



# FUNDRAISING WHILE BLACK: HARM, HAPPINESS, HEALING.

Confronting Systemic Anti-Black Racism  
within Predominantly White Institutions  
in Canada and the USA.

A report by agentsC Inc. Canada



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# APPRECIATION

**“One of the best things I have experienced in my fundraising career is having a supervisor who looks like me and truly understands the challenges we face as Black women in the philanthropic landscape. She consistently speaks up for her team.” – Alice**

We thank the 107 Black fundraisers who fully completed agentsC’s online survey and the 18 Black fundraisers who directly shared their perspectives in small group discussions. We are also grateful to African American Development Officers Network (AADO), Black Canadian Fundraisers’ Collective (BCFC), Fabulous Female Fundraisers (F3), Men of Color in Development (MOCID), and Rising People of Color in Fundraising (RPOCF) for encouraging their membership to participate in this research. All quotes used at the beginning of each chapter in this report were provided verbatim by survey participants in this research project.



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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## **A SHORT HISTORY OF FUNDRAISING WHILE BLACK: 2020-2025.**

“I’ve had a true mix of bosses that are supportive, detrimental, and ambivalent to my growth and success. I’ve had donors who were racist, insensitive, and donors who were homophobic (I’m queer) as well as donors who have become like fans.” – Simone

### **Twenty Years of Reporting Anti-Black Racism in Fundraising**

*"African American Development Officers: Confronting the Obstacles and Rising Above Them in the New Millennium,"* so read the optimistic title of an Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) sponsored research paper, written by Birgit Smith Burton, then Director of Foundation Relations at Georgia Tech.<sup>1</sup> Today, Ms. Burton is one of the most accomplished and globally-recognized Black fundraisers. As the first Black woman to chair the Global Federation of AFP, she achieved a distinguished career in fundraising prior to retiring from Georgia Tech in 2023.

Ms. Burton's 2005 report was one of the first studies to document the experiences of Black fundraisers in the U.S. It revealed their underrepresentation within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and the isolation of those working in Black-led organizations such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). The study identified systemic barriers and called for intentional AFP initiatives to enhance visibility, membership access, and professional advancement for Black fundraisers.

Two decades later, this agentsC Inc. Report, *Fundraising While Black: Harm, Happiness, Healing*, asserts that little has changed: Entry into and progression within the profession remains difficult, experiences in PWIs are challenging, and the chronic underfunding of Black-led, Black-focused, and Black-serving (B3) organizations contributes to the marginalization of fundraisers who work in Black communities. Despite numerous subsequent studies, such as *Our Right to Heal* (2019)<sup>2</sup>, *Equity Matters* (2020)<sup>3</sup>, and the anthology, *Collecting Courage: Joy, Pain, Freedom, Love* (2021)<sup>4</sup>, the systems that exclude Black Canadian and African American participation in fundraising, particularly within PWIs appear to remain intact.

### **The Return to Old Norms and Harms**

In the wake of George Floyd's murder, during the COVID-19 pandemic, and at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement (2020–2022), Black fundraisers were suddenly in high demand, recruited at unprecedented rates as non-profit boards sought to diversify and appear “non-racist.” As equity questions emerged, there was a sea change in the composition of boards and executive teams.

<sup>1</sup> [African American Development Officers: Confronting the Obstacles and Rising Above them in the New Millennium](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Our right to Heal](#), (2019): Black Women fundraisers in Canada share their professional and personal stories.

<sup>3</sup> [Equity Matters](#), (2020): A Snapshot of Canadian Non-Profit Perspectives During the COVID-19 Era, outlining Black respondents' views.

<sup>4</sup> *Collecting Courage*, (2020): An anthology of 15 stories told by Black Fundraisers in Canada.

No formal records exist on how many Black professionals entered, advanced, or were recruited into fundraising, though within Black networks it was clear that Black bodies were valued to satisfy diversity mandates, while our minds and voices were not equally recognized.

The “Black rush” was short-lived. By 2023, many Black fundraisers, executives, and board members hired during that surge were dismissed or resigned. Old norms returned. Facing exclusionary practices and renewed racism, many, especially women, chose to step away, prioritizing well-being, family, or entrepreneurship. Reports of a “great resignation” underscored how fragile and performative many equity commitments proved to be.<sup>5</sup> For those who remained, further jeopardy was in store.

## The Impact of the War on “Woke”

By early 2025, the policy landscape had shifted dramatically. The inauguration of President Donald Trump brought swift efforts to dismantle Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) gains in the U.S. Through rapid executive orders, federal DEI programs were ended, affirmative action revoked, and the definition of sex narrowed to exclude gender identity. At the same time in Canada, during an election year, Pierre Poilievre, the opposition Prime Ministerial candidate, declared his objections to “Woke Ideology”<sup>6</sup> and “Woke culture”<sup>7</sup>, signifying how the term “woke” has evolved from its origins in Black activism, where it signified safety and awareness of racial injustice, to a co-opted pejorative term used mainly by white people to criticize progressive policies that eliminate discrimination against Black people.

When governments, corporations, non-profit institutions, their funders, and the public call to eliminate, reduce, or divest from DEI initiatives, they are, in effect, eliminating, reducing, or

divesting from opportunities for Black people to prosper—because despite the limited gains from DEI initiatives, they are inarguably synonymous with advancements for Black people.

For Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, and other marginalized groups, the war on woke now creates measures and sentiments that have led to a hostile environment that undermines workplace protections and equity goals across sectors, with effects reaching into Canada, the USA, and beyond.

Against this backdrop, *Fundraising While Black: Harm, Happiness, Healing* captures a pivotal moment: the aftermath of a time when Black fundraisers were sought as symbols of diversity after the murder of George Floyd’s in 2020, and the current reality of renewed exclusion led by governments in 2025.

Within this moment of authorized anti-Black racism, a regression from the limited gains is taking place. This report amplifies the voices of Black fundraisers in Canada and the U.S., most working within PWIs, who continue to face daily racism, dismissed complaints, and limited organizational support. Reports of burnout are widespread. As one participant shared, *“When words of promise don’t match actions of care, you begin to wonder if the foundation you’re standing on was ever real at all.”*

## The Emergence of Black Fundraising Associations

The pivotal moment following George Floyd’s murder is not simply a snapshot of limited change; it reflects a regression to old norms alongside the emergence of new dynamics in anti-Black racism. While systemic barriers persist and tokenistic DEI measures have, in many cases, failed to materialize deep change, Black fundraisers are finding strength and solidarity through Black Fundraising Associations (BFAs) and social networks.

5 [The State of Self-Care for Black Women](#)

6 [In Canadian Election, Top Conservative Candidate Vows to End ‘Woke Ideology’ in Science Funding](#)

7 [Never Confuse Our Kindness With Weakness: Ten Key Quotes From Pierre Poilievre’s Canada First Rally Speech](#)

This pivotal moment following George Floyd's murder is not merely a snapshot of limited change; it reflects a regression to old norms alongside the emergence of new dynamics in anti-Black racism. While some resources, such as Black Fundraising Associations, have been established to address these challenges, the persistence of tokenistic DEI measures has, in many cases, exacerbated setbacks. The anti-Black racism of this moment, shaped by both lingering systemic barriers and superficial interventions, presents new variations that differ from previous iterations and require deliberate, targeted responses.

Black fundraisers find strength and solidarity through Black Fundraising Associations (BFAs) and social networks. Established largely since 2022, BFAs address the distinct needs of Black fundraisers by providing trusted, culturally relevant spaces. Collectively, they represent thousands across North America, offering networking, learning, and professional development opportunities, including scholarships and grants. They fill the equity and belonging gaps left by traditional fundraising associations.

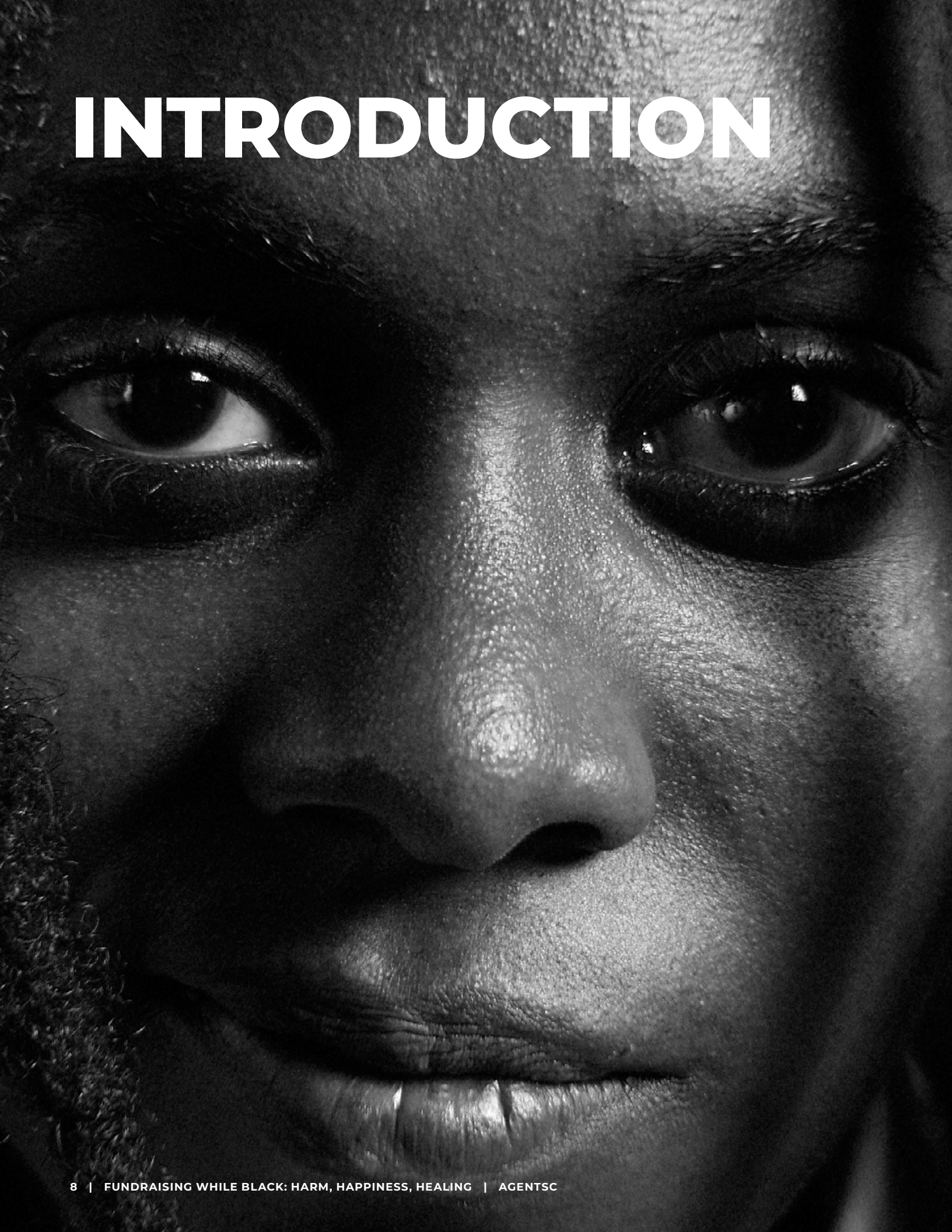
Participants in this research affirm that BFAs offer what they most need: meaningful connections, support, and a trusted community. As one noted, "We don't have to explain," capturing the relief of belonging in spaces free from code-switching, unfair judgment, and the pressures of the white gaze common in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and traditional fundraising associations. Additionally, almost eight out of 10 Black fundraisers declare that they are seeking mentorship from other Black fundraisers, pointing to a gap in the supports that BFA's provide.

## **The New Optimism: Happiness and Healing**

Today, a new tide is rising one defined by the recognition that PWIs are unlikely to significantly change, and Black self-advocacy works best as a solution to systemic anti-Black racism. The pathway forward is to unite the collective will of Black fundraisers to build representative bodies that foster belonging, amplify visions for fundraising, advocate for their communities, and create platforms where they can flourish professionally, personally, and spiritually. BFAs represent both a solution and a movement. They stand as safe spaces from systemic anti-Black racism within PWIs, and as active, representative forces challenging systemic inequities on behalf of their members nationwide and across borders.

The central message of this report is one of grounded in a new optimism. We now have confident belief rooted in evidence: that Black communities themselves are designing and building the solutions to dismantle the barriers the non-profit sector and the fundraising profession have long created. As well as seeking to change discriminatory practices within PWIs and traditional fundraising associations, Black fundraisers, through BFAs, embody this momentum, standing as both sanctuary and strategy, signaling not only resistance, but also the promise of transformative change for Black fundraisers and the sector as a whole.

# INTRODUCTION



“A sister recently shared an experience with me where she was told ... that she was capable of doing the Director role but it just did not make good business sense to promote her.” – Dana

In 2023, incidents of racism affecting three Black fundraisers, including the author of this research report, led to accountability measures, including the resignation of the AFP Greater Toronto Chapter Board and a formal apology from AFP Global for the presence of institutional racism within the AFP movement.<sup>8</sup> These events confirmed that the challenges faced by Black fundraisers are systemic. Yet AFP has since then remained largely passive on anti-Black racism, perhaps due to leadership changes or the broader backlash against DEI initiatives in North America.

