of reduced autonomy,” which explicitly warns against contracts and grants coming with “requirements for stringent, rigid, and quantitatively oriented approaches to planning, evaluation, and monitoring.”<sup>63</sup>

Rather than organizing around grant requirements, then, I offer a renewed understanding of organizational success based on coded patterns from the interviews and organizational structures with the highest levels of perceived effectiveness, specifically Organization B and C. These individuals felt that their ‘success’ meant that they were a) shifting broader narratives surrounding the issues their mission was dedicated to and b) building power within their communities through the sustained and accountable organization over time. These understandings of success rely much more heavily on substantial cultural and material change over time rather than working primarily to prove to non-impacted foundations that they are worth sustained financial support. I found that B and C, whom participants felt were most effective, emphasized broader cultural shifts and power growth, while those who felt their organization was less effective in Organization A relied heavily on statistics to measure success.

I also note that measuring success in terms of building power and narrative shift may more closely resemble measures of success in social movement work than traditional nonprofit metrics — and that this makes sense. Social movements do sometimes think about success in terms of the accomplishment of explicit aims, but often also in terms of changing narratives around an issue and bringing people into their movement through cultural or institutional shifts. As movement scholar Charles Tilly notes, the range of effects of social movements “far surpasses the explicit demands made by activists in the course of social movements, and sometimes negates them. By any standard, ‘success’ and ‘failure’ hardly describe most of the effects.”<sup>64</sup> Racial justice nonprofits often focus on specific anti-racist campaign work to achieve their goals. This work is often collaborative, long term, and not solely — or even often primarily — predicated on the accomplishment of particular goals (i.e. money raised, bills passed, or policies changed). Approaching the success of racial justice nonprofits in terms similar to how movement success or impact is understood will allow for a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of success that simultaneously combats the nonprofit industrial complex.

1. Narrative Shift: Narrative shift, though it might sound abstract, can be and was benchmarked for my interview subjects in various qualitative as well as quantitative ways. Each organization worked to shift specific narratives and move specific communities in their missions, and their perceptions of successful narrative shift also reflected that. Some indicators of narrative shift included election results related to the organization’s missions, the success of campaigns in building coalitions, media attention and perspectives, as well as broader cultural narratives about power, racial justice, and particular issue areas emphasized by an organization. Understanding what a ‘shifting narrative’ looks like varied within committees of an organization: while for communications it might look like the centering impacted voices in media, in a policy committee it was more often the kinds of policies that could feasibly pass in a given year, in fundraising it might look like the individual donor support that a campaign receives, and in organizing it could show up in the size and strengths of coalitions.

One of the ongoing campaigns that Organization B uses to shift narratives is an annual nationwide series of parties and rallies to redefine public safety for all. Each year, this decarceration-based organization helps communities in over 25 cities plan these events to help shift the dialogue about public safety from police-centered to community-based. Since the campaign’s founding close to a decade ago, community safety initiatives have gained substantial traction in national initiatives, culminating in the summer of 2020 with the mainstreaming of the idea that police do not keep communities safe, and that true public safety is borne out of community investment and care. Los Angeles, California promised to cut \$150 million from its police budget to reinvest the money in the city’s low-income communities of color. Cities and states across the country have adopted various initiatives

62 Sawhill, J. C., & Williamson, D. Mission Impossible?

63 Rodriguez, D. The Rise of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex. In INCITE! (Ed.) *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* (Reprint ed.). Women of Color Against Violence. Duke University Press Books, 2007.

64 Giugni, M. G. “Was It Worth the Effort? The Outcomes and Consequences of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 24, (1998): 371-393.

to reimagine public safety, as Black Lives Matter movement organizers have challenged governments to defund the police. Although Organization B's work alone undoubtedly did not single-handedly change the conversation around public safety, their national initiative engages organizations and community members across the country in a celebration of community safety. By creating a powerful counter-narrative to policing as the only way for neighborhoods to be protected, this organization has built a powerful coalition with tangible policy implications that have simultaneously shifted narratives around safety and police.

One person I interviewed, when I asked them about whether they felt Organization B had been successful, went on to note substantial victories that their organization had accomplished in its recent history specifically in ending mass incarceration. They then went on to state:

“I think the other piece that maybe folks don't talk about enough is like, winning the narrative, you know. The narrative about what safety is and how racial justice plays into that. I say that because some of our recent victories, if you were to talk about [the things we did recently] ten years ago, I don't know that that would happen. We won the narrative, and it used to be that police unions had a narrative control over safety. And now it's not like that, and that's what we've been successful in.”

