

2021

RACIAL EQUITY COALITION

HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY
FOR LOVE AND LIBERATION



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Supported by King County Department of Community and Human Services and Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA)

DESIGNED BY JORDAN FARALAN
PUBLISHED IN 2022

FOR THE YOUTH. FOR OUR PEOPLE.

THE RACIAL EQUITY COALITION IS:



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BACKGROUND

Disparities in educational outcomes by race and ethnicity in King County are clear.

Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) in King County are far less likely to graduate from high school and are disciplined at higher rates than their white counterparts. According to King County's [2015 Determinants of Equity report](#)¹, while the average King County graduation rate is almost 80%, major and long-standing differences exist across races / ethnicities. Additionally, school districts with lower graduation rates are often those with a higher concentration of students of color, low-income students, and those with limited English proficiency. Given data from the latest 2020 Census showing the growth and forecasting continued [growth of BIPOC in King County](#), it is imperative to address this crisis to ensure our [soon to be majority population](#) have positive educational and life outcomes and eliminate persistent disparities by offering cultural responsive services and transforming the school system.

United Way of King County (UWKC) has funded youth development since 2013. It was a conscious decision to fund services outside the school system, as it is challenging to get schools to shift. UWKC conducted an analysis comparing youth outcomes

for mainstream and BIPOC organizations and found not only did BIPOC organizations have better outcomes for BIPOC youth, they had better outcomes for all youth regardless of race. For this reason, UWKC shifted to funding only BIPOC organizations starting in 2020. The 14 BIPOC organizations funded are listed on the authorship page. The partnership between UWKC and these 14 BIPOC organizations represents a collaborative and innovative approach to philanthropy with all partners coming to the table as equal partners. As a result of this work, the 14 BIPOC organizations have organized themselves around their common vision of addressing the lack of equity support services in the education system, calling themselves the Racial Equity Coalition (REC). REC sought to develop a new, systemic approach to funding community work that is designed to keep BIPOC youth engaged in and persisting with education – an approach that involves those organizations and the youth they serve as authentic leaders and partners every step of the way, from definition and design to funding direction and evaluation. Called Love & Liberation, REC is creating a collaborative of out-of-school based youth services organized around positive identity development that will build the power and voices of BIPOC leaders.

BIPOC organizations provide out of school time culturally relevant supports that intentionally address systemic racism and reinforces and connects youth to their cultures in ways that strengthen their ability to successfully navigate and advocate for change in schools and systems that weren't designed with them in mind and often dismiss and/or denigrate them. Promoting positive identity development refers to learning about one's racial/ethnic heritage and history, language use, and cultural customs and traditions.²⁻⁶ Programs to help youth develop positive ethnic identity along with academic, social, and life skills and access to mentorship leads to increased self-esteem, more positive attitudes towards school, and increased social connectedness to positive peers. These factors are all linked to lower risk of violence, alcohol and drug use, truancy, suspension or expulsion, and criminal activity.¹⁻³ When BIPOC youth acquire and absorb this information they are able to construct an intentional personal identity by weaving together what they know from the dominant culture and the history they learn in school with their own social and cultural history.

This personal identity gives youth strength to navigate a school system that is not designed for them, a society that does not look like or favor them, and a culture that may not speak their language, sell their food in the grocery store, or put their faces on TV. This personal strength helps youth thrive into adulthood and contribute to society, regardless of the barriers they face. It also enables them to identify, call out, and push back against those barriers in community. We are seeing this in real time with organizations across King County seeing youth become next generation executive directors, council members, program officers, youth coordinators, teachers, social workers, CEOs, and community champions – but not to a degree and potential it can be.



- 1 Beatty, A. & Foster, D. (2015). The Determinants of Equity: Identifying Indicators to Establish a Baseline of Equity in King County. King County Office of Performance, Strategy and Budget. Accessed 8/27/21 at https://kingcounty.gov/~media/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/2015/The_Determinants_of_Equity_Report.ashx.
- 2 Cooley, S. (November 2017). Start with Us: Black Youth in South King County and South Seattle. Seattle, WA: Community Center for Education Results.
- 3 Day-Vines, Norman L., & Day-Hairston, Beth O. (2005). Culturally congruent strategies for addressing the behavioral needs of urban, African American male adolescents. *Professional School Counseling*, 8(3), 236-243.
- 4 Henry, Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Schoeny. (2012). Risk and Direct Protective Factors for Youth Violence: Results from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Multisite Violence Prevention Project. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 43(2), S67-S75.
- 5 Okwumabua, J., Wong, S.P., Duryea, E., Okwumabua, T. & Howell, S. (1999). Building Self-Esteem Through Social Skills Training and Cultural Awareness: A Community-Based Approach for Preventing Violence Among African American Youth. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 20(1), 61-74.
- 6 Williams, J., Anderson, R., Francois, A., Hussain, S., & Tolan, P. (2014). Ethnic Identity and Positive Youth Development in Adolescent Males: A Culturally Integrated Approach. *Applied Developmental Science*, 18(2), 110-122.



Nine organizations of the Racial Equity Coalition joined the research committee which met twice monthly for six months. The purpose of the participatory research was to:

- **Understand each REC organization and the communities served**
- **Identify commonalities and shared struggles to inform collective action**
- **Document accomplishments and lessons learned so they may be used as a model for other communities**
- **Share the impact of REC**

The study was reviewed and approved by one of the REC organizations and deemed exempt by the University of New England's IRB.

PHASE 1: DEVELOPED INTERVIEW GUIDE

The committee developed an interview guide comprised of three sections. Sample questions from each of the three sections are listed here, with the full interview guide included in the Appendix.

Section 1: Organization-level considerations

- How does your organization define and measure success in meeting the needs of the community you serve?
- What are some accomplishments/things you're proud of that your organization has done?
- What are some challenges that your organization faces in meeting the needs of the community you serve?

Section 2: Impact of REC

- What are some of the benefits/challenges you and/or your organization have received by being a part of REC?
- What are some key accomplishments of REC?
- How do you know REC has met the needs of the communities it serves?

Section 3: Future of REC

- How can REC have an even bigger impact?
- What do you see as the next critical steps for REC?
- In thinking about your experiences as a member of REC, what are some of the key lessons you would share with a) other community groups, b) funders, and c) other stakeholders?

PHASE 2: CONDUCTED INTERVIEWS

Members of the research committee conducted interviews with coalition members from each of the 14 REC organizations. Interviews occurred over Zoom and ranged from 60-75 minutes. With permission from the interviewees, interviews were recorded and transcribed. Each interviewee was given the opportunity to review and revise their transcript prior to analysis.



PHASE 3: CODED & DRAFTED NARRATIVES

Once the interviewee approved their transcript, it was uploaded into Dedoose for thematic analysis. UWKC staff generated coding reports by interview question, and members of the research committee worked in small groups of 3-5 members to conduct line-by-line coding. Based on the committee's coding decisions, UWKC staff drafted narratives.

PHASE 4: CONDUCTED RESEARCH RETREATS

The research committee scheduled three research retreats with all members of REC. Prior to the retreats, REC members were assigned to a small breakout group and sent 2-4 draft narratives approximately one week prior to the retreat. Members were asked to review the assigned narratives keeping the following questions in mind:

- What stood out to you?
- What should be removed?
- What isn't clear?
- What surprised you?
- What needs to be added?

At the 2-hour retreats, a research committee member facilitated each of the three breakout groups. Breakout sessions were recorded and extensive notes were taken during the session. Members of the breakout rooms could see the notes taken in real time as the facilitator shared their screen and made changes directly into a Google doc that REC members could access. Each group spent 90 minutes discussing the assigned narratives, and then reconvened for the last 30 minutes to report back on key points of discussion. REC members were encouraged to revise the narratives, treating the retreats as an opportunity to revise the narratives and ensure the report tells the story of REC.

PHASE 5: REVISED NARRATIVES POST-RESEARCH RETREATS

UWKC staff reviewed the notes and recordings to further revise the narratives based upon changes identified in the breakout rooms. At times this required UWKC staff to reach back to the facilitator and/or members of the breakout group to ensure changes aligned with feedback offered in the breakout groups. The revised drafts were then uploaded into the shared Google folder accessible to all REC members. REC members were encouraged to review the revisions and offer additional feedback.





RACIAL EQUITY COALITION ORGANIZATIONS

SERVING OUR COMMUNITIES

Interviewees described key ways their organization serves communities including programmatic goals such as undo sexism, unlearn patriarchy, build power with young people, ensure youth have emotional and social support, lessen health and education disparities and strengthen positive cultural identity. Many of the responses also touched upon who they serve, for example, youth of color, persons with developmental and intellectual disabilities, low income, undocumented as well as girls of color and gender non-conforming youth.

Some interviewees spoke to how their programs have adapted and evolved based upon changing community priorities and the impact of COVID. While the programs may have shifted over time, core values remain such as how programs are:

- *Youth or community centric*
- *Culturally and linguistically responsive*
- *Partnership oriented*
- *Places of healing*
- *Committed to systems change*

YOUTH AND / OR COMMUNITY CENTRIC



The commitment to being **youth and / or community-centered** was a recurring theme. At times, this entails listening to community priorities to inform program development.

"Our organization is actually a community driven organization. I'm the Executive Director, and the founder of the organization, but I don't necessarily decide what is supposed to be done. The community decides."

"We intentionally seek out input from the youth, their families, and other partner organizations that they are a part of to ask what they would like to see in our programs, instead of saying, 'I think this is what our youth needs', and then design it with only our staff's thinking in mind. Centering our community and seeking their input and opinions is how we work."

"We prioritize getting to know one another. We build relationships with our community first, and then incorporate everyone's voices at the table in program design - especially the youth who will be participating in it, because this is for them."



Being **youth-centric** requires **prioritizing relationship-building** with youth and **centering their voices**. Several interviewees spoke to nurturing youth leadership to develop programming and to drive policy and systems changes. For example, one program encourages youth to engage in activities to raise awareness or teach others about their passions. An example of this is the *Develop Your Voice and Speak (DYVAS)* program, an education and activism program for girls and gender non-conforming youth:

"[Youth] basically take an idea that they're really passionate about, something that they want to teach others about or that they just want to build awareness about. We've had young folks do workshops and conferences on things like youth mental health, things like having healthy relationships, things related to climate change."

Others spoke to **"building power with young people"** to effect change in areas that directly impact them and their communities.

"FEEST is building power with young people, specifically young people of color who are living in South Seattle and South King County, for the purposes of creating policy and systems change that will positively impact food justice and health in those communities. These communities were selected because they experience food apartheid, and also because they have some of the largest populations of students of color as well as students who receive free and reduced lunch."



CULTURALLY AND / OR LINGUISTICALLY RESPONSIVE

Commitments to **culturally and / or linguistically responsive programs** included *how programs are developed and delivered*, as well as *decisions regarding staffing and leadership*. Given youth served by REC organizations are generally from cultures different from mainstream, this entails purposefully de-centering dominant culture and being responsive to youth's cultural and language needs. Building off the commitment to be youth-centric, one interviewee described how they listened and responded to youth desires for a new culturally responsive programming option. More specifically, this interviewee shared,

"We have Black Muslimah Collective (BMC), and that's a program for middle school and high school-aged Black Muslim girls, where youth talk about identity. But we then connect to faith and culture and the experience of being an immigrant. BMC came out of young folks saying 'hey, I'm a Black Muslim girl. I really want to get together with other girls like me. I want to meet women who look like me and have my experience and be mentored by them.' And we happen to have Black Muslim women on staff who are amazing youth workers, and we're really passionate about creating this opportunity."

As touched upon in the earlier quote, **intentional staffing decisions** also help ensure programs are culturally and linguistically responsive. One interviewee described using a “cultural brokerage” model to meet the needs of the communities accessing their services.

"We hire people from the community we serve, and then paired them with people we serve who speak the same language and are from similar cultural backgrounds. Families can easily access the information in their own primary or preferred language. Open Doors, right now, all together within our staff, we speak about 27 different languages."



Another interviewee shared,

"We're really grounded in the community, and every service we provide is out of our commitment in social justice work for the API community. And in a more concrete way, we serve our communities with bilingual, bicultural staff who are leaders in their own respective communities. And these staff are supported by leadership staff who are also from the same communities with similar cultural and language background and share the similar commitment."



Others spoke to developing culturally responsive curriculums, or as one interviewee shared **content that centers “history of our people.”** Delivery methods included use of healing circles, performing arts, ultimate frisbee, mentoring and case management.



"Our mission is to serve Native / First Nations / Indigenous youth to express themselves with confidence and clarity through traditional and contemporary Performing Arts. We provide a place for our urban Native youth to come together to have positive peer groups and relationships with each other. We also provide a really key component of connecting them with their cultural identity in an urban setting. Going into that further, Red Eagle Soaring also connects them with stories, cultural traditions, cultural values, and knowledge. The knowledge of self and their cultures come through that. That gives them a strong foundation in life."



"We have [a youth-led] podcast which is all about Black girls talking about their experience growing up in Seattle and talking about different topics that relate to their identities. It covers what makes it challenging growing up in Seattle as a Black girl, but also Black girl magic and just feeling proud of who they are. Then they reach out to communities that they want to engage in conversation."

"We do culturally relevant programs, helping to start Black Student Unions, doing healing circles in schools, and doing staff training in the schools. Helping staff relate to trauma and understand how to serve the Black and brown kids in the hallways of their schools."



PARTNERSHIP ORIENTED

Several interviewees spoke to the value of **partnerships** as a means to get referrals and **provide holistic support and effect change**. There are two aspects to partnership:

1. being in equal partnership with youth and families served and
2. partnership with outside agencies.

"We engage middle schoolers, and we typically hold them during the school day in schools. We had partnerships with [local] middle schools, and basically, what we focus on is delivering trauma-informed programming through a lens of social justice, and specifically at the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality."

"We finally were able to co-design a program that fits the needs of the families from having conversations with the Assistant Principal [at the local elementary school]. He shared that many families are concerned that their youth are having less social interactions with their peers due to virtual learning. So, we hosted a virtual recess time where students can come and play games, chat with friends, draw, and whatever they want to do with their peers."





Organizations may not provide services to meet all families' needs, and instead will have partnerships with agencies providing critical supporting services. These organizations, however, may not have the capacity to provide culturally responsive services. REC organizations will partner with these external organizations to ensure a more culturally responsive approach that results in the best outcomes for youth / families.

For example, an interviewee spoke about working with prosecutors and others involved in the juvenile justice system to advocate for youth and help set them up with supports such as “housing, jobs, leadership development, apprenticeships, internships and therapeutic services.” This interviewee further described a new program that entails working with law enforcement to better meet the needs of youth.

"We're just launching that program where we're going to be working with law enforcement. Law enforcement has an opportunity to not arrest people for low level crimes and call our case managers to come intercept them from the police. Instead of police handcuffing them, putting them in the back of a car, taking them to jail, charging them, and going through the whole system. In that moment, the police officer can say "Hey, you know what, I'm gonna call a Community Passageways LED caseworker to come get you. I'm not gonna charge you for this, and they're gonna get you services."

Another interviewee spoke to partnering with a mental health organization to support youth given their own organization does not have therapists on staff. This partnership created space for youth to talk about *“things like depression, anxiety, and building resiliency practices.”*

PLACES OF HEALING

Working from a *“place of healing”* represents another value that informs how REC organizations engage youth and their communities. Typically, youth of color or youth with disabilities are seen from a deficit perspective. This includes messages that these youth don’t do well, they’re trouble makers, something is wrong with them. In essence, students are judged only by academic achievement or behaviors without understanding life circumstances. However, REC organizations see youth from a strength-based perspective, seeing potential, promise and bright futures. As one interviewee reflected,



"We work with our kids from a place of healing and positivity. We believe young people have potential. We have strived to eliminate the word 'at-risk.' We believe our children are 'at-promise.' Changing the language has been a challenge because most of the literature and grants identify struggling youth as 'at risk' or vulnerable."