### **Performative DEI Reports and Failed “Commitments”**

While Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) have conducted their own internal DEI research to uncover the prevalence of anti-Black racism, few of these reports are made public or shared in their entirety. One internal DEI report that surfaced publicly reflects a disturbing pattern of micro-aggressions, oppression, and varied acts of racism directed towards Black people and other equity seeking groups.<sup>9</sup>

A recent 2025 AFP Canada report acknowledged that experiences of racism within the AFP Greater Toronto Chapter had done little to transform the work of AFP Chapters generally, let alone the national Canadian body.<sup>10</sup> The report emphasizes the shared responsibility to dismantle oppressive systems, including those within AFP's infrastructure, and goes as far as to “commit” to transparency and accountability in addressing these issues. These findings echo familiar patterns, alongside promises of change that, by all accounts, Black fundraisers we interviewed have yet to experience.

### **Research Themes: Fundraising While Black Harm, Happiness, Healing**

The Fundraising While Black, Harm, Happiness, Healing, report is a uniquely raw articulation of the perspectives of more than 100 Black fundraisers across Canada and the U.S. This report serves as a temperature check on anti-Black racism in the non-profit sector, a mirror reflecting the experiences of Black fundraisers, as volunteers, employees, and consultants, and a call to action to move beyond the commitments of DEI or IDEA reports toward concrete steps that dismantle systemic anti-Black racism in fundraising and the broader non-profit sector. The report reflects distinct findings of harm, happiness, and healing, showing us that above and beyond the discrimination faced by Black fundraisers, collective empowerment through Black fundraising associations is pointing to a more promising future.

<sup>8</sup> [AFP Global Apology for Harm Caused to Black Fundraisers](#)

<sup>9</sup> [The IDEA Report](#) (2021) commissioned by the Association of Fundraising Professionals, Greater Toronto Chapter.

<sup>10</sup> [IDEAA Findings & Recommendation's Report](#) (2025)

## Data Interpretation: Contextualizing Contradictions and Building on Themes

In conducting this research into the experiences of Black fundraisers in Canada and the USA, we were curious about how responses should be interpreted and understood. Our statistical analysis section indicates that while 92% of those we surveyed report enjoying the work they do, 80% record incidences of burnout while fundraising. While 63% of Black fundraisers report being emotionally exhausted by their organizations DEI initiatives, 84% want to be in a position to influence policy or strategy in their organization. Again, while 62% say they would recommend fundraising as profession, 64% have experienced racism while working with a donor, and one in five fundraisers have been dismissed, demoted, verbally warned or cautioned in their roles.

These statistics reflect the stark dichotomy that confronts Black fundraisers; living in the worlds of hope and optimism, seeking to utilize skills and talents, while also surviving the dehumanizing worlds of discrimination and exclusion, simultaneously.

Three consistent themes arose from our survey analysis and group discussions, reflecting the experiences of Black fundraisers in Predominantly

White Institutions (PWIs) and within the profession as a whole: **Harm, Happiness, and Healing**. These themes were drawn from first-person accounts, participant quotes, and statistical data:

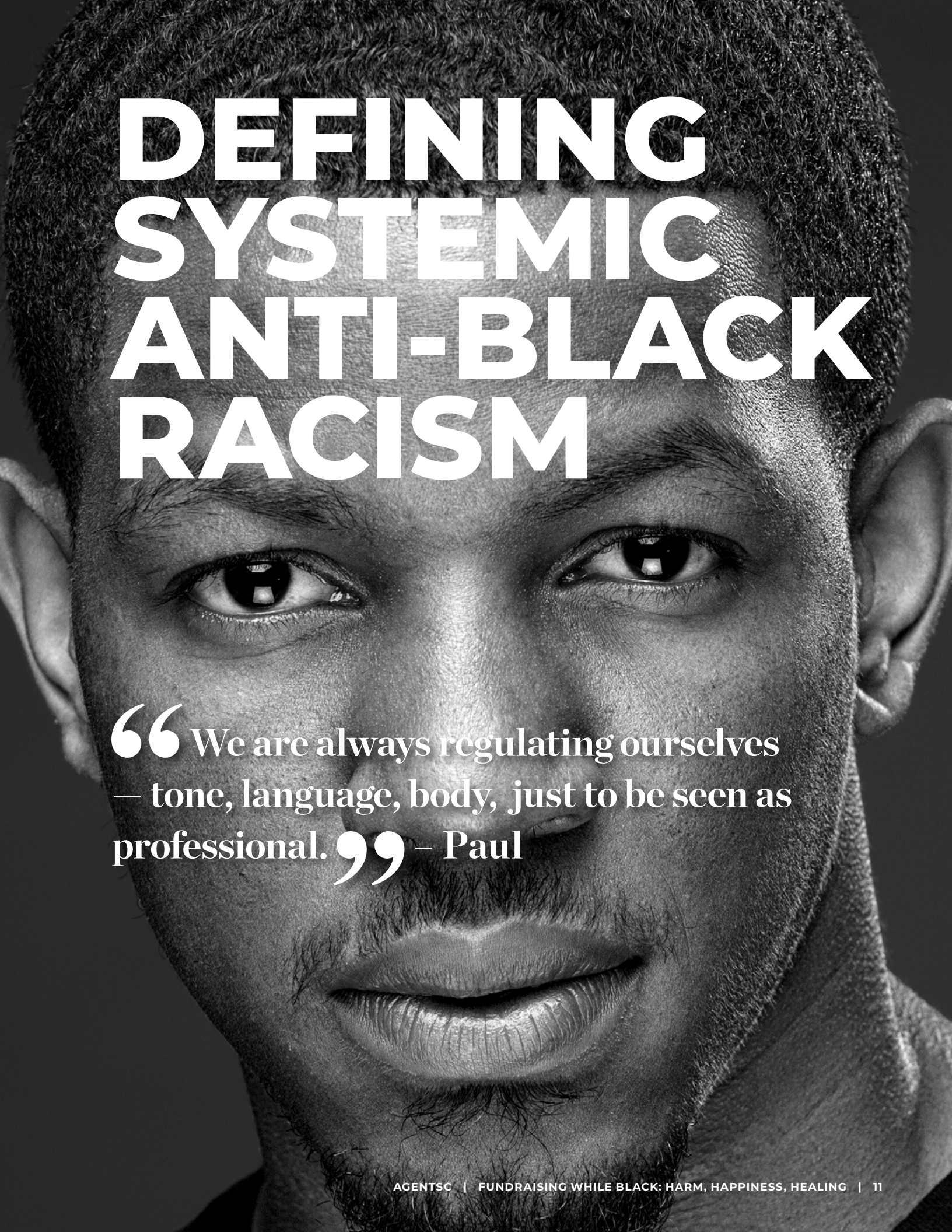
**Harm:** The pain and damage caused by systemic anti-Black racism within PWIs.

**Happiness:** The support and joy gained through Black Fundraising Associations (BFAs), which serve as havens from systemic anti-Black racism.

**Healing:** Personal self-care and wellness routines employed in response to systemic anti-Black racism within the fundraising profession.

**Part One** of this report presents a narrative account of the harm, happiness, and healing described by 18 Black fundraisers in group discussions. **Part Two** complements these narratives with statistical analysis from a structured survey of 107 Black fundraisers, providing a broader context for their experiences.

By combining narrative and statistical approaches, this report offers a comprehensive understanding of how Black fundraisers experience the profession capturing both personal stories and the patterns of shared experience revealed through structured data.



# DEFINING SYSTEMIC ANTI-BLACK RACISM

“We are always regulating ourselves — tone, language, body, just to be seen as professional.” — Paul

Anti-Black Racism is an amorphous, insidious, outrageous, and contagious force. It travels across oceans, seas, mountains, valleys, villages and cities. It's in our neighbourhoods and workplaces, hidden in rhetoric and spoken clearly for people to hear. Anti-Black racism embodies the pinnacle of hatred and the depth of unconscious biases. It lives wherever it is invited, and it forces itself on those who want nothing to do with it. Anti-Black racism brings a certain power to the perpetrator and weakness to the victim. It both rewards, and penalizes. Anti-Black racism is a historic problem and a current reality, it is systemic and autonomous, denied and doubted by others, yet experienced fully by Black people.

## **Systemic anti-Black Racism and Anti-Black Racism**

In this report, we use "Systemic anti-Black Racism" and "Anti-Black Racism" interchangeably, except where distinctions are needed. We avoid static definitions that make racism seem inevitable or clinical. Instead, we define it through lived reality the many ways racism affects Black people across two countries and multiple regions. Our definition is shaped by those who experience it most directly, grounded in the words of our survey participants, whose voices capture the meaning of anti-Black racism in ways no abstract definition can. The following quotes reflect this lived truth:

*"Another time we're in an anti-racism workshop. And I'm saying to a colleague of mine who, because at this point, it had been one thing after another, he introduced me to someone. I was like, Oh yeah, you know, my boss is pretty cool. And like, I'm super excited about us potentially working with you. And he says, 'don't listen to her. She's a little shit. She just brown-noses everybody'." – Veronica*

***"I just wanted to say that when you talk about systemic bias or systemic racism, it's systemic. It's already ingrained in the system. And when it's ingrained in the system, there's a stratification of where the Black woman belongs or where the Black man belongs. So that stratification is where everybody else, in all other spaces that we walk into. We already stratified, and that's where you belong, and that's where now, all these other challenges are born out of, because you go into a role, you are, you know, experienced." – Carla***

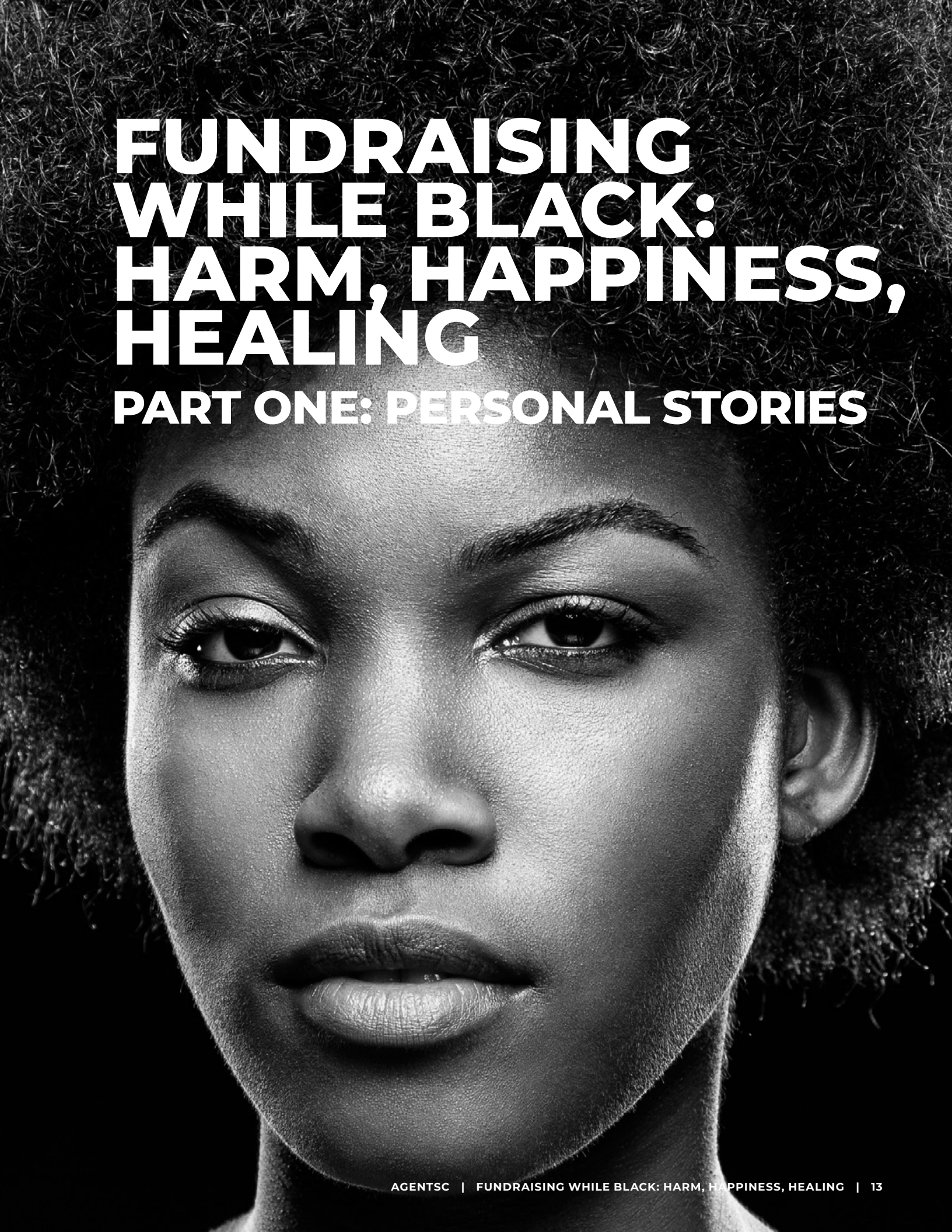
*"It shows up different. Racism, bias can show up differently from organization to organization, and it can show up as someone wanting to help you, and it's like telling you you're not ready yet. I see potential, but you're not there yet. And here are the reasons why we can't consider you for this, but we still think you have so much potential without the justification as to, but really, why not?" – Diana*

***"So that's my point, in terms of racism, that sometimes it's very brutal, it's very obvious you're being denied the opportunities you deserve. Other times you're kind of, it's almost like you're being catfished, yeah? So it shows up differently in different spaces..." – Angela***

*"But also I just like to acknowledge the fact that you know if you are having these feelings of trepidation or just not wanting to go to work every day, and you know, just having a tough time on a regular basis, it's probably time for you to go, for your own well-being." – Michael*

***"Racism in all its forms, is really hard to quantify, right, really hard to recognize at times as well."***

In inviting our survey and small group participants to define systemic anti-Black racism for themselves, we were able to record a plethora of experiences that Black fundraisers themselves had catalogued, thereby broadening our own understanding of how the issue manifests in the workplaces for our participants. In their own words, the definitions of racism become far clearer and more widespread, reminding us of a critically urgent problem that so far, the non-profit sector in Canada and the USA has failed to measurably deal with.