Organization C uses a similar focus on shifting narratives both within white communities as well as to those in power to demonstrate white solidarity with and investment in racial justice. In white communities, this organization has led campaigns to get white people to stop calling the police as part of working to change the narrative around police serving as an administrator of public safety. One member also provided an example of a partner organization asking Organization C to bring members to committee hearings for a criminal legal system reform bill, in which primarily BIPOC organizers had been showing up in support while many white business owners opposed it. In bringing a large coalition of white members to “demonstrate that these issues that can seem so segregated to legislators, but white folks, folks that aren't necessarily directly impacted by mass incarceration, are in favor of these bills as a matter of equity.” They went on to say that more broadly,

“What we bring is changing the narrative in our own communities and calling white people into this, but then also bucking the narrative in the capital to show that there is a widespread multiracial movement, including white people, including white middle class people, including poor white people, that are supporting these initiatives.”

Organization A generally uses more traditional metrics to understand its success, particularly in the form of statistics about those served, numbers of volunteers, and funds raised. However, while particularly the Executive Director and Board measured success using traditional metrics, individual Program Directors have worked to shift narratives in their own volunteers for programs as a means of creating impact. One Program Director, who runs programs that work directly with BIPOC high school students, trains volunteers extensively before allowing them to work within the community. They noted, “I make sure that before I even send them to a school that they understand that we're not here to save these people. We're here to help, and give them the tools to empower themselves.” As an organization that centers building leadership as one of its main services and that does have a history of “white saviorism,” the staff intentionally work to combat and shift narratives of privileged volunteers and members in particular about the communities they are serving.

Narrative shift was universally perceived to be a long and more sustained process, which relies heavily on trust, accountability, and commitment over time. Organization B works to shift broader narratives about safety and community investment through its work; Organization C challenges racist perceptions held by white people to emphasize white people's stake in collective liberation; and Organization A works on a smaller scale to shift narratives through education and leadership building. In their own ways, each has been successful in this work, and members noted narrative shifting initiatives as an essential component of each organization's racial justice mission.

2. Building Power: Building power was another key part of success for all members of Organizations B and C. This element of success often meant building broader movement coalitions that included a large number of community members invested in a particular campaign, or creating a large grassroots fundraising base. It could also mean building the power of impacted individuals to advocate for themselves and issues that matter to them. Sometimes, building power could be quantifiable, but other times it wasn't. Power might not always appear in the form of tangible campaign wins. As one staff member at Organization B stated:

“Sometimes campaigns take a long time. But that’s not a negative thing, because organizations build their people power that way. The education that you’re putting out there, you’re building leaders, you’re building community, and you’re gaining more members. When our work is highlighted in the media, we’re building up our power. And that’s another way to measure your success.”

The ability to build the capacity of impacted people to be centered in conversations about their liberation was also essential as a component of success. Sometimes, this could look like empowering people to be in touch with their ability to advocate for issues that are important to them. All of my case study organizations explicitly focus on building power through empowering the folks they aim to serve. By “specifically trying to teach people their rights and empower them to stand up for themselves, as well as demanding some form of recognition from local authority figures,” the individuals who these programs serve are able to shift cultures and advance racial justice both within and outside of that organization’s work. Empowering marginalized communities to advocate for their liberation through opportunities to give input on legislation that directly affects them, to speak to their legislators, and to engage with those who already have power builds the capacity of organizations to pursue their racial justice-related goals while meeting a goal in itself.

Organization A, B, and C each work to build power in their own ways. Organization A centers empowerment and leadership building as one of the core parts of its mission. While not always explicitly focused on uplifting BIPOC voices, each of the programs in Organization A offer participants (who are often students) the opportunity to lead campaigns, plan events, determine the issues they want to learn about and advocate for, and provide safe spaces for participants to grow. The communities that this organization serves, as well, work to allow volunteers to build young leaders themselves through mentorship programs. Additionally, many of the program’s volunteers are BIPOC students, and intentionally working to build their leadership capacities can in turn serve as a segue for these individuals to join other organizations or become leaders in their own advocacy work. As one Program Director described,

“Our racial justice and advocacy programs have a unique opportunity because we really give our students the space to decide what they want to be learning and who they want to be connecting with. In that sense, I think there is that agency amongst our young leaders, because they get to build out campaigns and events they get to choose which communities we will be reaching out to and the community partnerships.”

Ultimately, then, while Organization A might primarily measure success through traditional metrics, its staff’s focus on building power through leadership demonstrates an important capacity to promote change on a smaller scale.

Organization B works to empower impacted community members by including and centering their perspectives in all aspects of their work, and to build power more broadly through the creation of broad campaigns and communities that are sustained. One participant noted their continued inclusion of participants over time, stating that

“[Organization B] is always keeping people on a register, so it’s like okay who speaks Spanish, who knows about these topics, who can speak on these issues if we need them. And they’re quick to reach out to their network and their network is always willing.”