To create a place of healing, one interviewee spoke to how their organization strives to **create a welcoming space where youth feel comfortable, supported and encouraged**. Organizations support youth in **recognizing systems are biased** and the acknowledgement that youth have been truly hurt by discrimination and the labels placed on them. Organizations furthermore recognize the need for the youth to heal from these harms. For others, healing entailed **strengthening support systems**, or as one interviewee shared,

"It's really helping a family, working with the school district that that kid's in. They might have been expelled. Well we got to go speak up for that kid, make sure that kid's getting the proper education and opportunity to go back to school, getting the kid back involved in sports. Getting people involved in their life, trying to build a support system in a circle around the whole family so the family has a support system within the family and outside the family, continuous support."

COMMITMENT TO SYSTEMS CHANGE

Interviewees realized that because systems have not changed, issues would recycle with the next generation coming back with the same concerns. As a result, interviewees spoke to how their organizations increasingly **engage in systems reform and policy change work**. This included **addressing systemic factors** or as one interviewee reflected, “*we understand the root causes of academic failure, which is often rooted in poverty and trauma.*” Specific examples provided of system change efforts included disrupting the school to prison pipeline as well as advocating for food justice and an end to food apartheid. Other interviewees talked about engaging youth in advocacy work to recognize and address issues of “*power and oppression.*”

Interviewees acknowledged that changing whole systems to a system that produces opportunities was challenging. Several interviewees asserted that effective systems change requires a **holistic approach** driven by BIPOC led organizations. This requires **ensuring BIPOC organizations have unrestricted funds** that allow their experiences and community connections to inform how to best support youth.





We've grown from an organization that was really centered in youth development and really training young people to cook, while reconnecting and accessing their ancestral knowledge of recipes and how to use fresh healthy food in their cooking, and how to integrate that into foods that they already make or transform them and create new recipes. Now we are growing into an organization that's actually trying to drive policy change specifically in school food, which is the area that our community assessments have located as being the most impactful way to create systemic change and increase food access for young people.



CONNECTING & SUPPORTING YOUTH OF COLOR

Five themes emerged in response to how REC organizations support youth of color:

- *Providing individualized and holistic support*
- *Being culturally responsive and youth centered*
- *Centering youth leadership*
- *Building community support and partnerships*
- *Engaging in advocacy efforts*

These themes overlap and inform each other, as well as align with responses shared regarding how REC organizations serve communities. For example, an emphasis on **culturally responsive and youth centered practices** inform how **youth leadership** is nurtured and what **partnerships** are pursued. Across many of the responses, interviewees spoke to the **deep connections with youth** at



times describing the relationship in terms of being family. Or as one interviewee shared, the youth *“trust us so much and we become such a family unit to the young people we serve and the families we serve.”*

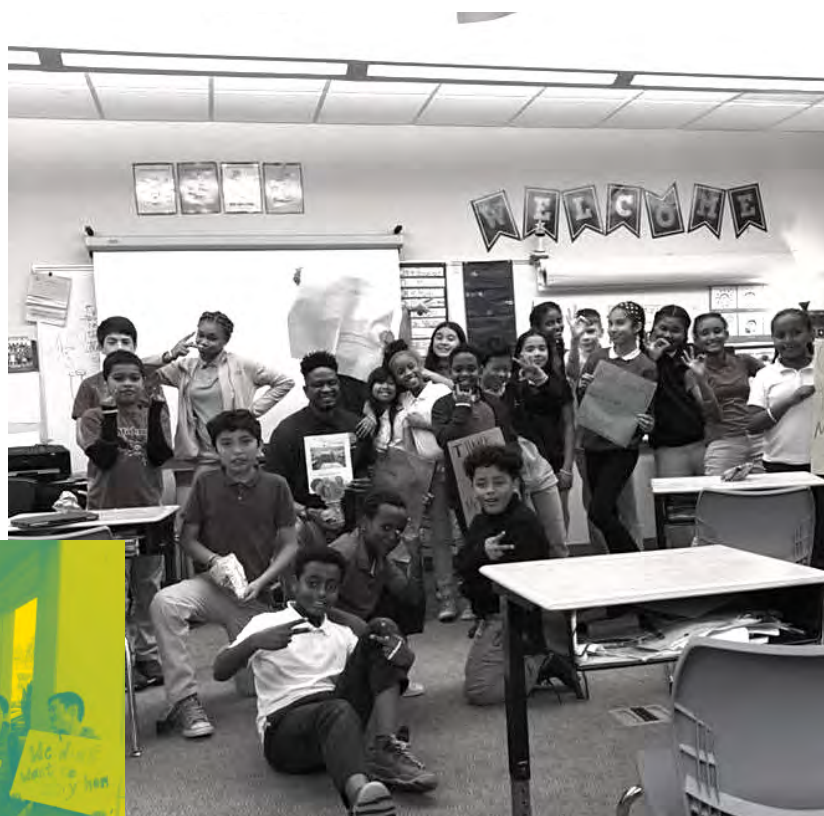
The stories shared conveyed a strong belief in the dreams and potential of the involved youth, and reflected a deep commitment to helping youth actualize their dreams while working towards dismantling oppressive systems that continue to cause harm. Or as one interviewee shared,

"I want to make sure that these young people in our community have an opportunity to fulfill their dreams. And not have to let survival mode or feeling like they don't have no other options or opportunities take advantage of their visions and dreams for themselves. I said, 'I can't sit back and watch kids keeps going down.' Generation after generation, they kept falling into the same traps that me and my peers fell into. I was like, 'I have to do something about it,' so I brought like-minded people onto my staff. People who have been down the same path that I've been down, and they want to make a change also. They want to give young people opportunities and help."

PROVIDING INDIVIDUALIZED & HOLISTIC SUPPORT

A recurring theme spoke to how **REC organizations provide individualized and holistic support to youth of color** at times through mentorship and other one-on-one support such as case management. The types of support provided included finding affordable and safe housing, providing academic support, offering pre-employment training, and fostering social emotional development. REC organizations understand that the youth they work with often don't thrive under mainstream and "one size fits all" approaches. REC organizations support youth by developing trustworthy relationships and by providing resources that foster positive growth for personal, academic, and cultural development. Part of this work entails supporting youth as they identify and work towards their goals and dreams.

"These are very important learning opportunities, programs and services that we provide to and support for our youth to ensure that they know who they are and they are not ashamed of their own disability. In fact, they actually are proud of themselves, and understand that they are capable and they are very talented in many different ways. It's just our talents are different. Our gifts are different."



“

We will literally try to find out a way to get you to young folks' vision, to get them to that dream, to get them to their passion and their desire. And at the same time, get them a job, so they don't feel like, *"I'm at this job, and I'm never gonna really do what I want to do."* I tell them, *"No, you have this job making money, taking care of yourself, supporting yourself, being able to pay a portion that's 20% of your salary for the rent of the apartment that we got you into. Now you're not out here couch surfing, living in the streets, and now it makes it easier for you to start disconnecting yourself from the homies that you've been out here tearing things up with."* That's what makes us unique. That's how we serve our young people. We give them these opportunities, and also help them go after their dreams and desires and passions. And then, even some of them that are in super danger with targets on their backs or whatever, part of the assessment to keep them safe might be the flying them out of town to a relative's house, flying them out to Texas for a couple of months while we try to get some de-escalation going on.



“

We are not there to tell them what and who to be or what to do, but provide them support in what they ask for. We acknowledge our human aspects and that when a mistake happens, we call each other in a respectful manner and explain why that is, so that they can see where each person is coming from. We encourage differences and celebrate it!

CENTERING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

The support provided from REC organizations aims to take on a deeper role through creating learning environments in which **youth are centered in program leadership and development.** Seen as “*experts of their own experience*,” youth are part of processes in which they are decision makers in content development and community organizing, leading to a positive sense of identity. Integrating

leadership into every part of one organization included being present at the board level, serving as staff, and / or being involved in fundraising, budgeting, and overall programming. Youth working in leadership roles are **compensated for their work.** This work is seen as successful in supporting youth of color, because youth are given a platform to voice their concerns and passions as well as develop strategies for action.



We also really encourage young folks to create programs with us. We believe in partnering with them, as opposed to trying to do all the work for them. So, a lot of our, especially our newer programs really have been developed in partnership with young folks, giving us feedback, telling us what they want to experience, and then we basically do the heavy lifting in terms of the coordination. But all of the work that comes out of what they experience, the content that we develop, it really is coming from them.

"One of the fundamental things that we do is try to center youth as leaders and train them in the skills of community organizing. We apply their lived experiences that they already have, so that they can be effective decision makers and advise adult decision makers on solutions that they know will be the most impactful for them. We deeply believe that young people are the experts of their own experience, and so, young people of color who are the most impacted by food apartheid and food insecurity should be decision makers and solution creators about how to resolve those issues. So centering youth as leaders and decision makers, training them in youth organizing and leadership skills, and also building their knowledge about healthy foods, and how to access them, how to utilize and cook them, while trying to create a positive sense of community and identity around their culture and their cultural foods."



"Anything that we're building, we want to have the leadership and expertise and brilliance of young people, which also requires deep relationship building. Something that I really love about my work is, you know, those young folks that I coached in 2010, that I'm still connected with, now they're graduating college, and they've come back and are running programs. Or they're coaching at summer camps, or they have something else they're excited about that they want to share with young people in this community. In all our programs, we set it up so we have alumni leading and mentoring the next generation of BIPOC youth in the community. And a lot of it is just making sure the nonprofit gets out of the way of young people doing what they're passionate about and want to take leadership on, and supporting them to do that."



BEING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE & YOUTH CENTERED

Being organizations that are a part of the community, REC organizations understand the benefits of connecting to youth beyond academics and providing **culturally responsive and youth centered resources**. Many organizations hire staff who share language and cultural backgrounds of the youth they work with and / or have shared life experiences. Since staff have similar experiences to the youth they are serving, they understand firsthand what youth are experiencing, coming from the same cultural background, hence know how to break the cycle of intergenerational harm, the sense of unworthiness, broken spirit, and inability to be whole that is passed down.



Through this connection, there is a sense of **cultural awareness and preservation** that teaches appreciation and respect of different cultures which is not taught in mainstream education. For some interviewees, such an approach moves beyond traditional support dynamic that too often reflects white supremacist values and practices rather than centering “*deep rooted connections with community.*”



Or as one interviewee reflected,

"Another thing that is different about our Native specific ways of education versus the American way of education. Obviously, you have to go to school and you learn things about subjects you didn't know, right, algebra and science, whatever. But in a lot of our tribally specific cultural philosophies we believe when people come to this life they're already given within their spirit wisdom and knowing things that they know. And a lot of the experiences of life are really meant, with that core belief in mind, that all of our youth and our children are sacred because they are here with a purpose, and they already have wisdom that's already placed within them."

As this interviewee discussed, connections stretch intergenerationally through ancestors, and youth are seen as inherently strong due to **generational wisdom**. This wisdom is neither acknowledged nor appreciated in mainstream settings that embrace or promote the narrative of white youth as inherently smarter than BIPOC youth.

This can result in youth feeling lost and disconnected, which can lead to not seeing themselves in mainstream teachings and then result in decreased belief in themselves. Several interviewees pointed out that for the education system to work for all, there is a **need to deemphasize assimilation as the measure of success**, where self-worth is determined only by whether you go to college. As one interviewee reflected, not meeting a set of standards can cause harm to a youth's positive self identity. More specifically, this interviewee shared,

"We hope students will graduate, but when we use this as a measure of a person's worth, potential, ability, then we destroy our students' spirits when they don't meet this box. The education system created a box where you're only worthy if in the box, only those going to college / higher education, and if you are out of this box, you don't deserve anything, and this is dangerous thinking. BIPOC have been pushed out of this box, and as a result, youth lose self-esteem, don't believe they are valued... it's not about if they go to college. We are trying to move away from assimilation and more to cultural success. We want to build the whole person, physically, mentally, mind, intellectually.

If a person is valued, loves self, confident with their different talent, gifts, and is proud, this person will grow up to be cheerful, brilliant, and have a good mindset."



Examples of being **culturally responsive and youth centered** include how one organization uses WhatsApp as a means to engage and support youth - given WhatsApp is commonly used amongst East African youth. Others spoke to the use of performing arts to share cultural knowledge and values while others spoke to addressing tensions between immigrant youth and their families, due to challenges associated with assimilation, as well as working with youth to further understand intersecting identities among BIPOC youth and addressing the stigma around them. As part of being responsive and youth centered, an interviewee pointed out how *“research-based, evidence-based practices are not always tailored for our communities.”* This requires organizations to be innovative including how to ensure programs are accessible, and community and youth centered. At times, this requires reaching out to youth where they're at, including churches, schools, and in their neighborhoods. Or as one interviewee shared, creating *“barrier free”* programs that are *“school based as opposed to facility based.”*

"We support youth in their interests, as well as provide opportunities for youth to try something new. For example, STEM is not very accessible, due to the high costs associated with it, and so the Filipino Community of Seattle (FCS) is now on its way in having its own STEM center called the Innovation Learning Center, which aims to be accessible with low barriers for our youth and communities."

"We recognize that our nation's system does not support BIPOC communities, especially youth. We also are intentional about the people we have come to our program. We make sure they are BIPOC people and representative of our youth. We learn about our ancestors' histories that are not taught in our education system and continue to strive to learn about the erasures of our different backgrounds and identities. We encourage exploration and imagination and that it is ok to fail - for failure only means first attempt in learning."

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It's a space for them where they can feel free, when they can feel that they can speak English or Spanish or Span-English. So, I think it's important that we validate where they come from, and start where they are. We are very different people from many different backgrounds, from many different countries in Latin America. So, I think it is just a place that they can come and feel safe.



BUILDING COMMUNITY RESOURCES & PARTNERSHIPS



Community collaboration is important to supporting youth of color. Interviewees spoke to collaborating with school administrators and teachers, employees in or associated with the juvenile justice system, clergy, and a university athletics program. These partnerships, at times, result in referrals as well as innovative and affordable programming. This includes making use of “*natural resources*”, assets naturally embedded in communities that are invaluable. For example, genuine care (vs. for a job) from people in the community, such as clergy leaders who have interest in the success of Black / brown youth. It takes connections between community-based organizations and natural leaders to address issues placed on youth by systems. Beyond reaching out to funders, BIPOC communities innately go to what they are capable of doing on their own, albeit with sometimes meager resources. The impact of collaborations on youth are stronger connections and resilient communities.

"Another way we connect with youth is through the relationships we have built with systems. They trust us so much, that the public defenders, the JPCs, parole officers, all kinds of different lawyers, attorneys, judges, they send people to us constantly. We're getting so many referrals at this point, I don't know how we're going to be able to keep up the services. Everybody sending us referrals. I mean, it's April now, and I think we've gotten over 200 referrals already by April this year. That's just new referrals. That's not who we've been working with. We're working with hundreds and hundreds of other young people and families."



"For five years, clergy, community members, and mentoring programs met in the basement of churches across King County, as we strategized on how we were going to address the issue of disproportionality among our Black boys in every system. Initially, the pastors wanted to focus on schools. They wanted to walk the halls of Garfield and other schools where drop out and suspensions were high. The clergy wanted to show a presence in the schools. We met with the superintendent of Seattle Public Schools and asked why so many Black kids were being suspended, and why so many Black kids were dropping out of school; and why were kids hanging out in front of the schools during school hours."



"The programs we provide aren't for the staff and for the grant providers (although yes, they give us money). We want to make sure we actually fill the needs and desires of our community. Centering our community and seeking their input and opinions is how we work with community. And it's even written in our youth development program mission: 'To amplify the visions of young community leaders by providing beyond-school programming that nurtures youth culture and partnerships with families, schools, and BIPOC members of the community.' The nurturing is part of centering them, and also not only seeking input from them, but building genuine relationships with them."



ENGAGING IN ADVOCACY & ORGANIZING WORK

REC organizations are strong advocates of **social and systemic change**. Some interviewees spoke to the need to **de-center white supremacist values and patriarchal practices**. To do so, these organizations address past and present trauma that include the effects of racism and other forms of discrimination.

"It's about aligning with our values, particularly centering relationships, undoing white supremacy and patriarchy, and working against the ageism and adultism patterns that show up all the time, and trusting and following the lead of young people of color."