# **FUNDRAISING WHILE BLACK: HARM, HAPPINESS, HEALING**

## **PART ONE: PERSONAL STORIES**

## PERSONAL STORIES

“My mentor advised me to start each day with gratitude. You will be a better fundraiser once you have established that principle.”  
– Zanya

This section shares first-person narratives from four group discussions with 18 Black fundraisers in Canada and the USA. Its purpose is to spotlight how Black fundraisers navigate interconnected experiences of harm, happiness, and healing in their professional lives. Examined individually, these themes reveal distinct dimensions of exclusion, affirmation, and perseverance; taken together, they illustrate the complexity of lived realities in a racially unjust non-profit sector.

### HARM

***“I am incredibly exhausted by white people coming into communities that I live in and I represent and I look like, informing what is best, without someone that looks like me... It’s almost this savior complex being continued through the guise of foundation work.” – Andre***



**Harm: “The Angry Black Man” Stereotype – Mark**

*I started out in this work young, not even twenty, working at a summer camp and after-school program in Harlem.*

*The executive director was magnetic; everybody in the community knew him, loved him, thanked him. He had been there for generations and helped turn the neighbourhood around. But then he was let go. Why? Because he couldn’t fundraise. At nineteen, that made no sense to me. How could someone so trusted, so vital to the community, be dismissed because he didn’t bring in dollars?*

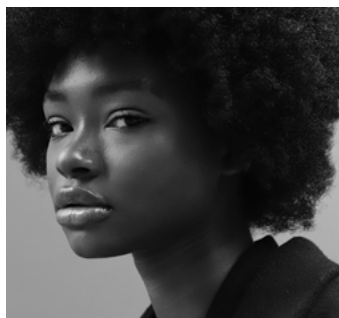
*Years later, when I stepped into leadership myself, I began to understand. Suddenly, everything was about*

*numbers, about grants, about proving value through metrics. When I tried to sound the alarm about looming funding gaps, my warnings weren’t taken seriously. A year later, the crisis hit, just like I said it would, and we were scrambling. That kind of disregard stings, because it’s not about competence, it’s about trust.*

*And the harm doesn’t stop there. In fundraising spaces, I’d look around and realize I was often the only Black man in the room. Layer that with the constant stereotypes: when I spoke directly, the way my non-Black colleagues did, I was accused of being “angry.” I’ve seen white and Middle Eastern colleagues speak with the same bluntness, and it was accepted. When I do it, suddenly I’m the problem. Suddenly, I’m “combative.” That label follows you, even when all you’re doing is your job.*

*The harm is not just personal, it’s structural. I am tired of white people parachuting into my community, deciding what’s best, and calling it service. I live in Harlem. I see what isn’t being solved. I know what my community needs. Yet too often, the people making the decisions don’t look like us, don’t come from where we come from, and don’t trust the voices of those who do.*

*That’s the real harm: the erasure of knowledge, the mistrust of expertise, and the constant weight of being seen as a problem rather than as a leader.*



### **Harm: Paper Cuts and Pushback – Tisha**

*I never thought of myself as someone who got bullied. Growing up, I faced competitiveness and jealousy in school especially in my*

*performing arts program where every opportunity was a contest, but I wouldn't have called it bullying. I knew what bullying looked like, and it didn't define my childhood. That's why it stunned me, years later, when I found myself in my forties wondering, "Is this woman trying to bully me?"*

*She was my colleague, and her behaviour went far beyond difficult. She ignored my emails, dodged calls, and refused to prepare for important meetings. Then she'd swoop in at the last minute, contribute little, and afterward criticize me for stepping in to fill the silence. She'd claim I shouldn't have spoken, even when the funder's questions required an immediate response. It was gaslighting: withholding information, shifting blame, undermining my contributions.*

*What made it worse was realizing I wasn't the only one. Others on the team, especially early-career staff, were enduring the same treatment. Some tolerated it because they felt trapped by personal or financial circumstances. One of my colleagues was married to an undocumented worker. She couldn't afford to risk being fired for speaking out. Watching them endure what I recognized as bullying confirmed that it wasn't "just me."*

*Looking back, I can see a pattern in my career. The sharpest wounds weren't always outright bullying, but the constant sting of micro-aggressions, tiny paper cuts that added up over time. I'd offer an idea in a meeting only to be met with silence, then watch as a white colleague repeated the same point and received praise. I was made to feel as though my intelligence, my judgment, my very presence needed constant validation.*

*When I finally tried to address the communication breakdown with this colleague directly, she turned defensive. I laid out the facts: emails unanswered, last-*

*minute appearances, meetings derailed. I told her plainly, "We have a communication problem." Instead of problem-solving, she grew angry. Her response was to threaten a performance review, as if my attempt at clarity was insubordination.*

*That was the moment it hit me: bullying doesn't always look like a playground shove. In professional life, it often hides in gaslighting, constant undermining, and the steady drip of micro-aggressions. And while the surface wounds may seem small, over time they cut deep."*



### **Harm: Black Immigrants Breaking Out of the Box - Cheryll**

*"When I first arrived in Canada, I thought education would be my way forward. I studied*

*computer programming at George Brown College, went through the long process of securing a work permit, and began applying for jobs. Yet, despite my qualifications, doors stayed closed. The first organization that finally took a chance on me was a Catholic non-profit. That moment changed everything; it opened the path that would define my career.*

*Coming from a communal upbringing where neighbours and families supported one another, I found the individualism here jarring. In Canada, the system is built so that you must depend on yourself alone. That reality deepened my conviction to work in non-profits and international development, because I wanted to create support systems for those who didn't have them.*

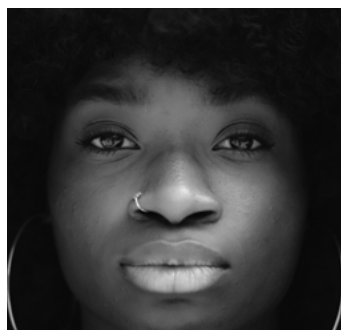
*But entering the non-profit sector as a Black immigrant came with challenges. I quickly realized how systemic bias shapes our experiences before we even step into the room. Systems of stratification decide where people like me are "supposed" to belong, regardless of our talent or readiness. I have been told I wasn't ready for leadership, even while doing the work of a leader. I was once discouraged from applying for a director role, only to be asked to sit on the hiring panel and watch someone with*

*less experience than me, someone I had to train, take the role. I broke down after that interview, realizing how deeply the system was stacked against me.*

*Sometimes racism is blatant—opportunities denied, qualifications dismissed. Other times, it masquerades as “support”: leaders saying they see my potential, telling me an unpaid workload will “help me grow.” It felt like encouragement on the surface, but in reality, it was exploitation. The real growth only came when I left that organization and stepped into spaces that recognized my worth.*

*Even then, the struggle isn’t just external. Systemic racism shapes how we treat one another too. I’ve seen Black women positioned to undermine each other as a survival strategy, forced to mirror the very systems that oppress us. It’s painful to admit, but it’s part of the reality.*

*My journey has been about refusing the boxes PWIs try to place me in. I’ve even gone as far as submitting a claim to the Canadian Human Rights Commission on the grounds of discrimination I endured with my employer. Whether in non-profits, finance, or fundraising, my purpose is clear: to mobilize resources so that those without privilege can thrive. Every step has required breaking barriers—not just for myself, but for those coming behind me. And while the system may be stratified, my story is proof that those boundaries can be challenged, one act of resilience at a time.*



**Harm: When Recognition Turns to Ridicule - Yolanda**

*When I first joined the organization, I admired my boss. He was a white male leader, and early on I told him, half-jokingly*

*but with ambition, “One day, I want your job.” He smiled and said, “Let’s do it.” For a while, I believed him.*

*As I grew in the role, my contributions became visible. I wrote my own grants, managed a portfolio, and worked closely with the development team. People inside and*

*outside the organization began to notice. Funders and colleagues would praise my work directly to him: “You made a great hire. She’s so talented. She’s amazing.” But instead of celebrating with me, he began to chip away at me, belittling me in public.*

*One memory is etched in my mind. We were preparing to celebrate a major organizational milestone. Nearly 90 leaders of foundations and non-profits from across Chicago were in the room. At the very last minute, he asked me to speak about my department’s work. I pulled myself together and delivered with passion. The response was electric—the room leapt to its feet. Funders said, “Where have you been hiding her?” They were ready to commit. For a moment, I felt seen. And then he cut me down. “Yeah, yeah, yeah,” he said, “but you should’ve seen her yesterday. She had her hair in what I think she calls twists. Not quite as polished as today.” He reached over and patted the headscarf I was wearing. The room went silent. You could hear a pin drop. My triumph collapsed into humiliation.*

*This wasn’t isolated. At an anti-racism workshop, as I introduced myself warmly to a new colleague, he interjected: “Don’t listen to her, she’s a little shit. She just brown-noses everybody.” Another time, pointing at my headscarf, he told others, “I guess she just didn’t feel like doing her hair today.” It was full-on bullying—personal, public, and persistent. I went to HR, explaining that I didn’t feel safe and that my ability to learn and grow was being stifled. Their response? That I should “have deeper conversations” with him. Nothing changed. No one intervened.*

*Eventually, my projects were stripped from me, including a \$15M Capital Campaign that I had almost completed but was handed over to a young white colleague who received all the praise for my work. Ideas I had created were reassigned. My opportunities evaporated. I left the organization, carrying with me not just the frustration of being silenced, but the painful clarity that even in spaces committed to equity, racism and bullying can flourish when left unchecked.*

## HAPPINESS

***"Happiness came back in small doses—through one honest conversation, one act of kindness, one reminder that community can still be good." - Tyrell***



### **Happiness: Shifting Motivations - Catherine**

*When I think about what keeps me motivated in this work, I realize it has shifted over time.*

*In the very beginning, when I was much younger, my motivation was simple and immediate: impact. I wanted to raise enough money so my friends could come to summer camp with me. I can still remember us strategizing as kids, asking each other, how can we double the donations? Maybe we should go down to the beach where the tourists were and ask them to give. Maybe we could convert it somehow. Back then, it was all about raising just enough so everyone could be included.*

*As I grew older, my motivation became about bridging purpose and resources. And then, as I became more embedded in the sector, I started to see how deeply the system itself needed to change. Now, I'm in a place where my focus is on innovation, philanthropy, and building sustainability into organizations. It's interesting to look back and see how my "why" has shifted with each phase of my journey, always evolving, always reshaping itself.*

*For me, performing has always been a kind of anchor. When things get hard, I bury myself in work. Sometimes, I find myself in what I call the "don't give a fuck" phase, not angry, just tired. Fatigued from it all. For a long time, I was the only Black woman in my organization. Eventually, another Black woman joined, and now there are two of us. But for years, it felt like I was carrying that identity alone. Back then, I didn't feel the need to fight for anyone else, I was just trying to survive, to do my job, to keep moving forward. My mindset was: leave me alone, don't get in my way, let me do my work. And honestly, the organization seemed fine letting things go that way. But now, with this new colleague, she's younger, more junior,*

*in a different region, I feel something shift again. A sense of responsibility. Maybe I need to step into more of a supportive role, not just for myself but for her, too.*

*That's why spaces like BCFC matter so much to me. They remind me I'm not alone. I'm also part of a group for Black neurodivergent moms and kids, and being in these spaces where people share similar struggles is incredibly powerful. It shows me there's a pattern; that it isn't just me, that I'm not imagining things. And that realization breaks the hold those experiences can have on you.*

*When I'm grounded in that truth, I can set boundaries. I can ask: What do I want? How am I going to achieve it for me, within this system? Instead of internalizing everything, I start to move with more intention.*

*I may not give as much to these spaces as I'd like, but I deeply value them. They nurture me, they strengthen me, and they remind me I don't have to carry this journey alone. And for that, I'm grateful.*



### **Happiness: Finding Fabulous Female Fundraisers - Tonya**

*I've always carried a kind of wisdom that tells me when to walk away. My mom instilled that in me early on if a place no*

*longer serves you, you don't have to stay. That lesson has guided me throughout my career.*

*In the beginning, I leaned on professional coaches, always women, Black and white, who helped me survive spaces that weren't made for me. They gave me tools to exist until I could move on. But survival isn't the same as thriving, and I knew I wanted more.*

*That's when F3 came into my life. The group launched right as I was starting my consulting business, and it became my lifeline. Suddenly, I wasn't just a fundraiser anymore, I was a business owner. That meant contracts, rates, invoicing systems, client boundaries, all things no one teaches you. F3 gave me a community of Black women who could share that wisdom, who could say, "Here's how you do it," or sometimes, "Here's what not*

to do.” And it wasn’t just technical knowledge. It was the honesty of being able to talk about race and gender without having to explain myself. Because no matter how experienced you are, those barriers don’t vanish, they just show up in different ways. Even now, as a consultant, I’ve had to end client relationships because of racism. F3 reminded me: it’s not just me. And I don’t have to carry it alone.