This nonprofit encourages participants and community members to represent the organization, to give input on

legislation, and to shape organizational work, and broadly works to “politically empower those communities and center them in any broader policy agenda that we push forward” (Staff Interview). The community members they organize with are often currently incarcerated or formerly incarcerated, and are entrusted with huge organizing responsibility with support from B’s staff in the form of resources and other support. Additionally, the organization often joins broader coalitions based on its capacities and foci in order to build broader support for movements. Most bills they sponsor are cosponsored by other similarly focused organizations, and campaigns to change particular laws often last for several years and build support as they grow.

Organization C works to build power both within its own membership and by taking some of the burden off its BIPOC partner organization through its work. A member commented that “we really see [Organization C] as an organization supporting the work of other organizations. And it’s that collective camaraderie and solidarity that’s going to build power.” Members are trained and gradually taught how to hold more responsibilities in the organization based on their interest or capacity, to ensure that the organization can continue to grow and sustain itself. The organization also builds power of other white people by dedicating a large portion of its work to political education, training other white people about how to be better allies and accomplices in racial justice work and engaging in organizing in an effective, non-cooptive way. In doing this, the organization also builds the power of its BIPOC-led partners by lessening the burden on them to educate and mobilize white people for racial justice, providing unrestricted financial support for campaigns and operations, and creating larger multiracial movements for key issue areas that partners want to focus on.

Grassroots fundraising was also an essential part of building power. As focused on in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, grassroots fundraising is not only “a method that can increase and strengthen our accountability to the communities most affected by injustice,” but also a form of organizing, as “part of building community power is creating a community economy in line with our principles and analysis.”<sup>65</sup> Organizations B and C, as discussed in the “Funding” section, clearly understand and use grassroots funding as a tool of building power already. A Program Director from Organization A, which has failed to create a grassroots-based fundraising system, noted the huge shortcomings that failing to create a grassroots fundraising base creates.

“We need to invest in our young people, in queer and trans-BIPOC, in our programs, and in campaigns when building relationships with other organizations. We need to think about equity to be able to center BIPOC and pay interns and speakers for their time. Without grassroots fundraising, we’re not going to be building a base. We’re not going to be building power. We’re not going to be able to sustain our work for the long haul.”

Building a grassroots fundraising base in addition to increasing leadership capacity and the number of people in movements can further expand organizational impact both in the causes that they advocate for as well as in the long term and beyond the scope of the organization’s work.

3. Traditional methods: Traditional methods of measuring success are not entirely irrelevant in my analysis - it was still important for many of the people I interviewed to record and think about their success in terms of numbers of people at events, dollars raised in support of certain issues or causes, policies passed, tangible goals achieved, and other traditional mechanisms. Additionally, many foundation grant applications require tangible measurements of dollars raised, campaign successes, numbers of volunteers, and other metrics of success. My study found, however, that these measurements must be used in service of and in addition to understanding how movement narratives have shifted over time and how individual nonprofits have been able to build power in numbers. Rather than thinking about measurable success in service of grant application expectations, these measurements allow for organizers and leadership to more accurately evaluate their work in achieving broader goals rather than solely meeting short-term expectations.

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65 Guilloud, S., & Cordery, W. Fundraising Is Not a Dirty Word. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, (2007): 107–111. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373001-009>

## V. Discussion: A Summary of the Contemporary Landscape

Is there a way forward under the label of 501(c)(3) — the now ubiquitous IRS indication of recognized nonprofits? Official nonprofit status does lend particular benefits, particularly in wide-reaching recognition, “facilitating the political goals of credibility... the approval of churches, clubs, and even law enforcement.”<sup>66</sup> In the close to fifteen years since the seminal text on the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC), *The Revolution Will Not be Funded*, my findings offer a reexamination and contribution to scholarly understandings of the current landscape of nonprofit decision-making and understandings of success, and how these relate to the perpetuation or ultimate undermining of the NPIC. In some ways, nothing has changed. Many foundations and government-supported nonprofit organizations continue to superficially address problems through managing symptoms rather than addressing their root causes. While it seems understood that reliance on government funding could potentially atrophy movement work — such direct reliance on the state from organizations that often explicitly critique it would be pretty directly antithetical to movement work — foundation funding persists. Two of the three organizations I studied still relied heavily on foundation grants to operate. This dependence on foundation funding, however, is not embraced as the main and only answer to continued existence, but rather used somewhat reluctantly to support unrestricted general operating funds rather than explicitly shaping the work an organization can do. Organizations prefer general operating funds so “that you’re never pigeonholed into only spending money on projects we got funded for,” as members of both foundation-funded organizations mentioned.