"We're passionate about breaking the cycles of poverty, breaking the cycles of unemployment, missed education and breaking the cycles of self-hatred, breaking the cycles of lack of opportunities."



DEFINING & MEASURING SUCCESS

"There's not always peace in our community because we're having shootings every day and even though you pull yourself out of the game, don't mean that your rivals are respecting that. So, you always got a target on your back. So, you got to keep living and surviving. But success is when those young people can look and go, I don't want to live that life no more. When those families can say thank you for helping us move to a safe environment. Thank you for helping my son. Thank you for helping my cousin or my daughter get back in school and get a job and get their own apartment and all that stuff. When you see the thank yous coming your way, you see the life changes come your way, and you also see the systemic changes ... That's success."

Interviewees described **how they define and measure success** in meeting the needs of the communities they serve. Most of the interviewees highlighted indicators of success that focused on the youth participating in their programs with a few responses explicitly naming **system level changes**. As part of the responses, interviewees also spoke about the range of methods used to gather feedback as well as some of the challenges encountered in measuring success.

These varied approaches stem from how REC organizations work differently based in part upon their program's mission and vision, as well as cultural differences regarding how youth are engaged and how success is conceptualized and measured.



DEFINING & MEASURING SUCCESS

ON AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Interviewees identified a range of individual level indicators focused on **positive cultural / ethnic identity, program engagement, and academic performance**. At times, the responses focused on just the youth, while other responses included parent / guardian engagement and broader community considerations. For example, one interviewee reflected on the range of issues considered, as well as how their program often detects concerns that risk being overlooked:

"We are striving for positive change in communities that are touched by poverty, crime, violence, and broken families—not only helping youth stay in school, stay off drugs, and look to the future, but helping their families and communities learn effective strategies for supporting them in leading more fulfilling and positive lives. We track and measure instances of justice involvement and completion of diversion, and improvements in grades and behavior. Some incidents of mental health issues, where the kid is depressed, mentors have been able to tell us things that the schools didn't know, and youth and parents have been referred for counseling or to a case manager."

POSITIVE CULTURAL & ETHNIC IDENTITY

Indicators of success included whether youth “*have friends, value themselves, feel good about themselves, and able to speak up for themselves.*” Others identified **positive cultural and ethnic identity**, which was seen as key for BIPOC youths’ socio-emotional well-being and strengthened community and cultural connections. Other indicators of success identified by interviewees included **hope for the future, healthy relationships with peers and adults, self-determination and agency, community readiness**, and **engagement in positive activities** such as “*sports, clubs or other healthful pastime activities.*”

"Through our program they learn to creatively work through challenges that they face, together and also stand alone. It's reflected in their path both in the educational school system, but also you know within their personal lives. They develop confidence in themselves, their identity, understanding who they are and they have a lot of peer and adult support to do that from the greater Native community and then they demonstrate that they're community ready. So, I think that's a really critical piece the experience through the process. They become more community ready - ready to be able to contribute and give back to the community. And, you know, they're able to communicate and clearly express themselves."



"We define success really by helping young people and their communities and their families experience our work, and what they're able to gain from it, not just the hard skills but also just the community, the connections, if they feel like they're growing in their voice and their sense of self, that's one thing that we hear a lot more from young folks when they're reflecting on their experience in our programs is they talked about how maybe before they were very shy very quiet or soft spoken or didn't feel as confident and then after they go through our programs, they feel really confident and kind of sure themselves. They feel like they have a deeper connection to their cultures and to their communities at school."

PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT

Indicators of success pertaining to program engagement included youth:

- 1. completing the program*
- 2. developing their own goals*
- 3. recommending the program to their peers, and*
- 4. staying connected to the program as alumni (i.e., becoming program staff, serving on the board)*

"We have about a 95 to 100% completion rate once the students are registered and they see what we have to offer and the support we give them. They are committed, and so that's been a great accomplishment for our organization. Students stay throughout the program which helps us determine if we're truly connecting with them or if what we're doing is not fun or exciting or engaging. We also feel that our parent engagement is so important."

"This may be a true measure of success --youth are coming back to do volunteer work; former youth are keeping connection with our staff members. Some of them went back to school of social work, came back as an intern, and then hired as a staff. This is a great success for us because there are not very many Asian and Pacific Islander social workers out there, and when our youth are coming back as a staff after a master's program."



"When you start a program with high level gang involved, criminal justice involved young people, and a year into one of the programs, I've hired four of the young men full time as community peer to peer ambassadors to work in the community because they were so good at what they were doing going through the program. They were so on point, so intelligent, so intellectual. All these guys needed was an opportunity. So, we provided an opportunity for these guys. That's what it's all about, getting young people in a space where they can be brilliant because they are brilliant. Success looks like helping them tap into their brilliance and opening up the doors of opportunities for them to step into their brilliance and use their brilliance, and then go on to have some normality in their life."



ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

For some of the interviewees, indicators of success included improved academic performance, increased self-efficacy in school and the broader community, and graduation. While school-based indicators were identified, several interviewees pointed out how academic performance is not the sole focus and that positive cultural and ethnic identity remains central to their work.

"Our long-term successful goal is every youth who completes our programs will either go to college or have a job after graduating from high school."

DEFINING & MEASURING SUCCESS ON SYSTEMS CHANGE LEVEL

Several interviewees also identified **system change indicators**. This included **policy changes within the school system as well as the criminal justice system**.

For some programs, youth gain **advocacy and / or organizing skills** to identify critical issues and to engage in system change themselves. As one REC member noted, "advocacy refers to generating public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy" while "organizing occurs when people who experience a problem define a solution and build power to change systems and current power structures." This member further described how organizing "works outside of current power relations" and offers greater power to disrupt and change oppressive systems.



"Success comes systemically when we're able to show the system that community alternatives and community support is where money should be poured into. And we're able to put programming in place and legislation is being pushed through that changes the way systems normally have operated and changes some of the power dynamics of systems. We've literally exposed the criminal justice system for what it really is - not successful, and a big failure."

Youth having more understanding about how they can shape the systems that impact them and having a place to process and get support around the adverse experiences they might be having as well as how they can create positive change in that ... as a young person comes in engages with FEEST, they may be at different levels of leadership within the organization. Ranging from a member who is somebody who might come to events and support outreach and engage in a lot of learning and scaling that up to a leader who is somebody who is actually speaking directly to decision makers and facilitating meetings and driving the course of what campaigns we take on for the year, and what tactics and strategies we want to use in our campaigns.

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DEFINING & MEASURING SUCCESS

METHODS



A range of methods were identified for determining success. Some of the methods included listening and hearing from the youth and their parents / caregivers through surveys and more informally, pre- post-surveys, observations, community assessments, and focus groups. Several interviewees emphasized the importance of a more holistic approach and gaining feedback to ensure programs remain youth centered and community driven.

Responses specific to methods used include:

"It's a real bonus when the kids say, 'make sure you come back' or 'we can't wait for you to come back'. Or when we drive around the apartment complexes and they ask us, 'is it June yet? Is it gonna be in July?' That's another way that we can tell if we're doing well. The excitement of the children, and the students, that's cool. And the parents. We get survey responses back that say, 'gosh, you helped my son get out of his shell' and 'my daughter never thought about this career path.'"

"We tend to measure success by surveying the young people about their learnings in terms of like their access to fresh healthy food, their ability to cook it, their ability to understand food justice and racial justice in the context of larger social systems, their development of leadership skills. We've actually been developing a leadership scale so that we can understand how a young person comes into our organization and moves through different levels of membership."

"They always use the last few minutes of each session to ask students, what's the highlight of today, what do you like about it and what are the activities you don't like, how would you suggest us to make changes? And so, the students can provide feedback directly. Through gathering feedback regularly, we measure our program successes by observing whether the youth are fully engaged in the classes or the lessons we provide, and also see how often they come back to participate."

"The other way of success is when you see individuals being able to come and tell their own stories saying, you saved my life. Community Passageway saved my life, saved my family's life. Then you see them pouring into their own children and pouring back into their own community. Success looks like this."



DEFINING & MEASURING SUCCESS

CHALLENGES

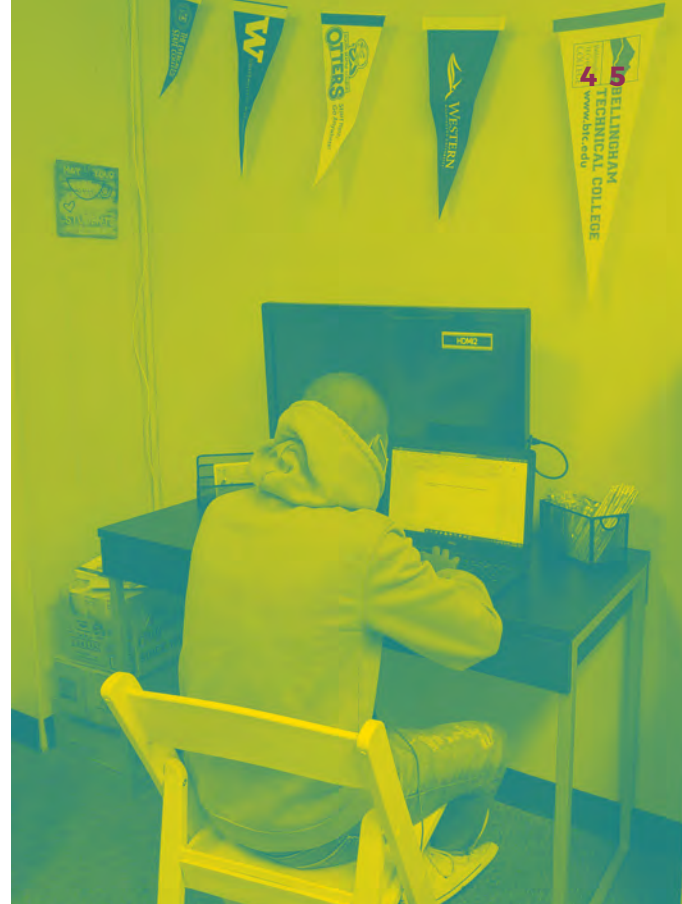
Interviewees also identified challenges related to determining success. A recurring challenge focused on how **fundors often focus on more immediate changes** and **fail to account for longer term impact**.

"One thing I think for us as Native people, we know that the work that we're doing today, the work we're doing in the present time, sometimes we're not going to see the fruition of that maybe even in our lifetime. But it's always in our thought process and it's always within our hope that we wake up with every day that whatever we are doing that given day will benefit our children and our grandchildren, that they will see the benefits of that work long after we're gone."

"Success in our community ... [is] measured in generations and decades because some of the outcomes that we see in our young people's program will not be apparent for another decade, but ... they're coming back, contributing back to community, contributing back to the organization. Those are really important measures of success."

Others spoke to the need to collect specific data required by funders to justify program's **worth** to external stakeholders. While this information can be helpful, at times, it **does not align with the program's commitments and values and feels extractive.**

Consequently, information gathered risks telling only **part** of the story or **misrepresenting program impact.** This can create tension or a sense of disconnect given many interviewees' commitment to a more **holistic approach to understanding success** that often accounts for contextual factors that impact BIPOC communities such as systemic racism and other forms of social inequities.



"There's this idea of leadership with a capital L, which is like these students who always get good grades and participate in certain programs and have privileges to be able to kind of move through the world in different ways. And what I know about our young people is that they are also leaders, whether or not they are able to show up in some of those ways or they're impacted differently by social inequities. And so, these young people may not be able to do every single co-curricular enrichment program because they're also working to support their families and providing childcare for their siblings and care for their elders and they're trying to maintain jobs while also being a student and being a young person.

So, I think FEEST is a space where many different types of leadership shows up, and we really want to be able to honor and recognize and support that, and also compensate young people at a level where they can fully participate in FEEST and maybe don't need a second job on top of their other roles to be able to sustain themselves and their family."

"We do youth, parents, and schools' survey. Those are more formal way because it is requested by the funders, but that doesn't seem to be a really good way to measure, but we do."

We center our community and their needs whether that is food, housing, financially, education, etc. Yes, we have grant goals to achieve but we look at that as something that supplements the needs of our families. We aren't going to focus on providing resources centered on what the grantors see as successful but what we see as making our community thrive together and being sustainable together!



Another identified challenge was offsetting the problem with BIPOC youth being “over surveyed” and **uncompensated**. This can become even more problematic when **traditional measures are not culturally responsive**.

"For us it's about having good feedback loops. So, we don't do a lot of quantitative data collection and part of that is because we know that BIPOC young people in particular are over surveyed, for someone else's agenda, without compensation or ever seeing the results of that data collection."

A final challenge voiced by an interviewee was having the **capacity to collect meaningful data** to more fully understand success. In part, this challenge has been addressed by being a part of REC and working together to track and demonstrate impact. To manage data needs and ensure relevant research practices, a different interviewee described **hiring a data professional** to manage their database and others referred to research partnerships to **co-develop research processes**.



"I can tell you I achieved helping 200 people ... I helped 300 people, I helped 400 people ... What we achieved with the REC, it wouldn't be achieved if we had been given individually. That's what I believe because the contribution on being part of it and reporting, and the way we do the reporting helps to collect this data and information, because I know a lot of times, even when I help communities like that, my data wasn't being captured. Like maybe I have names or I might have zip codes, which I don't actually provide, except a number of people I actually served. So those captured in there with the reporting together helps us, that we know that we actually did help these people."



ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The accomplishments of REC organizations were massive and extraordinary. Four main categories of accomplishments emerged:

Accomplishments covering a wide range of human services:

- Housing
- Workforce related
- Advocacy
- Diversion

Accomplishments related to programming:

- Increased organizational infrastructure
- Youth and family outcomes
- Successful partnerships
- Support offered to other BIPOC organizations

Accomplishments driven by core values:

- Living our values
- Community and culturally responsive

Accomplishments in times of COVID

HUMAN SERVICES ACCOMPLISHMENTS

HOUSING

Two interviewees talked about affordable housing their organizations have developed that embodies their cultural values, such as multigenerational support, often with services provided on site (e.g. a community space, youth center). Other interviewees also talked about the ability to connect their community members to housing resources and help to obtain stable housing, serving as unrecognized homelessness prevention providers.



"In 2016, we built a \$50 million dollar housing development on site with commercial space, space for a credit union, and small businesses."

"The development of the Filipino Community Village (FCV) and Innovation Learning Center (ILC). The FCV is in construction and it is a 95 unit of affordable housing for seniors and ILC is a center for the youth (and open to the general public) that will house a computer lab and maker space. Recently FCS signed the papers to OWN ILC."



HUMAN SERVICES ACCOMPLISHMENTS

WORKFORCE RELATED

In terms of workforce, interviewees spoke about the importance and value of having a **diverse staff**, as well as offering workforce development. Numerous interviewees spoke about how their staff often come from the same linguistically and culturally diverse communities served by their organizations. Identified benefits of a diverse staff included ensuring **culturally responsive services** and **earning community trust**.



"I'm very proud of our staff who definitely are so dedicated to serve families and youth. They care about the youth so much, and I'm proud of these very diverse workforce that we have so we are able to serve more people of color from linguistically, culturally diverse backgrounds or indigenous populations, the Black, African American youth."

Many interviewees spoke to activities related to workforce development. This included providing **employment assistance** and becoming a **training ground** for fields where BIPOC individuals are underrepresented (e.g. social work), providing jobs / apprenticeships / internships to community members.

"Another accomplishment relates to worker shortage, and workforce shortage issues we are experiencing. Not very many Asian and Pacific Islander family members would encourage our children to go to social services. We have been really good immigrant parents and they don't encourage their children to go to social work, so there's a lot of shortage of social workers. So, ACRS had made a commitment to be a training ground for API social workers."



"I'm proud of the hundreds of jobs, apprenticeships and internships we've been able to provide."