It wasn’t always like this. When I moved back to Cleveland from Atlanta, I expected to find community among local Black fundraisers. Instead, I ran into politics, insecurity, even ageism. I presented younger than I was, and that made people uneasy. At the time, I couldn’t see the layers, but looking back now, it’s clear: there was a lot more happening than I realized.

That’s why I’m grateful younger Black women fundraisers today have more resources, AADO, F3, and other networks to lean on. Those spaces didn’t exist for me in the same way, but I’m glad they do now. This year marks five years in business. Honestly, I didn’t think I’d last six months. Back then, my only goal was to replace my salary. Now, my mindset has shifted, I’m thinking about sustainability, about legacy, about building something that will last into retirement.

And the difference is, I know I won’t be doing it alone.



**Happiness:  
Spirituality In  
Fundraising - Dele**

*I found happiness in my work in ways I never expected. Back in 2008, I became an international missionary*

*and took on the role of principal at a Christian school in Jerusalem. Most of the students were Palestinian Muslims, and I had no prior experience raising funds or managing development. My family supported me, but I had to teach myself everything, how to raise funds, how to manage resources, and how to support the school. It was overwhelming at times, but there was a profound satisfaction in learning and growing while serving a purpose bigger than myself.*

*When I returned to the USA, I became Director of Development at my alma mater. I loved that school, the students, the faculty, and the mission. This role gave me the chance to understand the full breadth of fundraising, from connecting with donors to understanding their motivations and priorities. I realized that it wasn’t about me asking for money; it was about helping donors invest in causes they cared about and empowering organizations to do meaningful work. Once I shifted my perspective in that way, the work became not only easier but deeply fulfilling.*

*Over time, I began to see fundraising as more than a job, it became a form of stewardship and worship. I focused on how to strategically reallocate talent, influence, money, and time to make a real difference in the world. Helping donors understand that their resources could create impact became my passion. I learned that generosity isn’t just giving; it’s a responsibility and a privilege. Every time I saw resources applied effectively, or a donor’s heart grow through giving, I felt a sense of joy and purpose. It is this understanding, that connecting needs with resources can change lives, that continues to drive me and fills my work with meaning.*



**Happiness: Joy in  
Rewarding Work -  
Taraji**

*I never planned on a career in fundraising. I started out in programs, and it was a sorority sister who first pulled*

*me into university administration. At the beginning, it was all finance, grant allocations, spreadsheets, the back-end numbers work. But when program staff needed help with reporting, I stepped in. When grants needed writing, I picked that up too. What started as a numbers job slowly grew into something else. Finance became fundraising, and before long, I had found myself in a career that blended my skills with my passion for impact.*

*What began with budgets and reports grew into something so much bigger helping organizations bring opportunity into people's lives.*

*The work was demanding, but it was deeply rewarding. In Nashville, where the fundraising landscape often revolved around the same families of wealth, I learned how to build trust, cultivate relationships, and open doors for organizations serving the community. Donors responded to my authenticity and energy, and I found joy in watching those relationships translate into real resources for change.*

*There's nothing like the moment when you know the dollars raised are breaking down barriers and giving people a chance they didn't have before.*

*Of course, there were challenges, biases to navigate, risks that came with managing donor relationships, but none of it erased the sense of fulfillment I felt when I saw the difference my work made. I thrived in community-based, social service organizations that created pathways for opportunity.*

*I like seeing people get beyond systemic barriers and finally have access to opportunity. That's what drives me.*

*My happiness has never come from titles or recognition; it comes from impact. I love the way fundraising blends strategy and humanity. Each grant written, each donor conversation, each program report is more than just a task; it's a step toward helping communities thrive.*

*Fundraising gave me the gift of seeing lives change, and there's no greater joy than knowing I helped make that possible.*

## HEALING

***"Healing is recognizing when your environment is life-sucking rather than life-giving and having the courage to move on." - Beverley***



### **Healing: Reshaping Philanthropy - Kadeem**

*One of the strongest lessons I've learned as a Black male fundraiser is that healing often comes from transforming harm into purpose.*

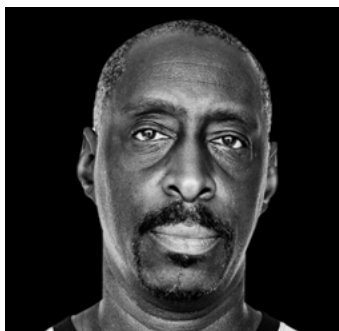
*I began my journey in Harlem, where I witnessed something that stayed with me. A respected community leader, someone deeply rooted in the neighborhood, was pushed out of his role because he couldn't raise money. His impact in the community wasn't enough to keep him in leadership without financial backing. That moment revealed a hard truth: in our sector, community trust alone doesn't sustain leadership, resources do.*

*When I later entered the development field, I refused to see fundraising as just a technical skill. For me, it became a tool for equity a way to redirect resources from institutions of wealth into communities historically denied access. At its core, the work was about taking resources "from the rich to give to those in need."*

*Healing, for me, wasn't about personal recovery; it was about reshaping philanthropy itself. My focus became ensuring that communities weren't only recipients of investment but also decision-makers in how that investment was used. As I often say, "If you're going to invest in our community, you should actually have people from the community investing in it."*

*I've tried to live this by sharing my knowledge and mentoring others, opening doors for organizations without access to elite networks or institutions like the Ford Foundation or Goldman Sachs. Each conversation, each connection, felt like a step toward correcting systemic imbalances turning my own frustrations into collective opportunity.*

*For me, healing has meant converting lived harm into strategies that challenge exclusion, expand access, and strengthen community-led leadership in philanthropy.*



### **Healing – Black Brotherhood – Harold**

*I'll never forget the first time I joined a call with the Black men in philanthropy group. I sat there thinking, "Oh my god these men are*

*having the same experiences that I'm having." For the first time, I didn't have to explain myself. I didn't have to water down what I was going through. I could just be. That feeling of belonging was powerful.*

*I've also learned to guard my peace. For me, happiness is about self-care that keeps me balanced. I work out to burn through the stress, to let the frustration leave my body. I draw boundaries around my time, too. "Once I close my laptop for the day, that time is mine." That's non-negotiable. Happiness, for me, isn't pretending the challenges don't exist. It's creating space for myself to breathe, to reset, to live fully outside the labels and demands of the job.*



### **HEALING: A Sunday Ritual – Deondre**

*Every Sunday, I create space to breathe. The week is often heavy, the pressure at work, the quiet isolation of being one of the few*

*Black fundraisers in my field, and the constant stream of political headlines that weigh on my spirit. But Sundays are different. I call it my reset.*

*It starts with order: I clean my space, cook meals for the week, and set up the small comforts that will carry me through the days ahead. Then I turn to self-care, my favorite books, the familiar rhythm of tending to my hair, the calming steam of a facial treatment. One thing I've learned: never do your hair when you're angry. You won't be gentle. You'll pull, you'll tear, and you'll end up hurting yourself. So now, when it's wash day, I make sure I'm in the right mindset because that's real care, right down to the strands on my head.*

*I slip on my noise-canceling headphones, shut out the world, and step into a cocoon of peace where I don't owe anyone explanations, where no judgment can reach me. I'm not religious, but I know this time is sacred. It's where I release stress, reclaim my energy, and remind myself of my worth.*

*Some Sundays I play chess to keep sharp. Other Sundays I just sit in silence, grateful for my own company. I've learned that wellness isn't a luxury, it's survival. Protecting my time, honoring my body, refusing roles that diminish my spirit are the choices that keep me whole.*

*My Sunday reset isn't just a routine. It's my anchor. My promise to myself that when Monday comes, I'll meet the week whole, centered, unshaken, and ready to go.*



# **FUNDRAISING WHILE BLACK: HARM, HAPPINESS, HEALING**

## **PART TWO: STATISTICAL DATA**

“The best moments have been with colleagues who understand what it means to fundraise while Black, there is safety there - in collective.” – Sydney

This section presents statistical survey data drawn from 107 complete responses submitted by Black fundraisers in Canada and the United States. The data complements the personal narratives shared in Part One. Together, Parts One and Two of this report offer a comprehensive picture of how Black fundraisers experience Harm, Happiness, and Healing.

When combined, the personal accounts and quantitative data reveal the layered realities of fundraisers confronting systemic anti-Black racism within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), in which 60% of our participants work. Correspondingly 27% of survey participants work in a Black-led organization where the majority of the executive team and/or board members are Black.

## HARM

“I’ve seen less qualified colleagues advance while I stay in the same role for years.” – Elma

Data on harm is drawn from survey questions on workplace climate, bias, toxic leadership, racism, bullying, and microaggressions. It reveals the deep, lasting impact of anti-Black racism within the fundraising profession. Racism is normalized, accountability is absent, and leadership shields harmful behaviour under the guise of professionalism. These patterns erode confidence, isolate Black fundraisers, and force a choice between workplace survival and authenticity, showing a sector that often perpetuates the very inequities it claims to oppose.

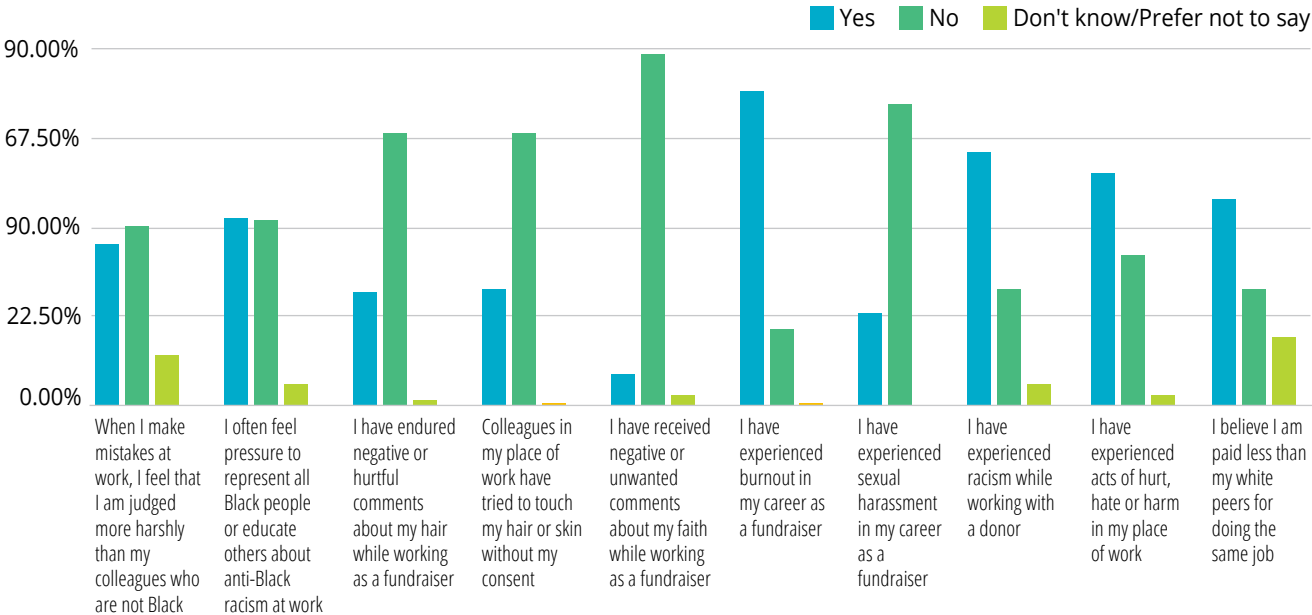
### **Harm: The Negative Aspects of Fundraising While Black**

Black fundraisers experience profound harm both within organizations and in donor interactions. Data reveal persistent exclusion, discrimination, and inequity, including burnout, racism from donors, and workplace acts of harm. Pay gaps, heightened scrutiny, and the pressure to represent all Black

people add to this burden, while identity-based violations such as unwanted hair touching or negative remarks show the personal, invasive nature of these harms. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that racism is central to Black fundraisers’ professional realities, threatening their well-being, safety, and career sustainability.

- **Burnout is Alarmingly High** – Almost 80% of respondents reported experiencing burnout, tied not only to workload but to the constant strain of racism, inequity, and heightened scrutiny. This signals a systemic crisis of sustainability for Black fundraisers.
- **Racism and Harm Are Widespread** – Nearly 64% of respondents experienced racism directly from donors, and almost 59% reported acts of hurt, hate, or harm in their workplace. These are not marginal numbers, they point to a sector-wide problem of racism both inside organizations and in external donor relationships.