In addition to working to limit the restraints put on organizations by foundation funding sources, the organizations in my case study also emphasized grassroots income — income from individuals, fee-for-service, and non-foundation sources.<sup>67</sup> Grassroots funding is the idyllic way for organizations to operate, fostering accountability between organizations and the communities they work with and for. One organization is already and another organization is working towards relying on individual donorship as much as possible to fund organizational work. Fundraising in this sense, rather than detracting from organizing efforts, offers another way for organizations to practice sustainable and accountable movement work. When success is quantified through metrics alone, quantifying effectiveness in numbers of volunteers, hours spent, projects accomplished in a way that placates potential funders and the state over community-based and measured impact, something essential is lost.

The centering of impacted voices and identities in all decision-making is also integral to undermining white savior-ism and impactful nonprofit work. By intentionally hiring impacted staff, including impacted people on Boards, choosing BIPOC leadership, and implementing strategies to remain in continuous conversation with the communities that an organization hopes to serve, organizations can meet the actual needs of a community with strategy and efficiency that would otherwise be impossible. Boards with lived experience in the mission’s issue areas used strategies and chose Executive Directors that were more effective; BIPOC leadership fostered the hiring of other impacted people and provided for more intentional campaigns and projects; and impacted staff was more in touch with the issues and needs of communities and how to address them in accountable, community-building ways. Implementing accountability structures builds trust within the organization in addition to fostering relationships with other organizations doing similar work and building broader coalitions in particular projects.

This case study provided an in-depth look into three Bay Area-based, racial justice-oriented nonprofit organizations, their decision-making structures, and their perceptions of success. The unique location of these organizations allows for comparison between them, as they are each able to access the wide range of organizations as well as the extremely diverse, resource-rich, and politically motivated populations, but may have somewhat separate implications for organizations without such well-resourced geographic conditions. While I believe my findings about “effective” nonprofit organizations are generalizable to other organizations and communities, I recognize that the circumstances among which these organizations have been able to emerge and grow may not be. Future research could consider racial justice organizing work in more rural, conservative areas to understand whether these methods and structures are possible.

Ultimately, my findings are as follows. Centering impacted voices over non impacted ones at all stages

66 Tang, E. Non-Profits and the Autonomous Grassroots. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded* (2007): 215–227. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373001-016>

67 Guilloud, S., & Cordery, W. Fundraising Is Not a Dirty Word.

of a nonprofit's work had a positive relationship with perceived effectiveness. From the hiring process to leadership decisions, to who to serve, to what projects or campaigns to focus on, intentional consulting of and relationships with communities directly impacted by an organization's racial justice mission improved the quality effectiveness of organizational work with no exception. Foundation-approved success metrics, white leadership, and unintentional decision-making structures contribute to institutionalizing social change organizations without creating any tangible social change. Contrastedly, understanding effectiveness in people-centered ways — through building power and shifting narratives — allowed organizations to move further away from NPIC-based, white supremacist metrics of success into real, sustained, and community-centered changes. This is not to imply that numbers don't indicate effectiveness at all, but the numbers that should be focused on must be community-based, grassroots-oriented, and sustained over time. Success might look like a substantial increase in sustained individual donors over time, even if the amount raised is the same. Success might look like “defund the police” becoming a mainstream idea after decades of radicals pushing for it, building broad coalitions in support and community even though the police likely will not be defunded in the immediate future. Success might mean that a racist bill doesn't pass the California legislature when a similar one did pass just years before. Success could look like the number of people who are involved in and feel empowered by the work of an organization not just for one event, but over an extended period, and whether they begin to lead and bring other people into that work.

While the Nonprofit Industrial Complex, white supremacy, and racial hierarchy still exist, effective resistance continues to grow and evolve as well. Organizations, though they may still rely in part on foundation funding, are increasingly centering and prioritizing grassroots donors. While many nonprofits are still run by white people in hierarchical 501(c)(3) organizations, some have taken or are beginning to take a serious look at the white supremacy inherent in many of their organizations' processes and intentionally working to undermine it. This work is not new, but the recent racial uprisings have recast attention on the ways that even racial justice nonprofit organizations are complicit in systems of racial hierarchy and institutionalized rather than radical change. Racial justice oriented nonprofits have to work at all levels internally and in the world to undermine the systems of racism and oppression that are pervasive seemingly everywhere. “Our liberation,” one staff member said, “has to be as sophisticated as our oppression.” Through intentional, sustained, accountable, and impacted-centered decision making and understandings of success, liberation is within sight.

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