HUMAN SERVICES ACCOMPLISHMENTS

ADVOCACY

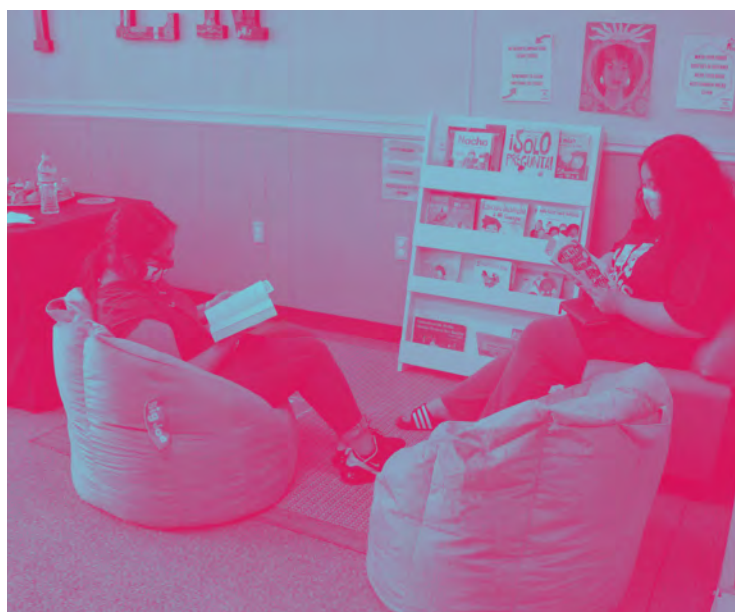
Interviewees talked about achievements related to advocacy, such as actively advocating for legislation in Olympia. Some interviewees talked about being trailblazers, advocating historically at very critical times such as during welfare and immigration reform, for their communities, for example advocacy in support of API, immigrants and refugees. Another example included successes in school food policy changes due to youth advocacy or youth taking research project findings linking poor quality school food to the school to prison pipeline for advocacy which led to all Seattle schools ending their relationship with the Seattle Police Department permanently. Key to youth advocacy is growing youth leadership where youth see themselves as powerful change agents. Advocacy happened on a micro-scale, for example parents advocating for their youth and youth advocating in their schools, communities as well as macro-scale, expanding impact to systems level changes that went way beyond the specific school/community, for example, districtwide. Partnerships were pointed out as a key factor, amplifying voices for advocacy work, such as with REC.

"And mostly, I will say that I'm so proud of the families and the youth that we have served because we have seen so many of the parents become strong advocates."



"We tend to measure successes in terms of our wins around our campaigns for policy and systems change. One way our success is measured is by our wins from our campaigns for policy and systems change. FEEST youth have been able to work with the Nutrition Services directors in Seattle and Highline school districts to increase the amount of scratch cooked items and whole foods that are on the menu. There are FEEST youth created menu items that are being served district wide in both school districts. There have been a lot of changes to the variety of foods that are being offered as a result of their feedback over the years."

"We collected over 20,000 signatures from the community on a petition and youth presented those directly to the school board, and so young people were always at the center of driving what is that campaign about how do we want to go about it and being the ones to speak directly to decision makers and we were actually able to make a change that again affected students district wide."



HUMAN SERVICES ACCOMPLISHMENTS

DIVERSION

Two interviewees specifically lifted up their work to disrupt the school to prison pipeline. There was also the school food advocacy effort described that led to divesting of Seattle police in the schools. Another organization talked about helping kids on parole and probation to succeed, efforts recognized to be so successful that they were funded for 10 years.

"I'm really proud that we have worked with kids across every system on parole, and probation, diversion in the community and helped many succeed. I'm also proud we were funded through the City of Seattle HSD, Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (SYVPI). This initiative gave us an opportunity to work with kids identified as at risk by schools, police departments, counselors, judges. We worked with SYVPI networks in Seattle Central District, SE and SW. The initiative included case management, recreation, and employment to name a few. We were funded for 10 years through the SYVPI initiative."



"One success was the fact that over the last four years, we've been able to divert 350 years of prison and jail time off the table for the community."



PROGRAMMING AND OUTCOMES

INCREASED ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Interviewees talked about growing budgets, expanding programs and staffing, developing stronger infrastructure, and securing stable funding. Examples included expansion of staff from 1 to 60 employees as well as expansion in the number of participants from 26 to 500. Other cited accomplishments included having the ability to provide jobs and hire people from the community, expanding geographic reach into South King County, expanding programming in schools, and especially with the pandemic being able to move beyond just survival. Organizations were unsure if they would even survive through the pandemic and had concerns about having to furlough employees. Instead organizations provided jobs for additional community members and were able to expand based on community needs (i.e., youth programming, job training, ELL student and parent resources) and the impact of COVID. Another aspect of expansion was owning/purchasing additional space, which is important since it provides stability and a permanent home for community-based organizations.



"We've also been successful at hiring 60 plus employees from the community. From me working for free for a couple of years and having a couple of volunteers four years ago, to having 60 plus employees with health care packages and paid vacation, that's successful."

"I started something called a focus group, which it's for women over 50 years old. If you come to my office the first picture you see is them. I started a walking club. Our women mostly don't exercise and especially over 50 forget it. So, I created that focus group with refreshment. I used to give them refreshment and every week if you come at least four days a week you get a \$25 gift card at the end of the week. That's how I started basically. And I started with I think it was 26 members. You can still see them in the old website or you know in my office actually they're a main picture for me. And it happened where it never stopped. So now over 500 people sometimes in a week come to just walk there... the low-income housing next to the Safeway, that's where I used to live for 10 years myself so behind that that's where people come and walk and sometimes we go, even right now and give them some refreshment to encourage them."

"Definitely just the growth of our after-school program. We started off in one school, and we so far have run programs at Chief Sealth, Federal Way, Kent Meridian, Todd Beamer. Like, 4 high schools so far and in such a small time, so we are excited. We're really happy that the word is spreading about our organization."



PROGRAMMING AND OUTCOMES

YOUTH AND FAMILY OUTCOMES

Other programmatic accomplishments touched upon youth outcomes, some of which were considered more traditional outcomes such as youth graduating from high school, attending college and securing paid employment. In addition to naming youth outcomes, several interviewees also spoke to observed changes in parents and caregivers including becoming “strong advocates.”



I will say that I'm so proud of the families and the youth that we have served because we have seen so many of the parents become strong advocates, and the youth at the same, also have worked after they graduate school. They have jobs that pay them. And many of them also went to college.

We're also really proud of our youth that have gone on to college. Right now, just in the last year it was kind of a long-time dream of Red Eagle Soaring to be able to provide some sort of a scholarship program within our program to youth that are graduating from high school and going on. We've given four scholarships away worth \$1,500 each to youth that have gone on to college just in the last two or three years. So, we're excited about that, it's so cool. ... Just to see them kind of take flight and go on to pursue their careers and their interests and their education having seen where they've come from just means the world to us.

More commonly, interviewees spoke to how they measured youth outcomes in terms of youth leadership which often centered around advocacy and organizing to address systems of oppression. One example was the Girlvolution conference, a youth focused platform where youth are in charge and take full credit for creating an experience for all participants. Other examples were numerous, and included participating youth becoming nationally recognized actors, frisbee players and spelling bee winners. These accomplishments were considered secondary examples of leadership.

"One of the things that we've done well that we're hoping to be able to bring back in an authentic way when we're able to meet in person is our Girlvolution conference, and even though that's attached to our activities and program, the conference itself is just like such a massive like undertaking, but it's also so inspirational because it's so youth focused, and it really is about creating that platform for our young folks to be able to feel like they're the ones in charge. They're the ones taking the lead, they're the ones getting the credit for the experience that these folks are having at the conference."

"We have done an outstanding job prioritizing youth leadership in all of the ways that we're organizing, including the decision to organize around school food specifically has come from youth led assessments and surveys and research and previous years of organizing. And we have young people at all levels of leadership within our organization including on the board.

So that feels really important to me and also that we compensate young people well for the expertise that they're bringing in the work that they're doing and thinking about what it means to pay them not just a living wage but a thriving wage is, you know, something that's important to me and I think that we're continually making progress towards."



"And our priority is not to produce the best ultimate frisbee players, because for us it's about community, building analysis around systems of oppression and backing youth leadership."



Interviewees also emphasized that a critical outcome was **youth feeling like they have a supportive community**. For young people, it is often at school where they don't feel heard, and the programs provide a space for building power and confidence that comes from having their voices elevated to create change. Part of this was **compensating youth**, recognizing them for their wisdom and leadership and paying a living wage. Finally, one interviewee spoke to the important outcome of youth being **community-ready**, youth not only having great successes but also being great assets to the community.

Other accomplishments related to youth outcomes touched upon longer term impacts where **youth participants returned to the organizations** as alumni to volunteer, serve on the board, become staff, partner on projects, and lead or direct workshops. Youth staying connected, being in communication with the program after they have completed was celebrated as positive sign of sustained engagement.



We're so proud of the fact that our students lean on our support and reach back to us even after our programs are said and done for them, it's fantastic. For example, I've given references for several of our graduated students for job opportunities, program admissions and college admissions. Just recently, one of our students who has only been in America for a little over one year, since November 2019, was able to attend Green River college to pursue a STEM related degree. He's also volunteered with our organization by helping us find more Pacific Islander resources that he found through his own research. So, even though we're a new organization, I just am so excited to see graduates of our programs just continue on to be great successes and great assets to our communities.

[A former participant] just did an acting workshop for our youth in October, and she's directed our programs in past years. It's by way of those examples like hers that it really becomes apparent to our youth that if they want a career in the arts, and they can be strongly rooted in who they are as a Native people and in their identity, they can go out and pursue things and they're not limited. They know they have Red Eagle Soaring there to support them with their foundation.

PROGRAMMING AND OUTCOMES

SUPPORT FOR OTHER BIPOC ORGANIZATIONS



Several interviewees talked about **supporting other BIPOC organizations** as another form of accomplishment. This included serving as a model on how to engage and support BIPOC communities and offering support in such areas as building capital campaigns, developing culturally responsive housing and owning buildings.

"Our program is doing really well because it's culturally appropriate, it's culturally sensitive... And because a lot of other communities are watching us. Some of them look up to us as a role model."



PROGRAMMING AND OUTCOMES

PARTNERSHIPS

Other accomplishments focused on a wide range of successful partnerships that helped expand services for youth and their communities. This included:

- Partnerships established as part of COVID relief, such as with food banks and restaurants
- Partnerships helping to elevate advocacy efforts, such as with REC
- Partnerships with other entities to boost youth programming, whether that be with other community-based organizations, churches, schools or advocacy organizations

"We've also been successful at partnering with a number of schools. Even more schools are asking us to come do more work but we don't have the capacity to be in all the schools that are asking us to come do the work. Being able to come into a school environment and giving students support, doing the work we do in the schools and showing the school system and school environments that this partnership and collaboration with community-based organizations with people that look like the students in your hallways, is super important, that's successful."



CORE VALUES



LIVING OUR VALUES

An important concept expressed by organizations was **living up to their values** and **building this into their organizational structure**. Several organizations talked about social justice as a central tenet by which their organization operates. For example, having staff committed to doing social justice work or organizing work in support of BIPOC communities. Another organization spoke to regular check-ins on a daily basis to ensure programs, practices and all decision-making are aligned with organizational values, mission and vision of family / youth centered and equity driven.

"We've been deeply invested in our social justice work, and advocating at very critical times in our history in support of Asians and Pacific Islanders, and immigrants and refugees."

"We also are very grateful for the dedication of our staff team. They, on a regular basis, will ask themselves how they can improve and better our program and ensure that their practices are aligned with our values, mission and visions. At Open Doors for Multicultural Families, we have shared values that we live by and practice on a regular basis almost on a daily basis or weekly with everybody we will ask ourselves questions such as "What have you done in the past week in your work that is aligned with our values?" Our values include inclusion, social justice, equity, diversity, different ability, family, cross-cultural communication, family centered programs and services, cultural reciprocity teamwork, partnership and collaboration, accountability, hospitality and self-care. Because we continue to practice our values together, our programs are family/youth centered and equity driven. Our organizational tagline is "Equity in Action". We try to live whatever we are preaching, and when we make a decision, also are based on our values to assess the impacts on individual, organization and community levels. I am just so blessed and am grateful for such a wonderful workforce we have, and we got a wonderful team, we continue to attract people who truly believe in social justice, and are willing to do the work, which is hard work to advocate on behalf of the population we serve."



CORE VALUES

COMMUNITY AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE

Another value frequently expressed was ensuring practices were **community and culturally responsive** services. Examples included delivering culturally relevant behavioral health services, programmatic expansion based on needs expressed by the community, and offering COVID relief support. Another example of being culturally responsive was investing money back into the community which included hiring people from the community. Others spoke of developing and / or providing culturally relevant education that included a curriculum focused on black history, civil rights movement and black heroes.



"Through PEN OR PENCIL™, social action strategies evolve from the stories, courage, and examples of little- and well-known participants of the Underground Railroad and the modern-day Civil Rights movements into a modern movement of youth engaged as planners, leaders, and decision makers for equitable education and issues of juvenile justice, delinquency, and violence prevention. The Pen and Pencil focused on black history and taught the mentees about black heroes."

Responsiveness also entailed offering **holistic services** to meet all of the community needs while addressing a community's uniqueness. One interviewee shared how they were criticized for taking on too much instead of focusing on one thing. Such a holistic approach was seen as being overambitious when in fact it was being **responsive to community needs**. Only those from the community can know how best to address. A benefit of being responsive to the community is that it makes **recruitment** a non-issue. This interviewee spoke to routinely having 200 participants show up compared to other community-based events that would draw in only 20 participants. Other interviewees spoke to how responsiveness can entail emphasizing quality over quantity as well as storytelling vs. numbers. For example, to understand impact one interviewee shared that serving 100 people vs. 1000 could be equally if not more compelling when you account for and understand the story behind the people you are serving.



"Our services are needs driven, and it is really responding back to the community's needs and what we hear from the communities. So, when the community felt that we needed services beyond mental health, such as job training for youth, especially for ELL students, we provided that. If we serve youth alone, we are doing half of the services to the community. We really needed to work with parents, and then we added parents' component. I am proud about the way this agency is very responsive to the needs of the community. And services we develop are really coming out from listening to the community and connecting with the youth. I mean the youth and communities."



"I met [former CEO] the first time when I wanted to start the organization and I wanted him to fiscal sponsor me, and he told me what do you want to do. So, I just keep talking and talking and talking. And then he says you're over ambitious. I don't think you can achieve this, and then I told him you know with you or without you I'm gonna do it. This is how I want to do it. You know the way you do maybe is right, but this is the way I want to do this is how my community's need is. So that's why I always support people when they talk about their community's uniqueness, or how they work with their community. They are the only one who can know."

Another aspect related to being culturally responsive was developing a trustworthy and safe “*place where you can land*”. Particularly with the last four years of racism and BIPOC individuals and communities feeling unsafe in the streets, REC organizations offered a space where people could feel and know they were **safe**, where they are **listened to, heard, supported** and can experience love, care, joy and community.



"I think the more nice thing is that our community feels safe here. Especially in those last four years or five years that has been very nasty regarding racism and inequities, and people feel unsafe in the streets, people of color. I think to have a place where you can land, if not coming to the office, at least you know here, you're safe. I think is something very important, I think that people trust Para Los Ninos."

"It's also a success that young people come to our space and feel supported and feel like they're thriving and feel like they have a community. I hear often that young people don't feel listened to in other spaces by school administrators and community leaders. There are many places where young people feel that their voices aren't really heard or when they say things that action isn't really taken on it, but they feel that FEEST is that place where they actually are heard and are supported and do find that love and care and joy and community and that they're actually building power and building that confidence that comes when your voice is heard and you're able to make change."

COVID RESPONSE

Several interviewees talked about accomplishments related to **standing in the gap for community members during COVID**, which at times entailed shifting to activities they had never done before to be responsive to community need. While this included services that other CBOs were offering, such as rental assistance, transportation, food and utility vouchers, delivering emergency food, it also went beyond to be deeply responsive to community needs. For example, to assist with vaccination efforts, organizations ensured their communities had culturally relevant information about vaccines, used their organization's van to transport people for vaccines, and helped make appointments as needed. **In essence, organizations made securing a vaccine as low barrier as possible for BIPOC individuals and communities.** Some organizations even offered vaccines on-site knowing that this may increase people's comfort and access to securing a vaccination.