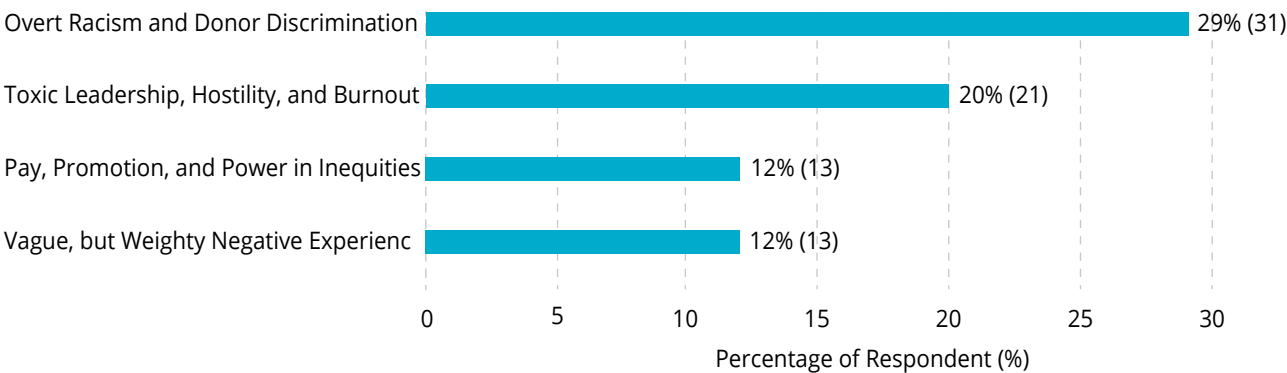
The Negative Aspects of Fundraising While Black



Harm: The Worst Experiences in the Workplace Since Becoming A Fundraiser

Harm spans overt racism and donor discrimination to toxic leadership, pay inequities, and persistent hostility. For many, these are cumulative, not isolated, leaving lasting impacts on careers.

- **Racism and Donor Discrimination** – 29% reported being directly targeted by racist behavior, including donors ignoring them, questioning their role, or making invasive comments about their appearance.
- **Toxic Leadership and Hostility** – 20% described harassment, public undermining, or relentless scrutiny from leaders and colleagues, often leading to burnout or resignation.

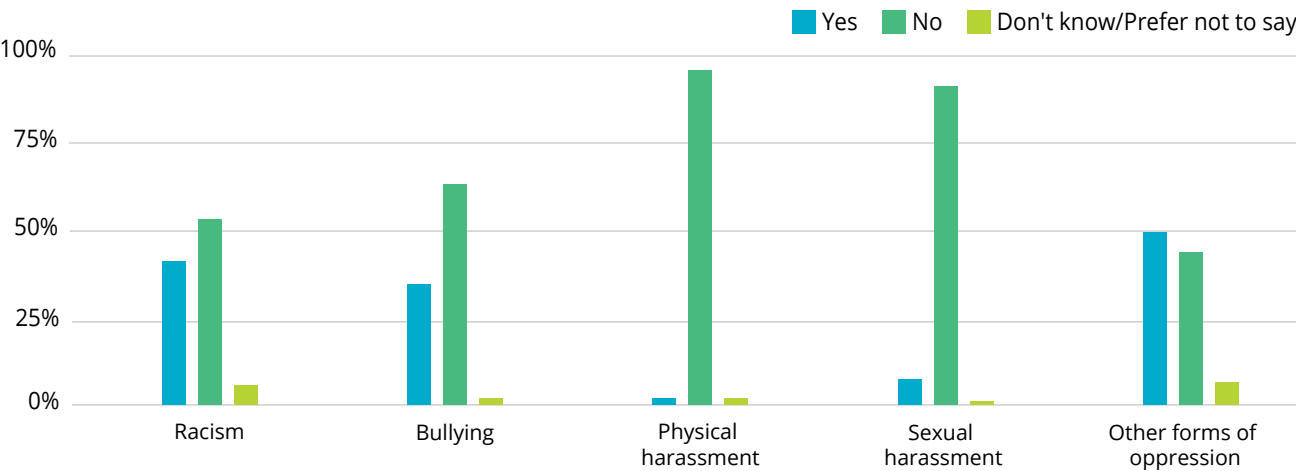


**Harm: Experiences of Hurt, Hate, and Harm in the Workplace Over the Past 18 months**

Nearly half of Black fundraisers reported oppression in the past 18 months, most commonly in the form of racism and workplace bullying. Some also faced physical harassment, showing that harm extends beyond structural and verbal oppression. Together, these findings reveal a spectrum of oppression that makes some workplaces unsafe and unsustainable for Black fundraisers.

- **Racism and Bullying Are Widespread** – 41% reported racism and 35% reported bullying in the past 18 months, underscoring how hostility defines workplace experiences.
- **Other Forms of Oppression Are Significant** – Nearly 50% reported facing additional forms of oppression, ranging from inequitable treatment to physical harassment.

**The Negative Aspects of Fundraising While Black**



**Harm: Elaboration on Workplace Experiences**

Black respondents described toxic workplace cultures, stemming from exclusion, and race-aligned cliques that foster hostility, while leadership failures eroded trust. Tokenism, heightened scrutiny, and denial of mentorship systematically undermine belonging and block opportunities for Black fundraisers to fully advance.

- **Toxic Culture and Power Dynamics** – 43% described exclusionary environments, cliques, retaliation, and racialized hiring and firing practices.
- **Leadership and Support Failures** – 21% reported poor leadership and instability, while 16% highlighted gaslighting, dismissal, and denial of mentorship or support.

# HAPPINESS

“When I see Black leaders in positions of power, I see what’s possible for me and for those coming after me.” – Afua

Happiness data underscores the fact that though systemic racism impacts Black fundraisers, some Predominantly White Institutions (PWI’s) create a positive culture where Black fundraisers have opportunities to prosper. Some PWI’s as well as Black Institutions provide spaces where fundraisers experience belonging, safety, recognition, and affirmation which are benefits often absent in broader workplaces.

By fostering community, mentorship, and professional development, some employers offer personal fulfillment, and also help counteract the systemic barriers and harms Black fundraisers most often face, in stark contrast to the majority of workplaces, which remain cause for concern.

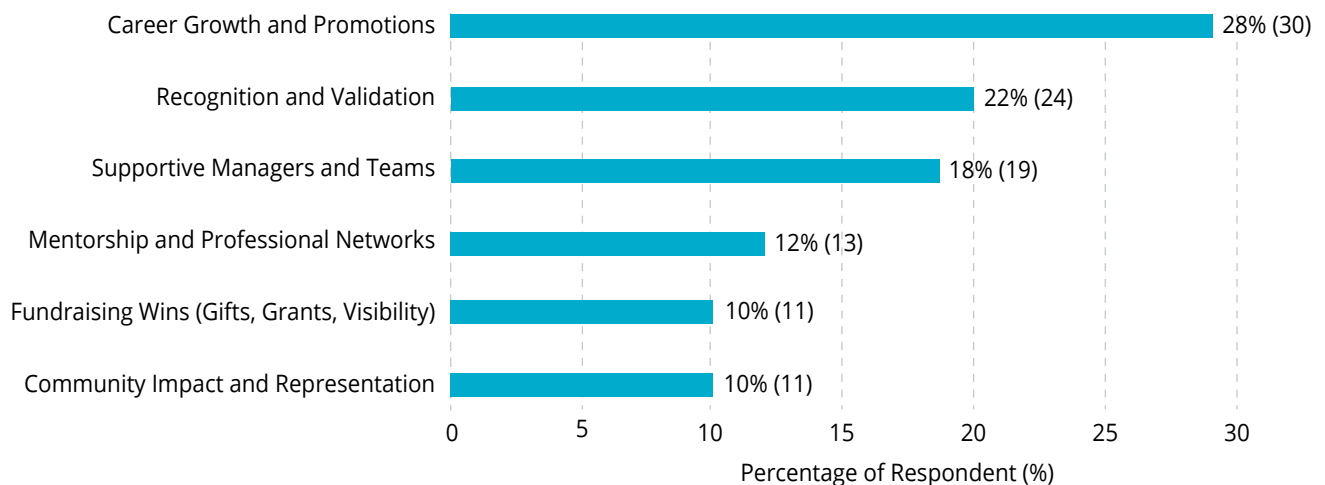
## Happiness: Positive Experiences in the Workplace

Positive experiences for Black fundraisers often stem from career advancement, recognition, and supportive

relationships. Key highlights include promotions and new roles, professional growth opportunities, and validation from colleagues, supervisors, and donors. Supportive managers, strong teams, mentors, and professional networks were especially meaningful. Successes in fundraising securing major gifts, receiving grants, or gaining visibility as thought leaders were also celebrated. Many emphasized that these achievements are not only personal victories but also advance Black communities, reinforcing the collective significance of their work.

- **Career Growth and Recognition** – Many cited 50% promotions, new roles, and validation from colleagues, managers, and donors as the most meaningful affirmations of their contributions.
- **Supportive Leadership and Community** – Strong teams, mentors, and professional networks, along with moments of community impact 40%, reinforced belonging and sustained success.

## Positive Experiences for Black Fundraisers

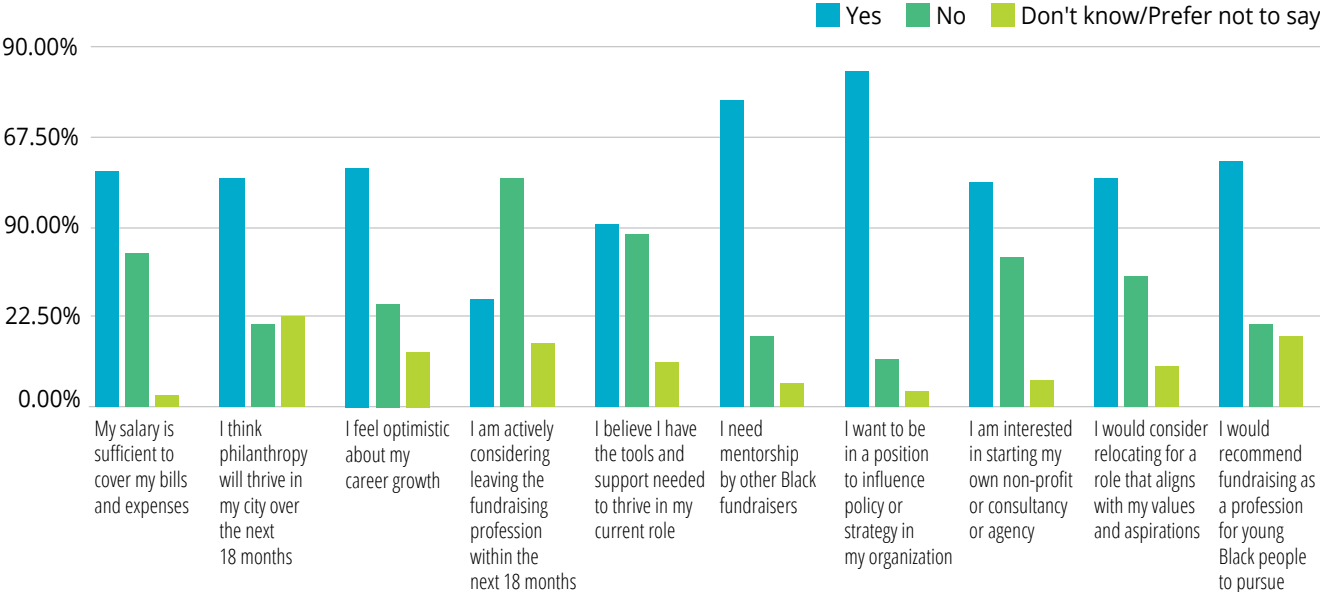


## Happiness: Current and Future Needs and Outlook

Some Black fundraisers’ perspectives on happiness are closely tied to their views of the future of fundraising as a profession and in the direction of philanthropy more broadly. Career growth outlooks are significantly positive.

- **Aspirations For Organizational Policy and Strategy** – 84% of Black fundraisers aspire to be in role where they can influence the direction of their organization.
- **Seeking Black Mentorship** – 77% of Black Fundraisers express a desire to be mentored by another Black fundraiser.
- **Recommending Fundraising as a Career** - While 62% of Black fundraisers would recommend fundraising as a career to young Black people, this is further supported by positive sentiments towards a prosperous philanthropic landscape (57%), being awarded a sufficient salary (59%), and optimism about career growth, (60%).

### Current and Future Needs and Outlook



# HEALING

“ I couldn’t let my wound become my identity; healing required me to separate what people did to me from what I still believed was true.” – Ramona

The theme of Healing data is drawn from survey questions capturing recommendations, solutions, and future-oriented visions for change in the fundraising in profession.