"We were so fortunate and very excited to have before, was that during a pandemic of some funding came out for us to really stand in the gap for our community members and our constituents who needed that little additional help. And it was very hard for some of our clients, families to request those types of dollars because they've never been in that position before, and I'm talking about rental assistance, we're talking about transportation vouchers, food vouchers, utility vouchers, I mean that was big for us. So, for us to be able to be in a position to apply for that funding, accept that funding and then reinvested into the community in the way that we did, I mean, that was amazing. We gave over \$120,000 away over the last 12 months. I mean, over the last 10 months, sorry over the last 10 months for our community here in Kent. We also had the opportunity to do a lot of food drives work with food boxes in partnering with local restaurants during a pandemic to offer free meals for our young people in the city of Kent. I mean, that right there was just amazing because we didn't know where we were going to be, our organization didn't know if we were going to have to furlough some employees and team members. But, you know, through it all, we survived and we came out on the other side better than we were before."



Other organizations pivoted to help with technology which included helping get computers to families, offering technical support to families such as teaching them how to use Zoom and addressing other barriers related to technical skills, setting up a computer lab, and helping access fast internet especially for large families.

"We were able to give away 144 computers. When people needed, we have a brand computers because we applied for a grant with King County, and another organization donate some. That was a very good help for them. We were able to speak out about they start trying to do virtual classes, but for our community doesn't have an expertise or a skilled in technology. So, we were able to help some, but in the same time is not just that the skills, is if you have three children that are going to the school, and mom that wants to have a program, you need to have four rooms, four computers and a fast internet. So that was so hard for the people that was planning things ... So, many things that wasn't taken in consideration in the earlier stage. I think we did a very good job, and asking questions, how they handle this."

"We were able to open in the pandemic, a lab computer. Now we have a long waiting list, so just we hired another person for our lab computer. And we were able to keep, somehow with remote, the youth connected. When they have needs or questions, we are here in the program, so I think that is important. I mean the pandemic is still here but we survived, or we are surviving."



Other accomplishments achieved during COVID included:

- Engaging community members to help one another, for example helping to pack and deliver food for seniors during COVID
- Helping connect community members with culturally responsive mental health services
- Providing gift cards as food assistance to purchase food

"And now that we went through this whole COVID process, and we realize how important therapy is, we've been able to start providing therapeutic services for a black and brown community that normally aren't the type of communities that buy into therapy. We've been able to tap into some black therapists, and I think that's the success that we have been able to break down some of those misnomers of therapeutic services and help that you're not crazy, you just suffered from trauma."



"Other thing that I think is very important, everybody has shift many things with the pandemic. We were able to, even though we never do this job of helping with some resources, we were able to ask for some grants independently as a Para Los Ninos and with REC together. We were able to help the emergency necessities. And was very nice because many people was without jobs, and they were able to be volunteers and volunteers with pay."



CHALLENGES FACED IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITIES SERVED

"These are the things we see challenge-wise really are continuing to not have enough capacity to serve the population we serve, and the other challenges we also see is the system does not understand the population we serve."

Interviewees identified challenges they face as organizations that included **structural racism, funder requirements, insufficient funding, and COVID**. Interviewees further spoke to what needs to be done to address these challenges.

STRUCTURAL RACISM

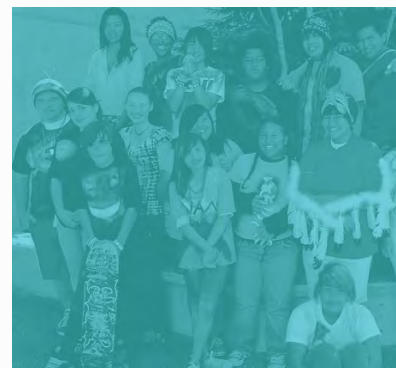
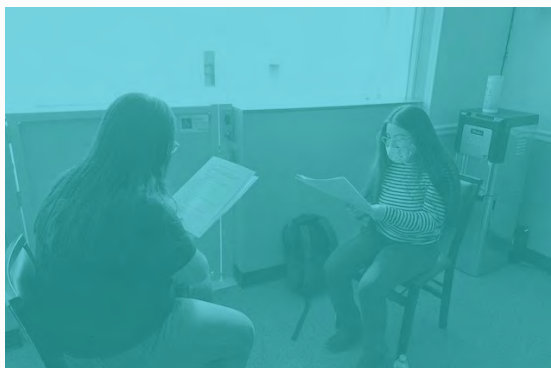
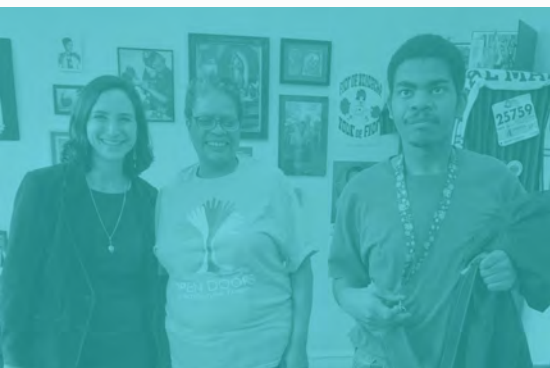
Many of the identified organization-level challenges stem from **structural racism** embedded in the school and justice systems. For example, one interviewee spoke to how the school system fails to provide inclusive curricular content and culturally responsive support.

As this interviewee reflected,

"A lot of our youth are still going to schools that have traditionally not honored them as who they are as Native people or their history. Those school systems are still largely ignorant to Native populations, Native people and cultures."

While some efforts have been implemented, such as recognizing Billy Frank Jr Day, more work needs to happen to recognize *"Native people's presence, resistance and struggles and rights to sovereignty... Only through that we can go forward and try to create a more understanding and just and equitable society."*

Others spoke about the challenges associated with the justice system touching upon **lack of funding** that goes directly to communities to address community-identified priorities such as gun violence. One interviewee not only spoke to this issue, but addressed the impact these systemic issues have on individual and community well-being.



"You throw 100-200 million at covering homelessness, education system, the health care system but gun violence gets 20 million...my biggest challenge is trying to make the government see that it would be beneficial for them to throw a few billion dollars every year into the direction of stopping the gun violence in our community by providing resources and opportunities for the community. But then at the same time, I think my number one challenge is white supremacy, racist institutionalism, systemic racism. That's why we have the gun violence in the first place because of self-hatred."

Other interviewees reflected on the **generational impact** of racism, trauma, marginalization, and intergenerational cultural tension as youth become "Americanized."



"We can't watch nothing or listen to nothing without seeing another officer killing somebody, or one of us killing each other, so we're in continuous constant perpetual state of trauma. Perpetual state of trauma that we can never shake off, or come out of it. It's consistent all day every day. Always looking over your shoulder, not knowing what's gonna happen. Just being uncertain and unsure, all day every day, and I'm even talking about the people that got jobs, and the people that got housing and the people that black, brown, black and brown bodies. Every day you still got this thing on the back of your neck just sitting on your shoulders all the time."



"The adjustment from Pacific Islander life to the American culture. I think that's been a huge barrier because our culture is very marginalized, and so it's taken some time for us to really talk about. So, I think it was just really creating a space where our community was comfortable enough to talk about how our culture impacts academics and social awareness and cultural preservation. So, I would say that just the way that Pacific Islanders across the board handle adjusting to the American systems. That's been something for us to address as an organization."

FUNDER REQUIREMENTS



Other interviewees spoke to how **white supremacy** shows up with grant making and funding requirements. One interviewee, for example, shared a story where a funder denied their proposal to teach youth their native language and instead suggested they teach English. Other identified concerns regarding funders or funding opportunities included:

- **Require a one-size-fits-all approach;**
- **Pit BIPOC communities against each other;**
- **Fail to recognize the deep ties and connections BIPOC led organizations have with the communities they serve;**
- **Require BIPOC-led organizations to constantly prove themselves;**
- **Privilege one way of measuring or determining impact that doesn't center community priorities;**
- **Prevent or override community driven approaches on how their story is told and who it is told to;**
- **Undermine organizations' abilities to secure grants due to unchecked language or other cultural barriers**

Examples of comments shared by interviewees that touch upon some of the challenges listed above include:

"The next big challenge is systems barriers, like a city, county, state, and foundations that tend to be like a one size fits all approach. And they do not consider BIPOC's unique needs, differences, cultural differences, approaches, and ways to serve youth. And they almost seem like they have their ways to do the programming and they like forcing that on us. And we feel like we must fit into it for us to get the funding to serve the community."

"Research compels us to have to put value on specific types of data. Whereas, we're lifting up here the importance and the power of stories, and the importance of the feedback that we get from program participants and parents and others as a measure of success. So, I think there's a bigger, broader conversation around how do we undo kind of Western approaches to our day to day practices and everywhere it shows up as we continue to move further towards multicultural identity as Americans."

"Why we got to go tap dance and show all our data, and all this information? We got to prove that we're worthy of a grant...all these government departments exist because black people are put it in a position for them to exist, and then they put out a little few \$100,000 here and there for us to fight over and tap dance for when it's our money anyway. You wouldn't even have this wealth, or have those departments, or have those jobs if it weren't for us, and then you don't hire us to do the work. We're the ones that are suffering."



One interviewee framed funder concerns in part due to **colonial constructs** that fail to acknowledge cultural traditions as well as other socioeconomic factors. More specifically, the interviewee pointed out how too often funders **mandate geographic boundaries that do not reflect indigenous ways of living** and fail to account for **gentrification** and increased cost of living.



"We're looking at applying [for a grant] but one of the criteria is that the youth being served have to live in the city of Seattle or go to Seattle School District. That will apply for some of them, but not all of them. ... I can't speak for every tribal nation but some of our tribes in history were very nomadic like based on different factors with, seasonal knowledge of hunting and gathering in the landscape and things like that. People live in balance with our natural world, spread apart or moving around. We weren't bound by artificial kind of constructs as far as colonial boundaries go. And so, it's really hard when you again try to convey an Indigenous way of being or inform the model of how we see and know things, how we're related and connected. And that is the place that we come from. As far as the ways that we think about things, the ways that we make decisions, the ways that we pursue things to help our people wherever they might be at. And when you put that into a colonial construct, you know where there that exists, we have to work around that. It really does kind of make it hard. Many processes and opportunities historically have not been very inclusive."

INSUFFICIENT FUNDING

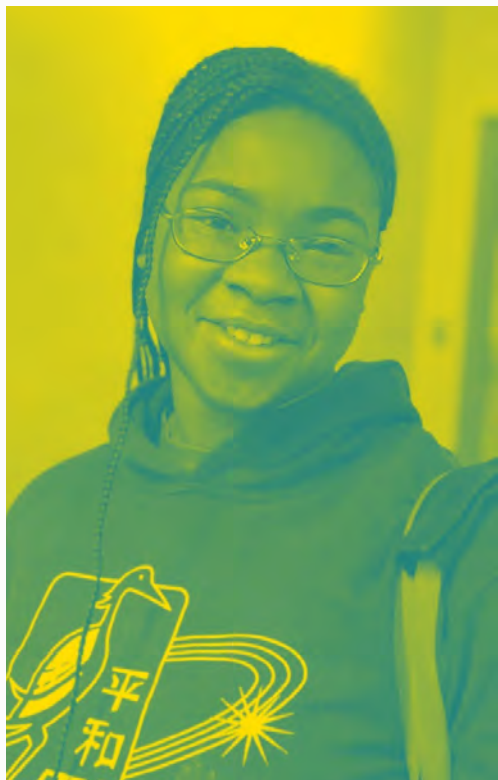
Another recurring challenge focused on how too often the needs are greater than what organizations can provide due to **insufficient funding**. This becomes increasingly challenging when communities distrust other sources of support due to negative past experiences or due to other organizations' inability to provide culturally and linguistically responsive services.



"As with many BIPOC organizations, fundraising is a constant challenge. That's one of the many reasons REC has been so important to us. We have continued to receive funding and support. Yet, there can never be enough working with families especially during this time of COVID when things are not stable for most families we serve. We are writing more grants than ever to meet the needs. Along with writing grants we face the added requirement of the reporting, staffing and capacity building."

"We serve a very unique population. In the mainstream disability system, very often the providers don't have enough capacity to meet the needs of a linguistically, culturally diverse population. The BIPOC community is not really served well by them. And then for the ethnic community or organizations that are dedicated to serve certain populations from diverse cultural backgrounds, they do not talk too much about disabilities."

The challenge with **lack of sustainable and unrestricted funding** shows up as organizational capacity concerns due to an inability to: 1) hire staff, 2) fully invest in staff and 3) retain staff.



"...Workforce development and staff retention. Again, very few of our community member will go into social service or community work or youth work. And it is very difficult to hire people and retain people. I think most of it is that those large systems, they pay themselves first. And then, they pay the providers. But the funding is not at a level to compensate at the same level as city or county or state. So that is a great injustice, and a challenge for the agency. When we hire and when train good workers, we lose them to city, county and state."

"Our staff is getting stretched thin and burnt out. If we continue to get burnt out, our programs will get affected in a way that doesn't meet the needs of the community and our community. How can our org serve our community if we can't serve ourselves properly and healthily?"



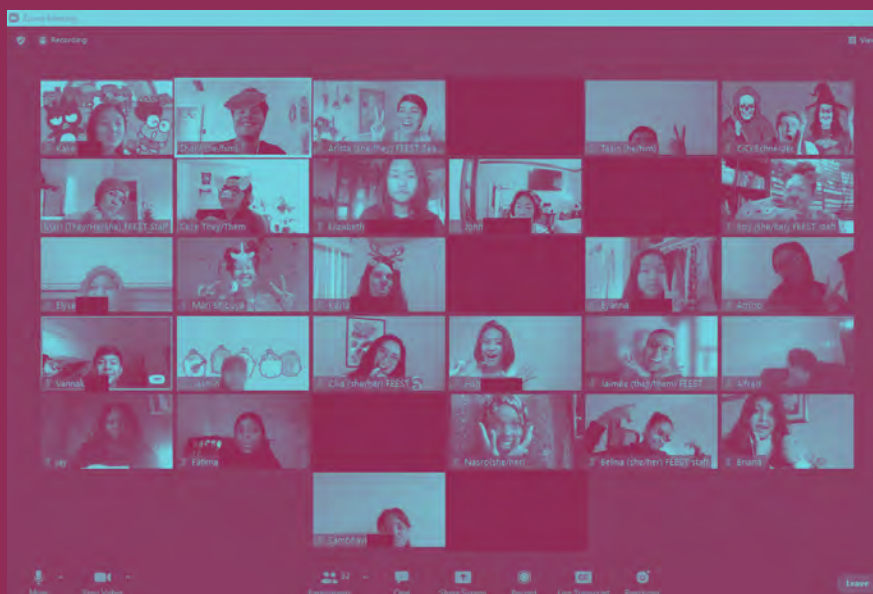
"We're trying to build a stronger, more long lasting [donor] base that can give us the flexibility we need to hire more people, and to expand the work that we do and have people do more specialized things because oftentimes we're having to kind of collapse multiple positions into one. I'm definitely a prime example of that. I helped with the grant writing, I'm basically the finance and operations director as well as the ED. I'm still hiring for my program director, so I'm still doing programs as well. And that's just kind of been a thing that's been a constant thorn in our side as a small organization that's having to live off of unfortunately grants that are not always multiyear, that are not always guaranteed year to year."



COVID

Other challenges identified focused on the impact of **COVID**. While for some organizations the number of youth and their families has increased during the pandemic, others are finding a decrease in numbers due to restrictions barring in-person events. For example, one interviewee spoke about the lack of school-based events as reducing the number of youth enrolled in the organization's activities while another interviewee spoke to decreased numbers of mentors due to cancelation of recruitment fairs due to COVID-19. Others spoke to challenges associated with technology and a **widening digital divide** resulting from many services and schooling shifting to virtual connection.

"With COVID and racism as the pandemics that are deeply affecting all of us and our young people, it means that we've needed to take a lot of time just to make sure people are cared for. We're still progressing towards our goals but we can't just like only be goal oriented. We also have to make sure that all of our people's needs are being met because everybody in our organization, all of our staff anyways and all of our young people are people of color. And so, all are deeply impacted by racism and as things are happening in our community, they're also happening to us as staff and they're happening to the people that we care about."



"Our staff help those who don't have computer or laptop and are experiencing digital divide by providing them with the technology they need and also help them to set up the system. And one on one, on the phone they walk through every single step, teaching them how they can join the Zoom meetings or how they can utilize the technology we provided to them to help their sons or daughters participate in their school."

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN

Interviewees identified critical next steps to address organizational level challenges. One interviewee, for example, reflected:

"Unrestricted funding has been amazing for us...it would be nice to kind of just have a little bit more room to use funding the way that we want it to be used in order to meet the actual needs of our communities because they're very different than non BIPOC cultures and systems."

Identified actions to be taken with additional unrestricted funding included:

- build capacity internally as well as for the community through job creation
- fund “emergency necessities”
- address harm done by acculturation
- keep youth voices at the center
- compensate volunteers and youth
- address the digital divide
- ensure accessibility (i.e., meet transportation needs)
- invest in staff development and self-care
- ensure community priorities are centered including not only what is addressed but how it is addressed
- fund more organizing work including investing in the professional development of organizers
- provide space and opportunities for communities to heal and flourish

In addition to advocating for unrestricted funding, several interviewees focused on how to **further support youth as they plan for their futures**. This included teaching practical life skills, offering employment training, and creating space for youth to process what they are witnessing and experiencing such as the impact of COVID or continued police murders. As one interviewee reflected,

"If we were able to teach these kids in the education system, you have an opportunity to say, let's teach you about real estate, let's teach you about finance, let's teach you about tech, let's give you technology skills, let's teach you about stock markets and investments...and then let's give you an opportunity to get the money to do these investments, and put these plans in motion. I always say to the kids, you'll put down the gun when I give you a plan, you pick up the plan instead of the gun because the planning gives you hope the gun gives you a little piece of power that only lasts for so long till you fall victim to that power. What we have to do is make investments into our community, into our kids."

To support this work, one suggestion was to partner with other organizations or governmental entities to **create a more equitable education system**. Centering youth voices was seen as an essential part of developing solutions and strategies.



"Our youth and our children know what is going on around them, and they have an important perspective they need to share as they create the world of tomorrow in unison with us. It's amazing when you get them to open up and then they get to artistically express themselves. It's amazing what they know and what they're able to convey and to speak and that's another really important critical part to the work that we do is to be able to address those challenges in an artistic way that helps enlighten people, helps people have conversations, helps us kind of move forward together and heal our wounds together."



Addressing organizational level challenges also requires naming and addressing structural racism that continues to plague BIPOC communities.



Part two of the interview focused on organizational impact resulting from being a part of REC. The questions included:

- *How and why did your organization join REC?*
- *How has involvement in REC changed, or not, your organization?*
- *What are some of the benefits you and/or your organization have received by being a part of REC?*
- *What have been some challenges that you/your organization has faced in being a part of REC?*



REASONS FOR JOINING REC

UWKC invited and brought together **BIPOC-led organizations** that had received or were currently receiving funds for BIPOC youth work. Notably, the UWKC invitation was not enough to sway people to join, but **having trust and belief in transparency** is what enabled organizations to accept the invitation. Interviewees spoke to their **pre-existing relationships with specific staff at United Way**, then **connecting with other staff of color at UWKC** as what drew them into REC. Several interviewees expressed that joining REC felt like a “*natural progression*.”

"...It has something to do with also working with the United Way of King County because it was already familiarized. They knew most of the organizations involved in that, and that's also another trust where you could say nothing bad is gonna come out so just why don't you give a shot."

"... being a member of REC was a natural progression as we are one of the recipients of United Way of King County funding...It naturally happened as the current REC members are all recipient of the United Way of King County funding. We are meeting as a group. We have organically grown and became REC."



Themes that emerged across interviewees' responses as to why they chose to join REC centered around:

- **PSTAA and other funding**
- **Shared values**
- **Advocacy**
- **Relationships**

PSTAA AND OTHER FUNDING

Coalition members engaged in **extensive advocacy efforts** to secure Puget Sound Taxpayer Accountability Account (PSTAA) funding. This included making a case to King County Council for how **REC is best positioned to address educational and other disparities facing BIPOC youth and communities**. These efforts helped coalesce the coalition and demonstrated the power of group effort to secure needed funding to ensure resources go directly to BIPOC communities. In addition to securing PSTAA funds, interviewees also spoke to other funding successes and how **REC has developed equitable processes to distribute funds within the coalition**.



"The reason why then we came out for the REC is because of the PSTAA money. That time they were having all these issues because as a person of color we want to make sure that we are being heard. So, there's a lot of us organizations that we thought, and also with the help the United Way, is to create something as a coalition so that we are all in this together, that we are not individually you know like fighting for those. And that's how we start. ...We joined that because we want to make sure that our community will be able to be a part of this funding source. I know even before the REC, I have a meeting with [UWKC staff person], just, like, giving us an understanding that hey this is coming in, what do you guys think about it? And then after that, we actually when we have to go to the King County Council to raise this issue we have to be a group, or you know like really have a power. So that's how I see when we started it then."

"The ability to collaborate on funding is just outstanding. And I really appreciate our organizations, like Open Doors for Multicultural Families you know the role that they've been able to play and just creating so much access for other organizations, especially smaller organizations like ours, and doing the heavy lifting of the admin work to disperse these funds and just being very equitable."



SHARED VALUES

While the UWKC invitation and PSTAA funding advocacy served as practical reasons for REC's initial formation, what has kept the coalition coming together was **shared values**. Interviewees talked about how different REC is from other coalitions.

One interviewee reflected how previous coalitions felt like a coalition in name only, but people did not show up and commit to the work. In contrast, interviewees spoke to how **people show up for REC**. Ways of showing up described by interviews included how REC members:

- Are energetic
- Try to accomplish the same thing
- Listen and learn from each other
- Support each other
- See equity embedded into every aspect of the coalition



Specifically, while REC members serve different communities, they see the importance of **partnership and learning about each other**, as the commonality they all shared is pushing for **social justice** and **equity** as BIPOC-led organizations, where they are forced to fight every day. Coalition work was seen as **one of the most powerful organizing tools for social change**, recognizing **interconnected issues** facing BIPOC communities, and building a larger net of **aligned community members**. Organizations saw **alignment** in mission, vision, and the reasons they show up for the work, to empower BIPOC youth and their families. By supporting each other, they could better support their own community.

"I was used to being in cohorts organized by funders with other organizations for other efforts. I began to realize how different and how powerful this group could be in terms of community-led funding, and it was very enticing to me to work in partnership with other BIPOC led and serving organizations."



"Even just the conversations around what does equity look like within a coalition like this, and how do we really build that in those principles into every aspect of our practice and not just in how we have conversations, not just in how we make decisions but also even in how we raise funds together. And so that's given me just a lot of insight into how I can take some of these things and replicate within our own organization to be able to even deepen our practice of being equitable from within."

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RELATIONSHIPS

Some interviewees have been part of REC since its formation and others were new Executive Directors / staff that joined after REC formation. Across the interviews, people talked about what keeps them a part of REC. The most commonly expressed reason for joining and staying in REC was due to **relationships**. Relationships are what allowed organizations to say yes to joining REC in the first place and kept organizations coming together. There was much benefit from the relationships within REC in terms of **advocacy, shared values,**

social justice organizing, strategizing, collaborating, learning, building a community, and being stronger together.

Camaraderie and a community of support was seen as important so that organizations do not feel so isolated, especially for new Executive Directors. There was deep appreciation for REC organizations helping one another, for example, collaborating on funding with larger organizations willing to take on the administrative and reporting burden.



REC provided a **learning community**, coming out of respective silos and providing a safe space to collaborate with other BIPOC. There was recognition that it was hard to find the time to come together all being BIPOC organizations that are underfunded, and jumping at the opportunity to build relationships with like minded leaders putting BIPOC communities and anti-racism at the forefront of their work. For example, trying not to perpetuate the nonprofit industrial complex and integrating equity into discussions, decision-making structures and funding allocations, learning from REC and other organizations and applying lessons learned within one's own organization.

"The reason why we remain engaged with REC is that coalition work is just like some of the most awesome work in terms of social justice there is. I mean, being able to build kind of like a larger net of community members and people that we know kind of align with our mission, and also connect with the reasons why we show up for this work as well.

That camaraderie is really important so that we don't feel as isolated as an organization. So that connection really is something that has been very valuable for me."



"And the ability to learn from each other about the work we all do, and also feel supported in a community of other BIPOC leaders of which there aren't many relatively speaking in our region. And so especially for me, as a first time Executive Director, I really gravitated towards that community of support."


"We hadn't been a formal nonprofit for very long, and we were trying to build a nonprofit that wasn't perpetuating all of the nonprofit industrial complex and white supremacy culture bullshit out there. Because there is so much about how you're supposed to be running things as a non-profit and how fast you should be doing it, and it was hard for us to make sense of that world. It was also hard as a new organization to get connected with BIPOC community leaders because everyone is busy and pressed for time. We saw this as a great opportunity to build relationships with other organizations and leaders who put BIPOC community and undoing racism at the center of their work."

ADVOCACY

While there were other general advocacy groups for youth, REC was formed to fill a void of **youth advocacy specifically from BIPOC**

point of view. Organizations spoke to feeling an obligation to represent their communities, whether it be the American Indian / Alaska Native, South King County or the Kent community, and having the opportunity to tell and share their stories. REC continues to work together due to shared common values around youth development for BIPOC communities, offering a safe space to build community, relationships with one another, and to strategize. REC was seen as an **avenue for further advocacy and systems change with funders** to get adequate resources to BIPOC communities, such as changing grant making structure to be culturally responsive for BIPOC communities. This was particularly important as REC formation occurred during the pandemic, where BIPOC communities were hit worst, yet not receiving dedicated resources (e.g. rental assistance lottery). It was felt having a strategic, united front as BIPOC organizations taking bold action could lead to real shift and impact, compared to existing systems work that has led to little change and even caused things to backtrack.





"...We continue to work together because we have shared common values around advancing youth development among the BIPOC community. I would also say that within the youth development space, I think that there are other efforts underway, but it's clear that BIPOC youth are not explicitly. And so, there's a vacuum and there's a need and a desire for those who are youth, BIPOC youth serving organizations to have a safe space where we can strategize and build community, build relationships with one another."

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"We thought it's very important for us to make a united front and united stand as BIPOC-led organizations, so that we can make the shift and impact we were hoping for. Because for so long, I've seen the way that the systems work - just kind of pushing the needle very little and slowly - sometimes even backwards. So, we felt that as a coalition, or as being part of a strong coalition, that this could be a good fit for us."

"I think that kind of relates back to REC where I am really thankful that we're able to be a part of REC and represent our greater Native community. We have a great responsibility to represent our community that way and then also to be able to work with our neighbors and other organizations to be able to lift everybody up and make a better society as a whole."

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES RESULTING FROM BEING A MEMBER OF REC

Three overlapping categories emerged in response to how REC involvement changed, or not, one's organization:

- *Created strong sense of community*
- *Increased capacity while ensuring greater stability*
- *Increased impact through advocacy and action as a collective.*

CREATING A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Some of the themes associated with a strong sense of community within REC included how there's a sense of family or strong friendships to being "amazing partners". Benefits of creating a strong sense of community included giving and receiving support from fellow REC members, sharing resources and improving services to one's communities. As an example, one person shared how their relationship with another REC member has led to more culturally responsive support for BIPOC youth with disabilities through consulting each other and referring families for services.

Others spoke to the benefits of partnering as a sharing of resources and working from a position of “really trying to work together and learning how to work in unity.” As another interviewee shared,

"To see each other not as competition when receiving money and executing programs, but as partners. Offering each other's programs to our community and sharing that as a resource for them because the more opportunities we provide, the more thriving our community can become."



INCREASED CAPACITY WHILE ENSURING GREATER STABILITY

Participation in REC was also seen as helping one's organization build capacity to **better serve youth of color and their communities**. This included access to more funds and resources to increase staff and ensure greater stability. One interviewee described how REC securing funds was **instrumental in helping their small organization survive** to meet the needs of the community it serves. Other interviewees also pointed to how REC securing COVID relief funds **allowed their organizations to pivot and meet urgent needs exacerbated by the pandemic**. Others spoke to building capacity by learning about coalition building, power sharing, participatory budget and youth engagement strategies. Many of these lessons learned from fellow BIPOC-led organizations were then adapted and applied to one's own organization. In thinking about power sharing practices with youth, one interviewee shared. *"I see a lot of just intention around practicing what it looks like to share power in REC that's just giving me a lot of education and insight into how we could potentially replicate that within our own organization."* The following responses are additional examples of how involvement in REC has changed one's organization by increasing capacity.

"Involvement in REC was how we started doing some more direct service and mutual aid work. Through REC, some of the first funding that we got for COVID response became available. We were able to take a really small program and make it a more robust grocery delivery service. Between the months of March and June of 2020, we made 808 deliveries of groceries to families with just our team. And over 200 volunteers like stepped up to help us."



"The regular funding has made a huge difference for us. This is the largest grant that we've ever gotten, and it's made a big difference in terms of compensating our staff - who are, you know, alumni and young adults from the community - and providing crucial stability to our work. We've been able to utilize that foundation to grow and strengthen so many areas."

"[REC] gives me an opportunity to see how other leaders are leading their organizations. And then I borrow some of their skills and techniques on how to be a better leader. And it has in turn helped shape GEM into this round ball because at first we had little rough edges but now that I'm seeing, oh I don't need to be as involved in this particular area if I had someone underneath me to help me out in this area. So, before REC, I did not have an assistant director. Since REC, I have an assistant director who I now can kind of delegate and pass some of those things off to get him more involved in what we're doing, which frees me up for more time like this, so it definitely has helped changed us in a way that is going to be more sustainable for us in the future."

INCREASED IMPACT THROUGH ADVOCACY AND ACTION AS A COLLECTIVE

In addition to building a sense of community within REC and increasing organizational level capacity, interviewees also spoke to how involvement in REC has **increased their advocacy efforts** often in the form of **collective action**.

Working collectively, for some interviewees, was seen as a more effective means of accomplishing shared goals, such as **disrupting institutional racism** and **effecting system change**. As part of the response, some interviewees named how institutional racism too often contributes to BIPOC-led organizations having to work “*triple hard*” without making any mistakes in order to prove themselves in ways non-BIPOC organizations do not have to do. Others spoke to how involvement in REC has changed their organizational practices by helping them **be at the table of decision-makers advocating for their communities**. Below are examples of other positive changes resulting from REC involvement.



"That was not the case before. so with the Racial Equity Coalition, not only are our youth with disabilities recognized, at the same time our organization is also able to work with many other great nonprofit organizations. And we also benefit from the collective efforts to advocate for additional funding that benefits everybody."

"I feel I am more connected with other BIPOC agencies that I did not know. I only knew a few BIPOC agencies before I joined the REC. It was really eye opening to see that there are so many other agencies, and it gave me the opportunity to learn from them, work with them, and learn about what they do and whom they work with. And learning their different leadership styles. I am more used to working with Asian and Pacific Islanders, and I have not had a chance to work with the East African community, Black community, and Native American community. It has been very new to me, thus it really broadened my horizons, and I think it helped me to learn about other agencies and helped me to learn how to build a coalition such as how we unite, and we do not compete, such as funding to elevate us all. So, it is not like the only API should succeed. I think we all as a group must succeed."



Across many of the interviews, interviewees touched upon all three categories suggesting how **building community** in many cases **led to increased capacity**, which in turn led to **collective action and advocacy**. As an example of how these categories overlap or interact with each other refer to comments that speak to how REC members learn from each other (sense of community) that in turn builds capacity to effectively serve youth which in turn heightens REC members' abilities to collectively advocate for system change. As an example, one interviewee spoke to "REC brothers and sisters" (community building), accessing funding and "learning how the systems work" (capacity building) and being at "the table of important decision makers" (advocacy and action).