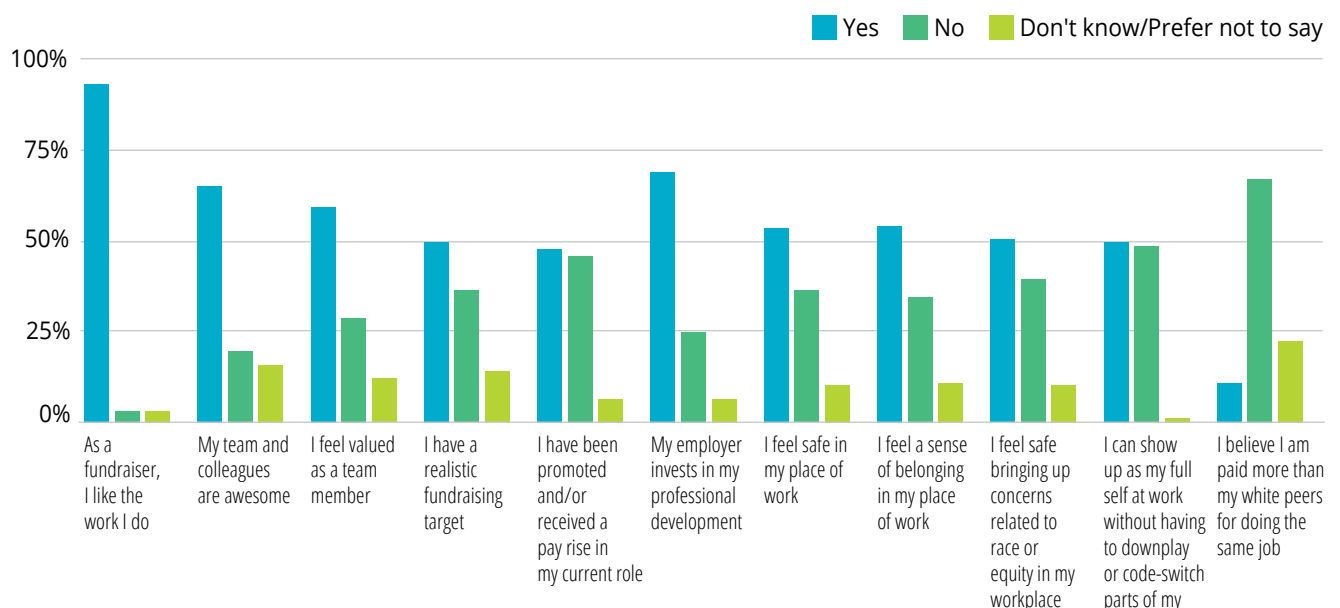
## Healing: Positive Aspects of Fundraising

Despite the pervasive impacts of systemic anti-Black racism in the fundraising profession, the vast majority of Black fundraisers report enjoying their work, valuing their colleagues, and feeling supported in their professional development. These positive experiences, whether through collaborative teams, mentoring relationships, or meaningful engagement with donors, play a crucial role in sustaining well-being and professional satisfaction.

For Black fundraisers, these moments of affirmation, recognition, and achievement help buffer the stress and challenges posed by discrimination, exclusion, and inequity, demonstrating that joy, fulfillment and healing are possible even within a profession shaped by systemic barriers.

- **Professional and Vocational Affinity** – 92% of Black fundraisers enjoy their roles as fundraisers
- **Professional Development** – 68% of Black fundraisers agree that their employer invests in their professional development
- **Awesome Colleagues** – 64% of Black fundraisers acknowledge that they have awesome colleagues

## The Positive Aspects of Fundraising While Black

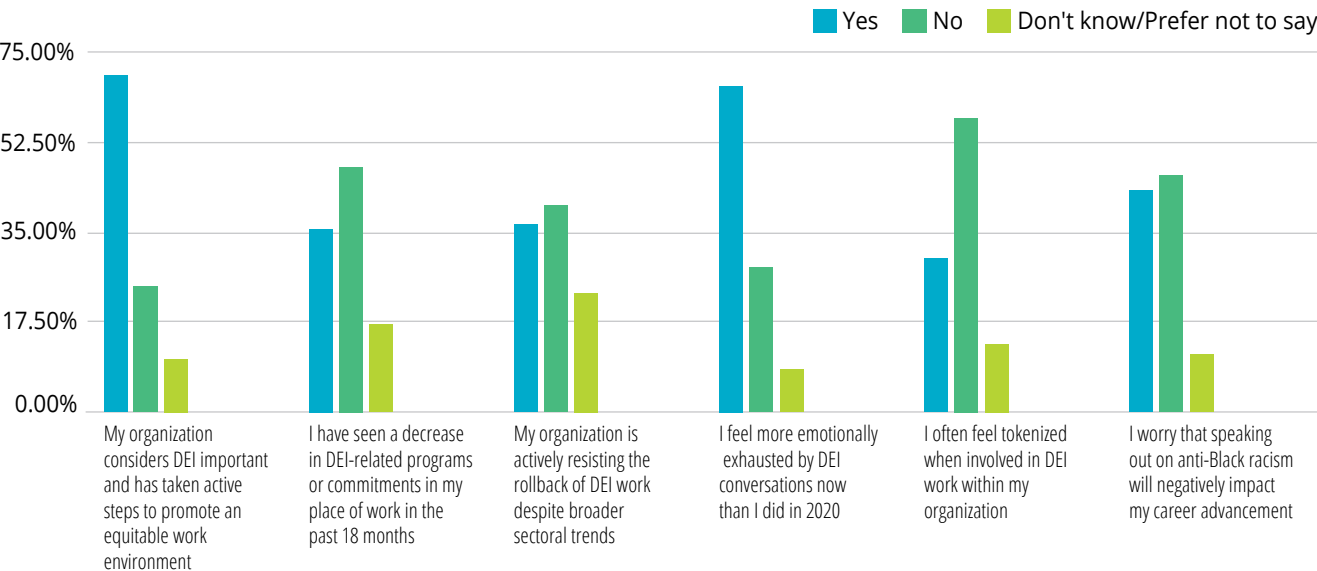


“The silence from leadership when racism happens is the deepest cut.”

Commitments to equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEI) remain fragile and inconsistent across the sector. While most organizations (65%) state that DEI is important and have initiatives in place, many describe a clear gap between stated priorities and lived practice. Over one-third 36% have seen programs decline, and another 36% report active resistance to implementation—underscoring both fragility and pushback. High levels of “No” and

“Don’t know” responses further suggest confusion, inconsistency, or tokenism in how DEI is understood and applied. Healing in the sector depends not only on individual resilience but also on institutional accountability. When DEI commitments are upheld and strengthened, they create the conditions for repair, belonging, and transformation; when they are stalled or resisted, healing remains fragile and incomplete.

Please select the option that applies to each statement



The survey findings reveal what we have long known: harm in this profession is not isolated but systemic, shaping our work and our well-being. They expose how racism, burnout, and exclusion have persisted despite decades of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives that promised change but failed to meet the expectations of Black fundraisers. Behind each number lives the labour of navigating spaces never built for us, yet still demanding our excellence. At the same time, the findings point to

the ingenuity of our survival—sustained through community, mentorship, and the strength of Black Fundraising Associations like BCFC, AADO, F3, MOCID, and RPOCF. These collectives embody what DEI has not: safety, belonging, and solidarity. Together, the narratives and these insights expose a complex landscape where harm endures, and where happiness and healing persist as acts of resistance that refuse erasure.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

“We have two sets of rules in our organization. One for minorities and one for White people.” – Karla

After 20 years of research, reporting, DEI strategies, and dialogue on systemic anti-Black racism in non-profit fundraising and in light of the limited progress achieved, it is time for robust, decisive, and measurable action. This involves change-focused strategies and actions that strengthen Black Fundraising Associations (BFAs), confront the systemic shortcomings of predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and traditional fundraising associations, and heighten the responsibility for equitable philanthropy and accountability within philanthropic intuitions.

We propose three change-focused strategies as recommendations that will result in the safeguarding, protection, well-being, and fair treatment of Black fundraisers:

**Recommendation One: Deeper Collaboration Among Black Fundraising Associations (BFAs).** Deeper collaboration and resource sharing among Black Fundraising Associations (BFAs) is essential to better meet the needs of Black fundraisers, expand the reach and visibility of available services, and grow membership bases. Strengthened collaboration would enhance the delivery of three critical areas identified by Black fundraisers:

**A. Establishing a Skills and Mentorship, Academy for Training and Career Development:** Provide skills development and culturally tailored experiences education and training that support the development and advancement of traditional and Afro-centric fundraising skills in Black communities, building confidence, enhancing business skills, and creating pathways to leadership in the profession.

**B. Responsive Protections From Racism:** Offer anti-racist response frameworks as a service to Black fundraisers. Frameworks could span recruitment practices, workplace culture, and career advancement, enabling BFA's to work directly with Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and fundraising membership organizations towards solutions, while also support Black fundraisers when and where anti-Black racism is reported.

**C. Networking and Collective Care:** Create opportunities for virtual and in-person networking and support circles, sharing information and education about health and mindfulness practices to promote wellness. This includes structured spaces for Black Fundraisers to socialize, speak freely and receive peer support.

**Recommendation Two: Boards, executives, senior managers, and HR teams within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) collaborate with traditional fundraising associations to share accountability for creating and implementing solutions that prevent and address anti-Black racism within the fundraising profession. This requires decisive action and should include the following considerations:**

**A. Enhanced Human Resources Capacity:** Building Targeted Competencies and Implementing Strategic Interventions to Protect and Support Black Employees: Recruit culturally competent and courageous HR professionals/consultants to address systemic and cultural anti-Black racism, ensuring Black staff who report discrimination are protected, heard, and empowered through advocacy, mentorship, and restorative practices.

**B. Partnership Building and Mutual Capacity Sharing:** Partner BFAs to share skills, exchange expertise, develop support tools, and create initiatives that foster Black belonging within PWIs.

**C. Advocate for Equity and Anti-Racist Practices:** Engage in bold advocacy and implement concrete equity measures by actively speaking out against systemic anti-Black racism, identifying and dismantling structural barriers, and creating tangible opportunities for career advancement, mentorship, and leadership development for Black fundraisers.

**Recommendation Three: PWIs and traditional fundraising associations' Funding partners should play a critical role in eliminating systemic anti-Black racism. Funders must exercise stronger due diligence to ensure their sponsorships and philanthropic investments support organizations genuinely and actively dismantling systemic anti-Black racism. Funder solutions could include:**

**A. Implementing Conditional Funding:**

Philanthropic investments and sponsorships should be explicitly tied to measurable anti-racism outcomes. PWIs must demonstrate concrete policies, initiatives, and progress in addressing systemic inequities before receiving or continuing to receive funding.

**B. Strengthening Due Diligence and Monitoring:**

Funders should develop robust evaluation frameworks to assess an organization's capacity to address anti-Black racism. This includes reviewing policies, leadership accountability mechanisms, and historical performance on equity initiatives, with regular discussions on progress.

**C. Promoting Shared Accountability:** Funders, PWi's and traditional fundraising associations must commit to transparency and oversight on issues of systemic anti-Black racism. This includes creating channels for Black staff and members to report inequities safely, tracking measurable outcomes, and linking funding decisions directly to organizational performance in dismantling systemic anti-Black racism.

These recommendations are not intended as a comprehensive roadmap for eliminating systemic anti-Black racism within PWIs or traditional fundraising associations. While some Black Fundraising Associations (BFAs) already offer a broad range of support services, greater collaboration and resource sharing among them can accelerate their growth. Ultimately, however, the primary responsibility for addressing anti-Black racism within the fundraising profession lies within the organizations where it occurs and among the people and organizations who fund or sponsor the PWIs.

As cited in the introduction to this report, various DEI and IDEA reports within the AFP movement highlight that leaders in traditional fundraising associations consistently fail to uphold their duty to foster an equitable fundraising profession and, by extension, an equitable non-profit sector. Inaction on systemic anti-Black racism within PWIs constitutes not only a failure of leadership but also a breach of accountability to Black professionals whose talent, expertise, and contributions are frequently marginalized, excluded, or overlooked.



# CONCLUSION: PATHWAYS TOWARD TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

“The wound marked me, but it did not own me. Healing gave me the freedom to walk forward with wisdom instead of bitterness.” – Joelle

Black fundraisers across Canada and the U.S. describe themselves as driven, ambitious, qualified, and hardworking, yet these qualities are reported to hold few rewards within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Leaders within PWIs are reported to lack the will or the skill to address systemic anti-Black racism, allowing discriminatory practices to remain entrenched within their organizations. According to participants in our survey, anti-Black racism in the sector is not sporadic; it is systemic and structural. It has been this way for the past twenty years (on record) and will remain for the next twenty years unless immediate changes are made now.

## **The Failure of DEI Initiatives**

Despite two decades of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies, trainings and performative statements systemic change has not materialized into substantive transformation for many Black fundraisers. The Black Lives Matter era following George Floyd's murder in 2020 was a brief moment of reckoning, ultimately giving way to a return to old norms by 2025. Today, Black fundraisers report that most PWIs they work for (65%) recognize the importance of DEI and have implemented measures to foster an equitable work environment. However, these efforts have also left 64% of Black fundraisers feeling emotionally exhausted by DEI initiatives, while 43% worry that speaking out against anti-Black racism could negatively affect their careers.

This highlights a systemic failure of DEI initiatives within the non-profit sector, signaling that new, more effective approaches, going far beyond training and performative statements, are urgently needed. Real organizational culture change requires new collective mindsets and new inspiring models of practice, rather than the dismantling or abandonment of responsibilities that our current moment precariously embodies.

If systemic anti-Black racism is allowed to grow, the non-profit sector will exacerbate, rather than alleviate, existing problems. Failing to create the safety, recognition, and equity that Black fundraisers seek is neither a strategic nor sustainable option for the sector. What is needed most are bold, active solutions and courageous leadership within PWIs and traditional fundraising associations.

## **Reimagining Institutional Accountability**

Leaders within Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and traditional fundraising associations must confront the hard truth: diversity initiatives without personal and structural accountability do not work, as evidenced by the eventual dismantling of DEI and the limited gains of such initiatives. Institutions must commit to transparent equity appraisals, measurable anti-racism goals, and leadership accountability for progress. DEI must be balanced with a shift from performative compliance to transformative change rooted in justice and creation of opportunity.