Examples where interviews touched upon all three categories include:

"It's just been such an honor to work with our other neighbor organizations that are also serving the greater community. I think that's the thing is that we realize that a lot of us are all really seeking the same thing. And in the same type of things in order to help position our young people to be able to go forth in their lives and creatively seek solutions to their lives and pathways and to be able to lead one day. I think that's just going to become more apparent as we continue to get to learn and know each other as organizations, what kind of work that we're currently doing and finding ways to support each other and shift the power dynamics that have oppressed our communities in the past. The institutional dynamics that have existed, the systemic dynamics that have existed for a long time, I think we're collectively starting to create change in that way. We have a lot of the same common goals that we're fighting for even if we do different things, we're all in the same fight for our children's futures."

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Being involved with REC has been a blessing. It's allowed us to access more funding, more resources. To access amazing partners...[by] being a member of REC, I have been able to learn so much from you know my co-members. I call them my REC brothers and sisters. So, it's really helped us to grow and to learn more about this space. As far as examples, just learning how the systems work and, you know, this was my first time actually even getting in front of any of the council members of King County, you know, meeting major decision makers. So, I think REC really helped bring us to the table of important decision makers and decisions.



ORGANIZATION-LEVEL BENEFITS FROM BEING IN REC

"It's rewarding to work in unity in systems that do not always listen to us, or hear us, or even see us. I'm just happy that I'm able to work with all of you, and with all the organizations and have this chance to make change and to prove that we can do this together and we can work as one and not have infighting, fighting for the same dollars. The 4C Coalition is thankful to have this opportunity to see something I've longed for years. The ability to work together, collectively as organizations serving BIPOC youth and families across King County."

The quote above speaks to the benefits of being a part of REC: power of relationships and collaboration where REC members advocate and organize to collectively uplift "BIPOC youth and families."

POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

A key benefit to participating in REC were the **relationships** with REC members. Interviewees shared how it was extremely helpful **both personally and professionally** to be with other BIPOC leaders who face similar challenges of not being seen / listened to, but who continue to put their ideals into practice. By developing trustworthy relationships, interviewees felt they could push back against competition and infighting and were stronger together. Having the emotional support from REC colleagues was especially helpful to get through the pandemic where there were really hard days.



"Just the ability to connect with folks and have conversations around challenges that we're experiencing as well, as our own organization but with other organizations that are likely experiencing the same thing. So, having those breakout groups and those conversations where we can get to know each other more, but then also support each other in more specific ways even with the young person whose family contracted COVID. I was able to reach out to REC and a few people reached back out, and we're offering support as well. And just to have that community that we can call on when we need folks to show up for our young folks in the way that we would want to show for their young folks. I just feel like that really is getting at the heart of why I originally became involved in social justice as an activist."

"It's resources and it's support with COVID and how it's impacted not only organizations, but personally having hard days just getting that email in our groups from our group, and even buy in from individuals. Just emotional support from executive directors like myself. So just having that social support and emotional support has been amazing."

Several interviewees described REC relationships as being in the company of “real people.” Unlike other coalitions, relationships with REC members felt **genuine and trustworthy**, where money is not used to hold power over someone. Another example of how this coalition “feels” different was not making assumptions about others, trying to hold your beliefs over someone else, and instead, genuinely honoring / valuing differences, that every person has a story / opinion / reasons for why and how they do the work and why coming together collectively is essential to uplifting BIPOC communities.



"Some of the organizations you feel that you belong to them, that's how they make you feel. I remember one time during the rental assistance, there was money left over, and [one person] ... said, who actually can do this job and can give this money to the people very quick? And, like I remember two organizations, including me, we said no we actually up to the limits. We can't do it. And then [another REC member] said, I can do it. And then I remember the same day I think or the following day, everyone voted for [this member] and she got the money and she dispensed it to the people who are supposed to get it... it is not the money, but the way it's done. Feels you are actually part of real, real people."



While most interviewees reflected on the benefits of relationships within REC, others spoke to the benefits of **building relationships with external stakeholders**, such as funders. A benefit of REC is the ability to work together to **engage with funders and others in positions of authority**. As part of this partnering, one REC member spoke of the need to “*shake them out of their comfort zone in a loving way...for the greater good to dismantle systemic oppression.*” Ideally, this will **raise awareness of persistent inequities** and what it takes to “*create a more equitable world to undo historical harm and trauma.*” This member further reflected on the importance of nurturing “*empathy, compassion and understanding*” to “*create a space where everyone is thriving.*” A distinction was made between paternal relationships with those that honor **self-determination and sovereignty**. Aligned with the importance of self-determination, one REC member shared, “*we need to rest in the truth that our communities can generate their own solutions and preserve our culture*” and that “*people in power can ally with resources and other support without overstepping or fixing the community.*”

POWER OF COLLABORATION

"We've been able to work with REC doing those group RFPs, going after money together and resources together as one organization as a collaboration. That is awesome because it takes a lot of stress off of me and my staff. It takes a lot of work away from us having to do all that work. Then when the resources come, the benefit is we are able to sit down as a team and distribute those resources out evenly to the organizations. Then the reporting is made very easy and that's a huge benefit to be able to get resources and not have to do all the legwork on your own and put your staff in the position to doing a bunch of legwork and a whole ton of reporting. It helps us a lot, it gave us more capacity."

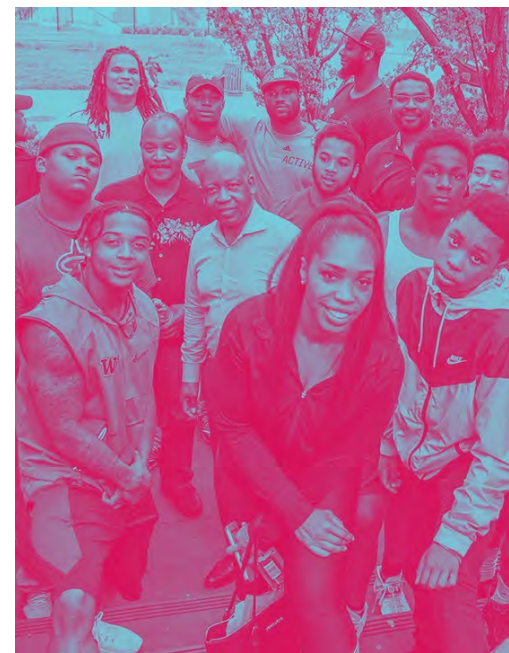


A main benefit of collaboration was the ability to **collectively secure funds** to fulfill REC's purpose of uplifting BIPOC youth and communities. REC processes were described as leading to **equitable resource sharing**, not taking what you don't need and / or recognizing where someone else has a greater need, and lifting barriers. REC processes were also seen as **honoring the specific way an organization does the work** to ensure resources are accessible to community members.

A collaborative approach to securing grants helped REC members **share the workload** where different organizations took on lead responsibility for grant writing and reporting. As a result of collectively securing COVID relief funds, several interviewees reflected on the number of families they were able to assist with rent and food. **The impact was significant**, with several interviewees speaking to the risks if REC had not secured relief funding. As part of these reflections, some interviewees spoke to the **importance of providing BIPOC-led organizations funding** due to their **deep connections** with the communities they serve and the ability to **effectively distribute funds** to BIPOC communities that are struggling with disparities exacerbated by COVID. As discussed in the challenges faced by REC section, a recurring challenge is systemic barriers that impede BIPOC-led organizations receiving funds where money instead is funneled more towards white mainstream organizations.

"To be honest it horrifies me to think what could have happened if it hadn't been for REC. With funding that we received, we were able to support and give struggling families basic rental assistance, food, and at times utilities."

"It's a frightening thing to think if 4C had not been a part of REC and were not able to help the many families we supported. We helped over 300 families between rental assistance, food, utilities, and we're still doing it."



Collaboration furthermore **combats** the “NPIC [non-profit industrial complex]-fueled isolation between BIPOC organizations created by a competitive philanthropic culture.” As this REC member further reflected “coalitioning is resistant to white supremacy culture that pits communities of color against each other.”



Other identified benefits of collaborating with REC members included **skill-sharing** and **increased network of trustworthy organizations to support BIPOC youth**.

Several interviewees described benefiting from sharing skills in the form of knowledge, information, resources and support. For example, REC members learned from each other about advocacy and organizing work, data collection, as well as getting government funding and negotiating contracts. Other interviewees described benefiting from the **mentorship** of other BIPOC Executive Directors and learning new strategies to support their work.

"The opportunity to listen and be in a group of professionals and leaders while practicing ideals that are helping each of us individually as well as collectively, it's been gratifying and an honor. Some of the REC BIPOC organizations I was not familiar. I've had an opportunity to learn more about organizations that have been in our community that I had no idea existed. It's a pleasure to work with a multitude of people that are doing incredible work."

In terms of building supportive networks, several interviewees shared that if they did not offer a particular service, they would feel comfortable referring community members to another REC organization. This comfort stems from **trusting** that other REC organizations would take care of youth / community members in the same manner they would. An example of this was rental assistance. Some REC organizations opted not to do this and were able to refer community members to another REC organization for support and assistance.

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We didn't do any of the [COVID relief] rental assistance, and knowing that other organizations in REC already do that we prefer to instead refer to those organizations that was already their area of expertise. REC has also brought us a network of other providers that we can refer our youth and families to if they're in need of those services that REC members provide that we don't currently provide. Another benefit of sharing a lot of strategy in terms of feedback for funders that we've delivered collectively, hearing about the work that each other is doing, and feeling more connected and able to make effective referrals and that feels important.

Overall, it was felt being a part of REC provided organizations **opportunities to better serve their communities** while building their own capacity as a BIPOC led organization. For example, by being a REC member, some interviewees commented that they **learned about and secured new funding sources**. Increased funding provided the capacity to **hire more staff** to meet the growing needs communities faced during COVID. Collaboration also served as a learning opportunity for all REC members to be able to work with organizations **cross-culturally**, Black, Immigrant, Latinx, Indigenous, Pacific Islander and Asian.



SYSTEMS CHANGE

A final benefit was advocacy and organizing for **systems change**. The collective voices of REC created a **united movement that led to a bigger impact**. There was power in having 14 organizations sharing strategies and all saying the same thing, and helping funders to understand community perspectives.

Organizing together, REC was able to push funders to act differently and **challenged the status quo of how philanthropy operates**. For example, feedback was provided to a foundation based on their de-incentivizing coalitions by providing more funds when organizations applied **individually vs. collectively**. In other examples, REC successfully advocated for changes within existing structures, including how **COVID relief funds were dispensed**. More specifically, due to REC's success in dispensing COVID rental assistance, King County adopted REC's "hub and spoke" model in the next round of COVID relief funds.

"And of course, just strengthening our message, having a united movement. Just creating that solid and unified message has been a great benefit to us. We're not just this small little Educating with Purpose foundation. We are REC. We're coming out. We're REC-ing systems and shaking it up. So, I think just a bigger impact."

"Another really important function that we serve is being able to find funding and resources that can benefit all of our communities. REC acts as a conduit as well. I think that's one of the beautiful things about REC is because we all have that community mindedness and coming from places of cultural backgrounds. We're all pulling together to kind of help each other and advocate for each other and I think that's really huge instead of organizations being out there on their own."

ORGANIZATION LEVEL CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH BEING IN REC

Primary challenges identified by interviewees centered around:

- Time commitment and capacity
- Reliance on virtual meetings due to COVID
- Funder related challenges
- No challenges

TIME COMMITMENT & CAPACITY

The overarching challenges faced by REC organizations centered on the **time commitment and capacity** to attend meetings and complete other REC tasks such as reading through extensive emails or finalizing documents. As with all nonprofits, the reality is that there is **too much work and not enough time or resources**. It was felt **funding for a full-time FTE was needed** to engage in REC related tasks. While funders are often willing to pay for programs, **insufficient or no funds are offered** for additional staffing needs required for partnerships. Several interviewees pointed to how **time constraints can impede building relationships** and learning about each other's organizations.

These constraints can also contribute to feeling **overwhelmed** and **prevent people taking on leadership** or other roles within REC. This was seen at times to be a result of **staffing capacity** as well as balancing REC requirements with both **personal and programmatic needs**. Several interviewees also spoke about how they need to **balance** their work and REC requirements, as well as their various roles in the community, such as serving on boards, councils or committees and working a second job to make ends meet.

"It is capacity to do it, because we are short staffed, so it is sometimes a challenge to be fully present in the meetings. I will admit I will be multitasking, because I got another thing to do. Another challenge is for me to catch up on emails! I take time to process reading and also responding to emails, and REC sends a lot of emails. I just get overwhelmed a lot because of that, and that then leads me to missing an important email or replying to someone etc."

Several interviewees spoke explicitly about the **additional or unique challenges** faced by **smaller organizations with fewer staff**. This can be particularly challenging when **Executive Directors** fulfill multiple roles.

"It's very challenging for a small organization -- all the meetings, the long meetings, and the long emails. It's a lot to handle for a small organization. I think that has been very challenging. Other organizations have 50 employees, and they can send people. Here, we are very few, and we have our programs, so it's a challenge. I think it depends on the size of the organization. Sometimes, I feel that I cannot do it, or it's difficult because yes, of course I want to be there, but you have many other things to do."





"Big organizations they have a system, they have other people that work for, if you're a director if you're a manager. But for us here we're everything, the manager, we're the director or the housekeeper, everything. So, I think that's just the challenge for me. So, it's not a bad thing, it's just like finding the time to actually participate in everything."

Several interviewees recognized the challenges faced by smaller organizations and spoke to their desire and commitment to **support smaller organizations as they build their capacity**. Or as one interviewee shared,

"I have a real heart for our smaller organizations that are part of REC and helping them to find ways that they can build their capacity or have enough bandwidth to do what they need to do and still stay engaged with REC."

Several interviewees also described feeling **overwhelmed**, and at times, **guilty** due to not being able to do more given the **competing demands on their time and lack of capacity**. Or as one person shared, "sometimes, it won't feel good that other people is doing more than I do because I don't have the capacity." Another interviewee shared,



"My number one challenge is lack of time to fully participate, and I've been feeling really guilty when I have to cut short or I can't attend REC meeting. After every meeting, there's a follow up work to do, and I do not have time sometimes for the follow up."