## **The Growth of Black Fundraising Associations**

The growth of Black Fundraising Associations (BFAs) including AADO, BCFC, F3, MOCID, and RPOCF provides a powerful model for progress. These organizations function as sanctuaries and professional networks for Black fundraisers while offering expertise to the broader sector.

Greater collaboration, shared resources, and cross-border partnerships among BFAs can amplify their collective impact. Together, they can cultivate stronger pipelines for leadership, mentorship, and professional mobility, ensuring that Black fundraisers thrive in all work settings.

## **Building Afro-Centric Philanthropy**

The evolution of Black philanthropy rooted in reciprocity, community care, and shared uplift should inform how the non-profit sector engages diverse donor bases. Recognizing and resourcing Afro-centric fundraising practices can expand the cultural intelligence of the sector and align giving strategies

with the values of equity and belonging. Through Afro-centric fundraising practices and culturally informed donor engagement, BFAs are redefining philanthropy to reflect the diversity of donor communities.

## **Applicability Beyond the Non-Profit Sector**

This research centers on the experiences of Black fundraisers within the fundraising profession and non-profits in Canada and the USA. However, its implications extend far beyond that specific field. The experiences, challenges, and systemic barriers faced by Black fundraisers are not unique to the non-profit sector, nor are they unique to the fundraising profession, they likely reflect patterns of inequity that exist across every professional field where Black people pursue their vocation.

Black professionals often navigate similar forms of bias, exclusion, and structural barriers that limit opportunity and recognition. Whether it's anti-Black racism in government<sup>11</sup>, in healthcare<sup>12</sup>, in corporations<sup>13</sup> in academia<sup>14</sup>, or in the legal profession<sup>15</sup> (for example), racism towards Black people in a multiplicity of fields is both documented and undeniable.

By examining anti-Black racism specifically within the fundraising profession, this research provides insights into how organizations can recognize,

confront, and dismantle systemic anti-Black racism more broadly. The fight against these inequities is universal, and the commitment to meaningful, sustained change must be universal applicable. Organizations in all sectors can draw lessons from this work: creating cultures of belonging, accountability, and equity and also supporting Black professionals as a whole, fostering workplaces where all talent can thrive.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Our hope in sharing this research is that urgent action is taken in our current time, so that by 2045, twenty years from now, Black fundraisers will report on a transformed non-profit sector, one in which significant change has been achieved. In this vision, Black fundraisers experience a genuine sense of belonging and pride in their profession, encounter far fewer incidents of harm, and enjoy elevated levels of happiness free from the systemic anti-Black racism documented in 2005 and still present today in 2025.

This transformation is possible, and it represents a clear call to action for Predominantly White Institutions and traditional fundraising associations within non-profit sector to drive meaningful change to drive meaningful change with greater purpose and determination.

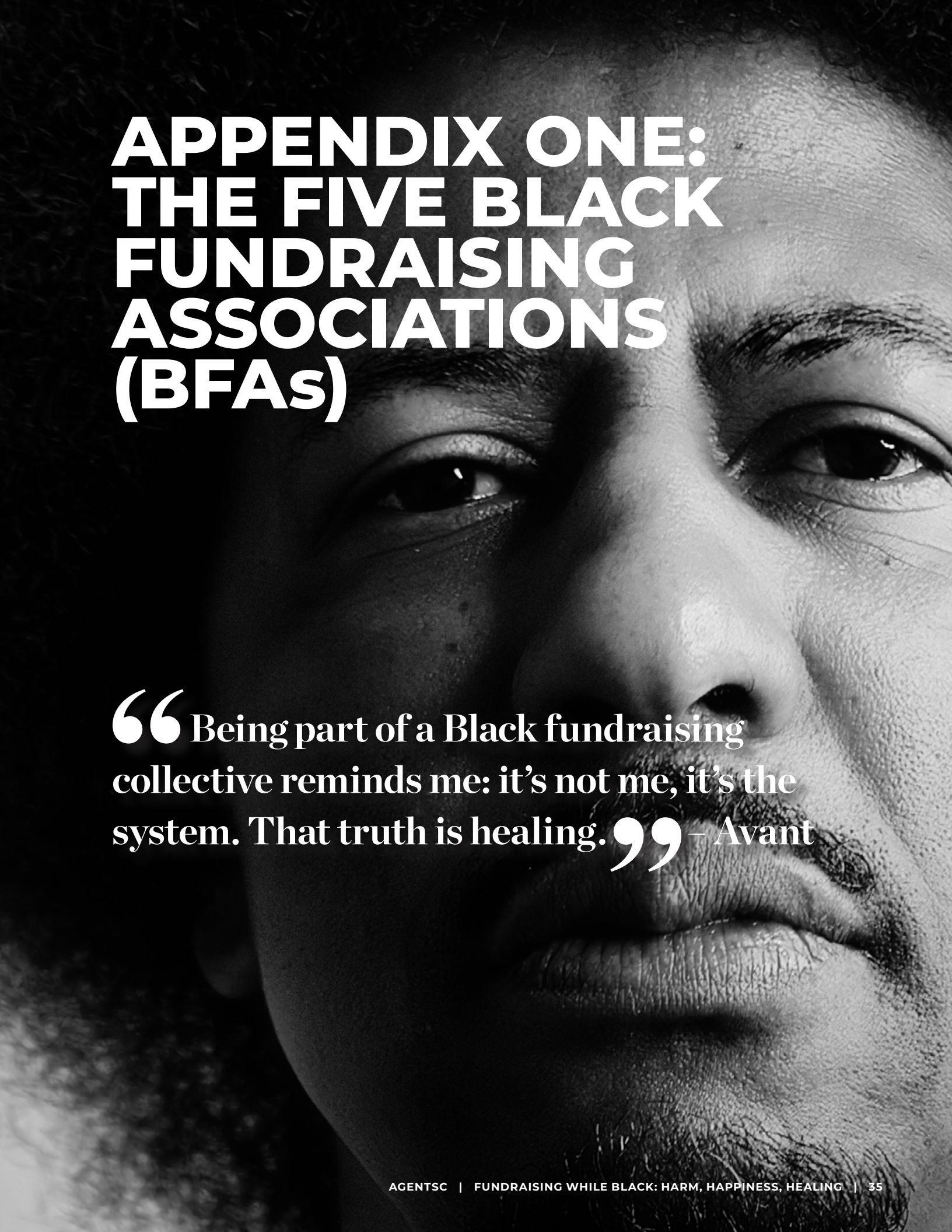
<sup>11</sup> [A Study on the Black Executive Community in the Federal Public Service](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Patients, Pride, and Prejudice: Exploring Black Ontarian Physicians' Experiences of Racism and Discrimination](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Being Black in Corporate America: An Intersectional Exploration](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Academics of Colour in Elite Universities in the UK and the USA: The 'Unspoken System of Exclusion'](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Black Lawyers Matter: Ensuing Racism in American Law Firms](#)



# APPENDIX ONE: THE FIVE BLACK FUNDRAISING ASSOCIATIONS (BFAs)

“Being part of a Black fundraising collective reminds me: it’s not me, it’s the system. That truth is healing.” – Avant

Black fundraisers find strength and solidarity through the Black Fundraising Associations (BFA) and social networks. Most BFA's were established since 2022, formed to meet the distinct needs of Black fundraisers, offering trusted, culturally relevant environments. BFAs create direct pathways for networking, knowledge exchange, and conference opportunities, with some offering scholarships and grants to support professional development, education, and training. The five Black BFA's engaged in our survey include the following:

### **African American Development Officers Network (AADO)**

AADO is a national membership organization based in Atlanta, GA, founded to provide professional development, education, employment opportunities, mentorship, and support for fundraisers of color. Today, AADO represents over 5,000 members, 85% are fundraising professionals of color, with the remainder allies and friends committed to advancing equity in philanthropy. Our biggest challenge is raising the funds necessary to sustain organizational infrastructure. A recent success is securing a grant from the Kellogg Foundation, affirming that a major national funder recognizes the value and impact of our work.

### **Black Canadian Fundraisers Collective (BCFC)**

BCFC is a national community of Black-identifying fundraising professionals, founded in 2018 by Nneka Allen. Rooted in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, "I am because you are", the Collective aims to inspire, support, and uplift Black leaders and organizations led by Black individuals by enhancing their fundraising abilities across Canada's philanthropic landscape. Among their major initiatives are the Black Philanthropy Fund, a giving circle, educational programs for B3s through the Black Charities Academy, a regular book club featuring authors, and unique events that encourage both professional and personal growth and wellbeing. By addressing systemic racism and pervasive inequalities within the sector, the Collective acts as a crucial advocate, thought leader, and supportive community, championing belonging and freedom in both professional and personal realms.

### **Fabulous Female Fundraisers (F3)**

F3's mission is to connect, support, engage, and empower women of color in fundraising to foster personal and professional growth. The organization was founded out of a need to support women of color in the field of non-profit fundraising who are often

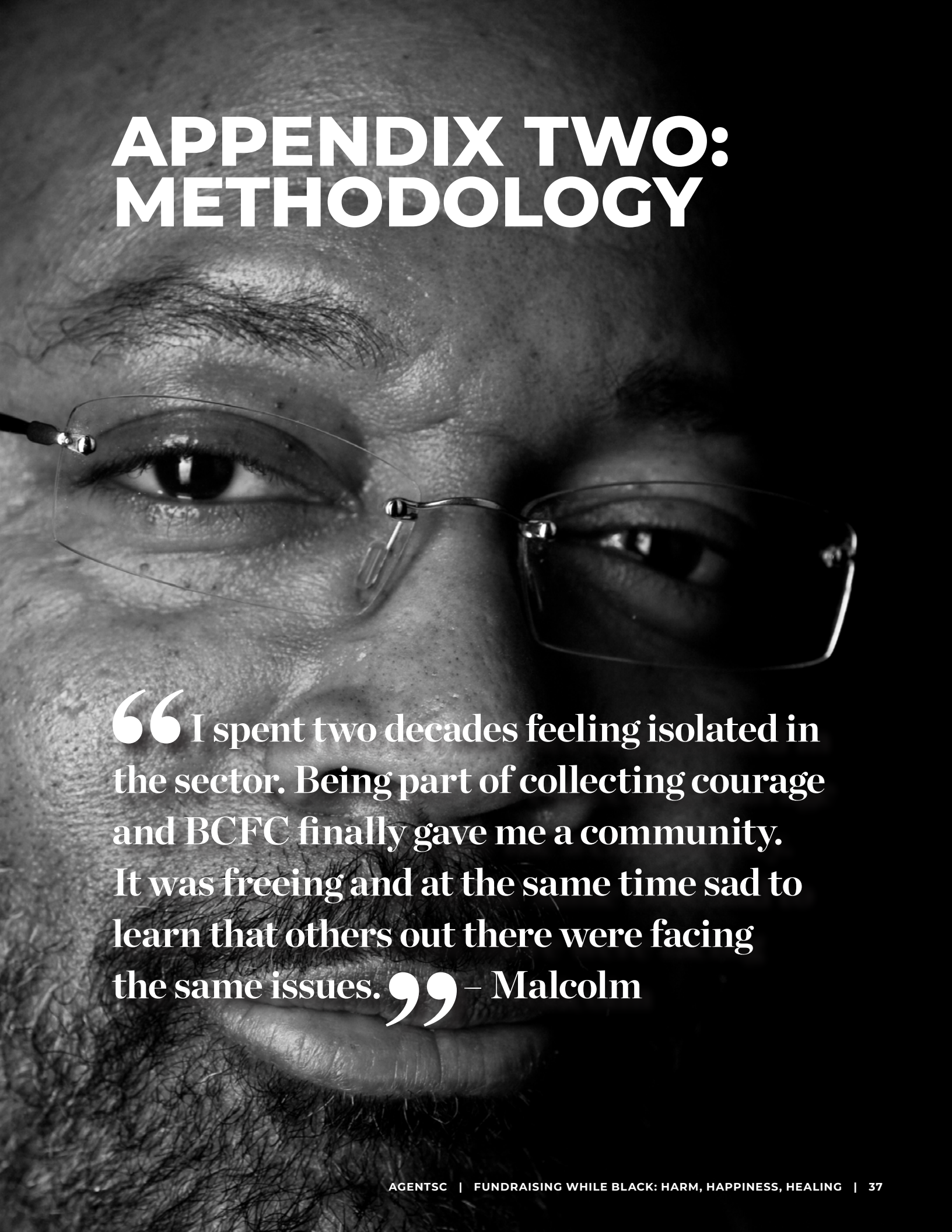
marginalized, overlooked, and dismissed. A small group of women in Atlanta, GA convened bi-monthly to provide support for one another. Common experiences, respect for individual contributions, and passion for non-profit work created a bonded network. Through a shared view of giving back to transform the world, F3 was formed to celebrate womanhood, professional development, and the impact we make individually and collectively.

### **Men of Color in Development (MOCID)**

As a Special Interest Group of AADO The Men of Color in Development (MOCID) group seeks to provide a safe and supportive space and to recognize the hard work and dedication of Men of Color in the fundraising industry. It provides a variety of networking activities, engaging discussions, and authentic mentorship. The group's goal is to provide the necessary platform, network, and resources to assist men of color in successfully navigating Black men in Fundraising's impact within the profession.

### **Rising People of Colour (RPOCF)**

The Rising Professionals of Color in Fundraising (RPOCF), is a vibrant subgroup within the African American Development Officers (AADO) network. RPOCF is dedicated to empowering and uplifting emerging professionals of color in the philanthropic sector. Founded in 2022, the group provides a platform for professional development, education, and networking tailored to the unique experiences of rising professionals of color. Through programs that highlight key areas of fundraising, such as annual campaigns, institutional giving, major gifts, special events, planned giving, development operations, and online fundraising, RPOCF fosters an environment of learning, growth, and open dialogue. With a commitment to creating safe and inclusive spaces, the group equips its members with the knowledge, resources, and support needed to excel and make a meaningful impact in the fundraising and philanthropic landscape.



# APPENDIX TWO: METHODOLOGY

“ I spent two decades feeling isolated in the sector. Being part of collecting courage and BCFC finally gave me a community. It was freeing and at the same time sad to learn that others out there were facing the same issues.” – Malcolm

This report, *Fundraising While Black: Harm, Happiness, Healing*, follows the investigative tradition of all agentsC reports. It is more akin to a journalistic inquiry than a conventional academic study. Our objective is to document and interpret the lived experiences of Black fundraisers through a distinctly Black lens, and to generate recommendations that support systemic change in their professional environments.

## Research Design

We employed a mixed-methods approach that combined both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Our research centered the voices and experiences of Black fundraisers, with a focus on participatory and empathetic engagement. As Black fundraisers ourselves, the research team brought lived experience and cultural proximity to this work, allowing for deeper trust and more candid dialogue with participants.

## Data Collection Survey

We invited individual members from five Black Fundraising Associations (BFAs) in Canada and the United States to complete an online survey consisting of 31 questions. In total, 139 responses were received. After data cleaning, 107 fully completed surveys were retained for analysis. We excluded 30 incomplete submissions and two responses from individuals who did not self-identify as fundraisers, BFAs members, Black, or based in Canada or the USA.

## Small Group Sessions

In addition to the survey, we conducted four small group discussions with 18 Black fundraisers, 9 based in Canada and 9 in the USA. These sessions, which included 4 men and 14 women, generated over 4.5 hours of recorded testimony and 65 pages of transcribed data.

## Participatory and Empathetic Approach

We adopted a participatory research model rooted in empathy and shared identity. Rather than maintaining a clinical or detached stance, we immersed ourselves in participants' narratives emotionally and intellectually. Our aim was to create a safe space where participants could speak freely without fear of judgement or repercussion. This methodology allowed us to capture not only what was said, but also the emotional weight and significance of participants' stories.

The proximity between the researchers and participants, many of whom share common

experiences of racism, perseverance, and healing, made this work both personally challenging and deeply meaningful. Listening to the experiences of harm, happiness, and healing expressed by fellow Black fundraisers underscored the urgency and emotional labor inherent in this work.

## Analytical Framework

We analyzed the quantitative survey data to identify patterns and trends regarding:

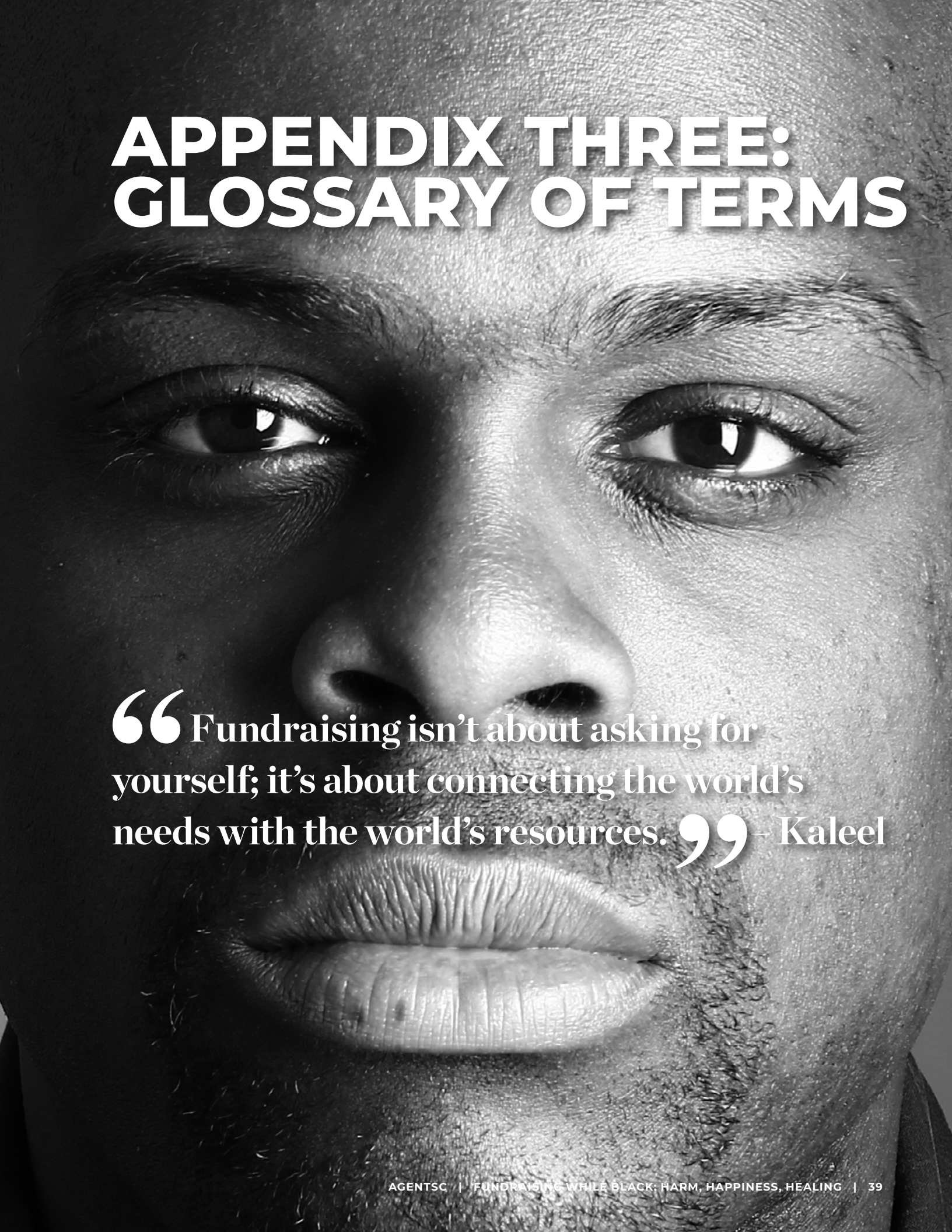
- Entry into the fundraising profession
- Motivations for remaining in the field
- Experiences of racism and exclusion
- Coping strategies and sources of joy

The qualitative data from group sessions were thematically analyzed to surface shared experiences and insights. These narratives offered depth and context to the survey findings.

## Scope and Limitations

We did not segment the data by country (Canada vs. USA), gender, or geographic region. This decision was intentional. Our findings suggest that racism is a consistent and pervasive experience for Black fundraisers, regardless of national or regional context. While variations do exist, they were relatively minor. Notably, one consistent demographic difference observed was that Black men in fundraising tended to be older than their female counterparts. However, variations in credentials Certified of Fundraising Executive (CFRE), and membership of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), pay equity, and work experience were not significant among the ages, genders or locations of Black male or female fundraisers.

The researchers made a conscious effort to highlight the voices of Black men, recognizing their distinct experiences within a non-profit sector where women make up between 66% and 70% of the population in the non-profit sector.



# APPENDIX THREE: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

“ Fundraising isn’t about asking for yourself; it’s about connecting the world’s needs with the world’s resources. ” – Kaleel

**Anti-Black Racism:** Anti-Black racism encompasses the policies, practices, and ideas that create, sustain, or justify inequities disadvantaging Black people, reflecting a structural denial of their full humanity and equal participation in society.

**Anti-Racist:** A person who actively works to oppose racism by supporting ideas, policies, and actions that produce equity among racial groups.

**Black Fundraising Association (BFAs):** An organized group, often non-profit, that exists to support, connect, and advance the work of Black fundraising professionals. These associations typically focus on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Black fundraisers and aim to strengthen both their skills and their collective influence.

**DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion):** a set of values and related policies and practices focused on establishing a group culture of equitable and inclusive treatment and on attracting and retaining a diverse group of participants, including people who have historically been excluded or discriminated against.

**Equity:** The fair distribution of opportunities, resources, and support so that everyone can succeed. Unlike equality, which treats everyone the same, equity recognizes that historical and systemic barriers mean different groups may need different levels of support to achieve comparable outcomes.

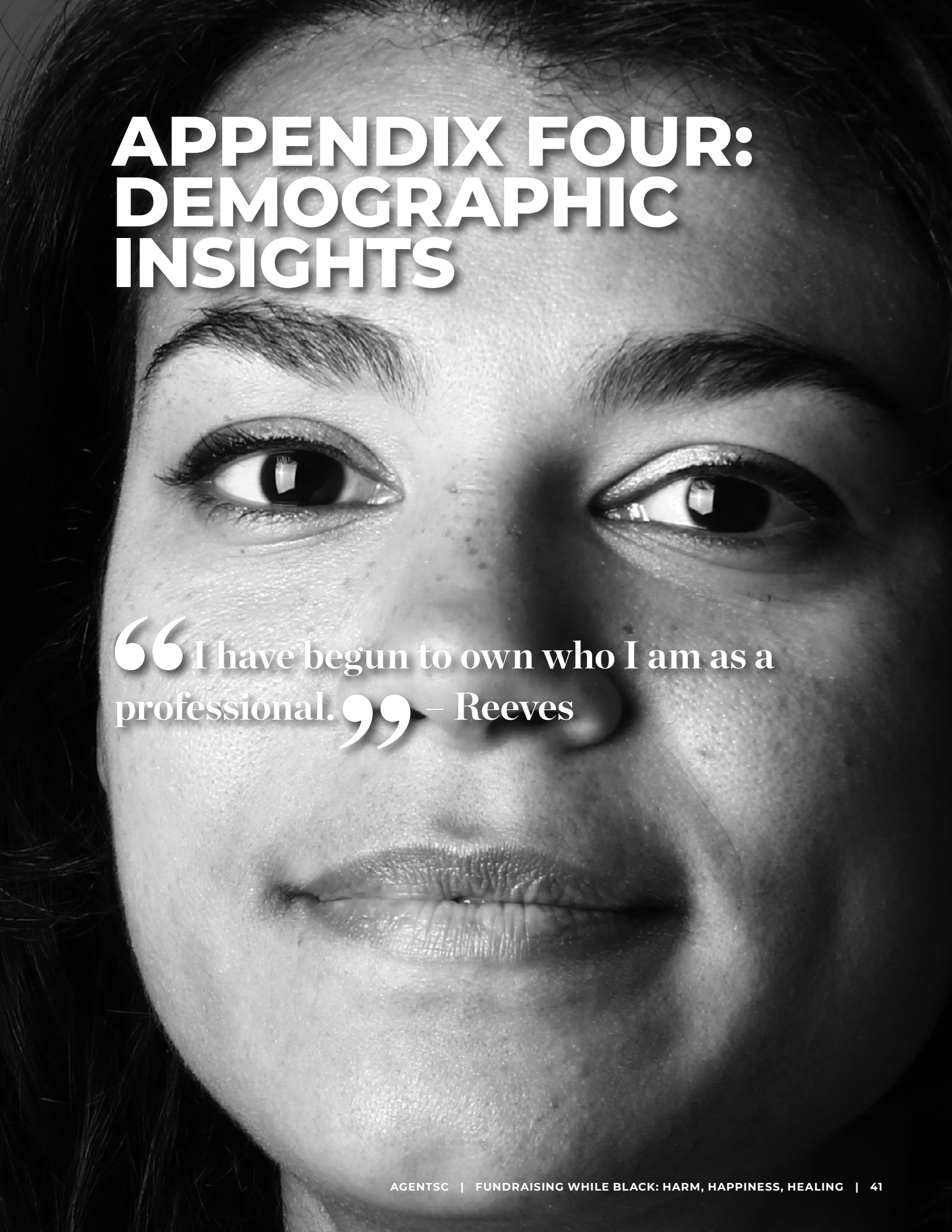
**Non-Racist:** A passive stance that avoids overtly racist actions but does little to challenge or dismantle racist systems. Being “non-racist” is about neutrality; it contrasts with being anti-racist, which requires active opposition to racism.

**Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs):**

Non-profits, registered charities, and foundations whose leadership, culture, norms, and staff are majority white and perpetuate exclusionary and anti-Black practices. These institutions frequently exclude, limit, or overlook Black participation and representation in governance, executive leadership, senior management, staff, consulting, and supplier roles, while also positioning themselves as service providers to Black communities and/or while publicly endorsing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) principles.

**Systemic:** Refers to practices, policies, and structures that are built into institutions and society, shaping outcomes for groups of people over time. Systemic issues are not about isolated incidents but about entrenched patterns that reproduce inequity across generations.

**Systemic Racism:** A system of advantage and disadvantage rooted in race, where prejudice combines with power to create and sustain unequal outcomes. Racism operates at individual, institutional, and systemic levels.



# APPENDIX FOUR: DEMOGRAPHIC INSIGHTS

“I have begun to own who I am as a professional.” – Reeves

# Discover the demographic insights behind Fundraising While Black: Harm, Happiness, Healing.

Visit [www.agentsc.ca/fundraising-while-black](http://www.agentsc.ca/fundraising-while-black) to view the demographic findings.



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