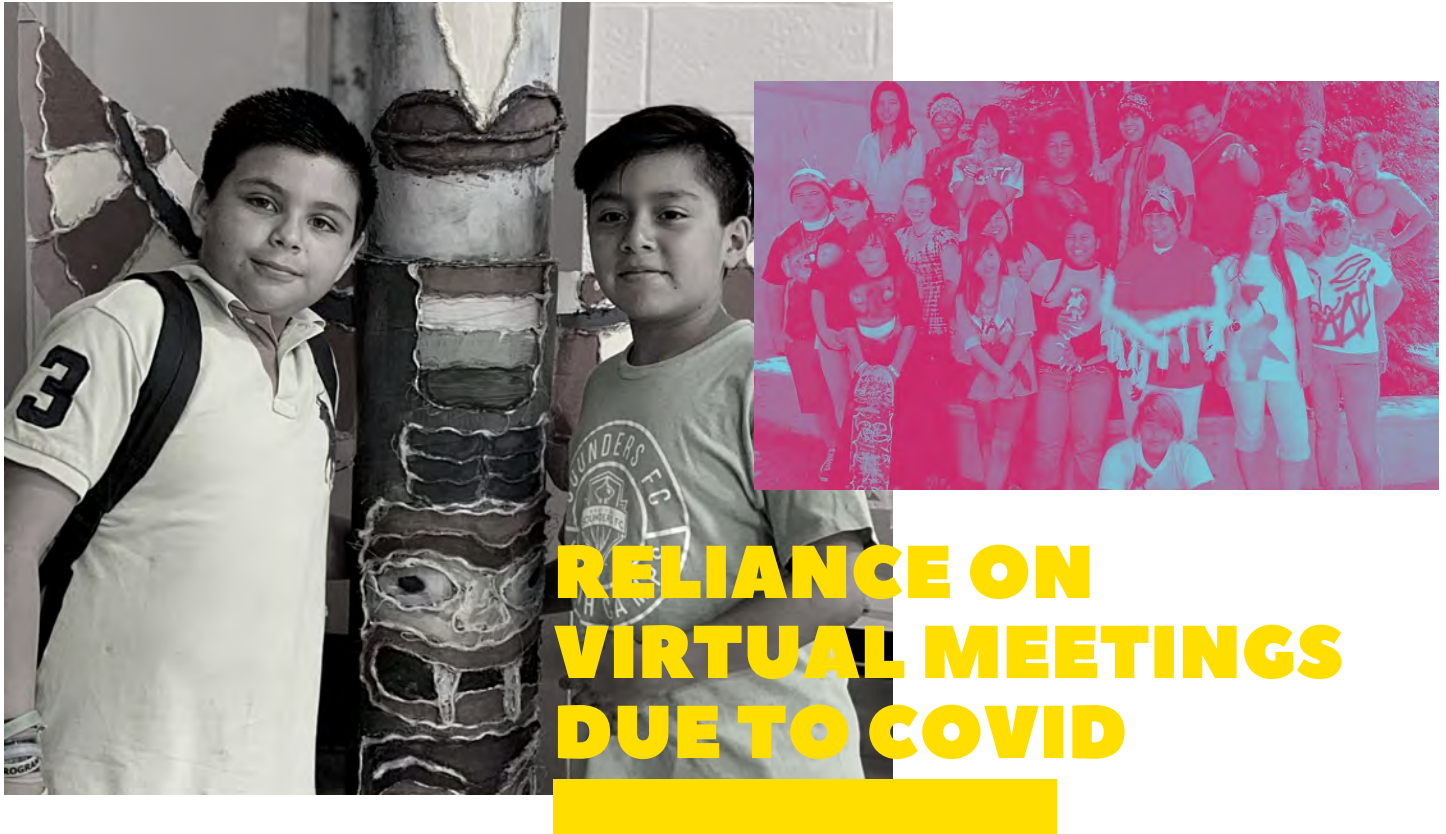
Others spoke to the time commitment challenge, while also **acknowledging how the work is necessary** in order to **be intentional, build a strong coalition, achieve REC's goals, and ensure processes align** with REC commitments and priorities.

"There's really no negative reason or impact as a result of being in REC, it's just that it does take a lot of time commitment to build that intentional relationship and it's something that I'm really happy and honored to be part of."

"It is a significant amount of time to invest in building these relationships which I agree is really important to center that process of building trust so that this coalition can be more sustainable and successful long term."

Part of this intentionality requires recognizing and honoring how REC members come from **different cultural backgrounds** and can have **different ways of learning and leading**. REC has worked towards ways to tap into and acknowledge each member's **different skill sets, preferences, and comfort levels** in order to foster **equitable engagement** that happens in ways that make sense for each person.





RELIANCE ON VIRTUAL MEETINGS DUE TO COVID

Another identified challenge included navigating digital connections including challenges associated with building relationships and finding one's voice in a **virtual world**. Pre-COVID, REC meetings occurred in-person. These gatherings took place onsite at different REC members' organizations and people met while sharing food with each other. COVID created obstacles to this **intentional relationship building efforts**. While for some interviewees virtual meetings pose challenges, others spoke to how Zoom calls reduce time commitments by eliminating travel time.

"The meetings can be hard. And I don't know what it would be like in person, but Zoom exacerbates the challenges. It's harder to build relationships, harder to see everybody in the room. And as a smaller and newer organization, and a director with less experience, it's hard to figure out speaking up at meetings. I'm constantly struggling with that. I also know that as an introvert I do better in small groups and one-on-one so I've tried to volunteer for outside of meeting tasks and projects so I can get more connected to people and contribute to the group in a different way. And that's been really good."

"I would say, at the beginning, it was all about timing. In terms of being available, having that capacity to come to the meetings, this was when we were actually meeting physically in person. So, when you're leaving the office for a one o'clock meeting, and if it's in Seattle, I have to leave here by 12, which means now it takes away from me being in the building. And at that point, I didn't have an Assistant Director, so it was like me just putting too much on my plate at one time."

FUNDER RELATED CHALLENGES

Two challenges related to funding emerged.

The first challenge related to funders was **de-incentivizing collaboration**. Applying collectively as a coalition led to less resources for each organization, forcing organizations into the **white dominant structure of individuality and competition** for funds.

Secondly, a challenge described was a **lack of unrestricted funding** to pay for operational expenses that support programs. More specifically, several interviewees noted that some of the REC organizations could not be a part of **collective applications**, because the funds were not enough to fully cover expenses related to the new or additional body of work. Due to strict funding requirements and rules, some interviewees also spoke of how they could not appropriately compensate staff in order to ensure adequate resources went to support the communities they serve.



NO CHALLENGES

Others either identified no challenges resulting from being in REC, or described how REC has **helped address capacity concerns** by providing funds to hire additional staff. Or as one person shared, *“In some ways REC brought more opportunities than we are even able to handle in terms of multiple new funding sources that we’re able to apply for together.”*





REC IMPACT

Part three of the interview focused on the **impact of REC** including:

- *What are key accomplishments of REC?*
- *How do you know REC has met the needs of the communities it serves?*
- *What are challenges that REC has faced in meeting the needs of the community it serves?*
- *What has happened to foster, or not, trust amongst REC?*
- *How has REC addressed and adapted to community needs due to COVID-19?*
- *What are 3 words to describe the relationship between REC and UWKC?*

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF REC

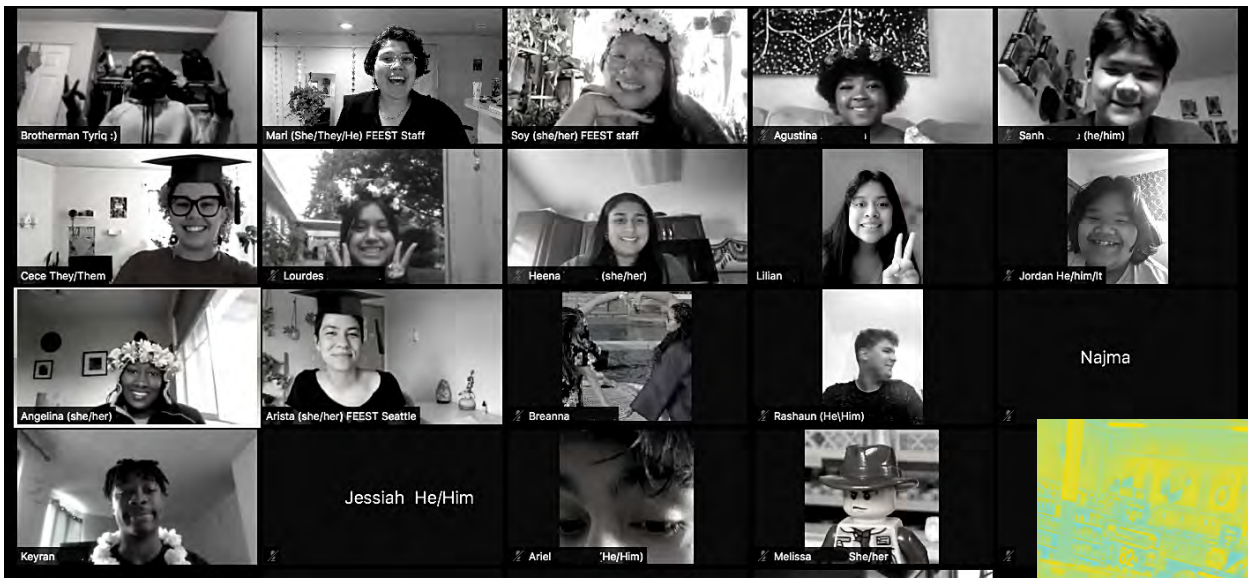
Four major accomplishments achieved by REC included were:

- **Advocating for and securing PSTAA funding**
- **Forming the Racial Equity Coalition**
- **Securing and dispersing COVID relief funding**
- **Building relationships**

ADVOCATING AND SECURING PSTAA ADVOCACY

Advocating for and obtaining PSTAA funding was identified as a major victory. This included mobilizing the community for repeat hearings, preparing PSTAA advocacy signs together and tapping into connections both within UWKC and externally to promote **Love & Liberation**. REC leveraged UWKC support, for example, to schedule meetings with council members and to alert REC when council members would vote on funding matters. Interviewees recognized that REC and BIPOC communities likely would have received funding if not for REC raising awareness and advocacy efforts. The win added **legitimacy** to REC and the coalition, and helped raise the visibility of REC and the need for BIPOC led initiatives. This in turn led to additional funding opportunities.

"One key accomplishment was the advocacy around the PSTAA funding. Even though that didn't quite turn out for the dollar amount we were asking for, I think we got what we got because of our advocacy and coming together. I kind of felt like if we weren't there together in unison and doing that level of advocacy with the county, we might have hardly got anything for our communities. I definitely think it had an impact. It made us more visible banding together and coming together at that county level."



"The Love & Liberation advocacy, even though I came in kind of on the tail end of that, just everything that I've heard about the work that was done from the beginning to being able to like now have the scope of work actually be the fruits of everyone's labor. I think that that's just really inspirational and something that can also potentially be a teaching tool for other coalitions, other organizations, especially organizations that are working with or in partnership with funders."



FORMING THE RACIAL EQUITY COALITION

The **formation of the coalition** itself was recognized as a major accomplishment particularly in the middle of a pandemic. As a result of BIPOC organizations being **underfunded**, several interviewees spoke of how such organizations never have enough time to serve their communities' needs. This becomes increasingly challenging when

Executive Directors / leaders fill multiple roles trying to make things work for their organization and community. Another internal accomplishment identified included building processes for REC members to strengthen relationships through such activities as the River of Life and organizational spotlights at each of the REC meetings. Interviewees spoke to how these and other efforts helped REC to develop its **mission, vision, values, and decision-making processes**.



"The coordination and the collaboration and the sharing of work that it takes to lead this coalition should not go unnoticed because this is a deeply intentional process and that takes a lot of time and energy and the fact that we have 14-15 organizations that are willing to move in alignment on something is like really actually something remarkable that just doesn't always happen often or sustain for long periods of time. So, there's clearly something special and intentional and powerful about the way that this coalition has been structured and I think that goes back to how intentional the process has been."

"This kind of goes back to my previous comment about how all of our cups are very full on any given week and how we've still been able to prioritize coming together to see how we can collaborate, work together and advocate for each other with the betterment of all of our communities in mind. It speaks such volumes that we've been able to carve out time and make that work, and we're still very much together. While it feels like we're still at the beginning of all this work together, it feels like we're all still on the same page with each other which is really remarkable."



SECURING AND DISPERSING COVID RELIEF FUNDING

A second funding accomplishment identified was obtaining COVID relief funding from various foundations. Interviewees spoke to the success at determining REC's priorities, shifting resources to communities that needed support most, and distributing money in an equitable way within REC. As an interviewee discussed, this was not about the "oppression Olympics." REC's use of a participatory funding framework and trustworthy relationships amongst REC members allowed for a coordinated rapid response to move resources to where it was needed. Some REC members commented, they pivoted to things they had never done previously, such as food and rental assistance, to help

families in need during the pandemic. Organizations that did not have the ability to provide food or rental assistance themselves were able to turn to other REC organizations to assist their communities, creating a coordinated system of referral and resource sharing. Another accomplishment identified was how REC shared responsibilities

where different organizations took the lead to write grant applications and complete required reporting. Additionally, one organization created a database for COVID fund tracking that other REC members used. Finally, REC members were able to tell and share the stories of impact REC accomplished with the received COVID funds.



"It's really powerful when we do receive money as a collective and we're willing to have conversations every time about what are our priorities, where are the communities with the most need, and how can we distribute money in the most equitable way? And members are willing to shift funding, even away from their own organizations to organizations that need more support in the context of equity priorities at that time."

"Rental assistance was actually fun and successful. I loved it and when I see the numbers coming in at the end of the program when we finished, I never feel more than happy than I feel that day because it was a short time and we have been achieving that potential of numbers and people who are in need and the stories, if you read some of them, it just makes you cry."

“

Working through COVID together over the last year with the rental assistance funding, the funding from Seattle Foundation and just the ways that we've been able to pull together and find resources and keep our communities going during the pandemic has been nothing short of remarkable. I think that should give us greater confidence for the future, demonstrating what we are able to do together during this a time like this. Whenever things can transition kind of back after COVID times, we demonstrate going forward that we can come together, and keep moving our communities forward with collective work and support.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Relationship building was identified as a key accomplishment, moving from REC members not really knowing one another to bringing people together and building trust. As described by one interviewee, this was easier to do as REC is composed of **all BIPOC organizations** who share the same intrinsic mindset around the importance of relationships and experiences of being left out of decision-making tables. REC was seen as an opportunity to come together to form their own table allowing REC members to learn about each other's organizations, build trust and drive the agenda. Given each organization had different ideas and / or vision, REC was able and willing to quickly adjust or adapt ideas, focusing on what they can



rather than can't do. More specifically, interviewees spoke to REC's ability to share resources, work collectively, support one another and build a caring community. This involved taking the time for everyone to share their opinions and discuss, feeling safe to say things and to disagree.

"Key accomplishments were bringing everybody together and bringing people that didn't even know each other together to work together. Now we've built relationships with each other. I think that's one of the main accomplishments that now we are operating like we've been known each other forever. The support that we give each other has been nothing short of amazing."



"It's a big accomplishment the ways that we've been able to build community, even though a lot of us are still getting to know each other. Even just seeing how people are coming together for other organizations that are experiencing a lot of hardship, you don't always see that in other coalitions. Sometimes a coalition is just focused on the work and that's it. But this is a coalition, I can tell of people who really care about each other."

Other accomplishments related to relationship building focused on the **relationship between REC and funders**. For some interviewees, this could serve as a model for moving beyond a transactional relationship to embedding equity principles. Or as one interviewee reflected, *"I mean there's not too many other collectives like this, at this level that allows the community partners to be at the decision-making table."* Another interviewee shared,

"I would love to see that happening more even outside of REC, and for other funders to realize that working in collaboration with their grantees is really the way to go, and not just seeing them as, oh, well we're just going to give you this money, do these reports, that's it, that's the extent of our relationship. I don't feel like we have a transactional relationship with the United Way. It may have felt that way like years ago, but now with people really being intentional around bringing in real equity principles and embedding those principles into the structure of how we operate as a coalition. I just feel like it's setting a tone for what this work can look like in the future, and how it can be really rooted in equity and not just seeing equity as this is a product that we produce but really having it embodied throughout everything that we do."



Other accomplishments related to relationship building focused on the **relationship between REC and funders**. For some interviewees, this could serve as a model for **moving beyond a transactional relationship to embedding equity principles**. Or as one interviewee reflected, “*I mean there's not too many other collectives like this, at this level that allows the community partners to be at the decision-making table.*” Another interviewee shared,

"REC members have very deep knowledge of the communities they serve. I think they have very strong connections and success in terms of meeting their missions. And that only gets more powerful as we join together and use our collective power to be kind of scaling up what our impact could be."





REC MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITIES SERVED

Interviewees spoke to the **COVID relief assistance they directly provided to their communities** as evidence of meeting community needs. Others pointed to **formal and informal sources of community feedback**, as well acknowledging how REC remains **community centered** by who sits at the table and the **mutual trust** between REC members and between REC and the UWKC staff directly involved with supporting the coalition.

COVID RELIEF FUNDS

Through a competitive funding opportunity, REC secured dollars to provide **COVID relief assistance**. Aligned with the commitment to support each other and the communities served, REC members engaged in a **participatory funding process** to determine how to **equitably distribute funds amongst each other**. As described in the previous section, this entailed allocating funds to the REC organizations who most needed it and were positioned to quickly distribute the relief funds to their respective communities. Need in part accounted for which communities were hardest hit by COVID. Funds were not divided up based upon organization size, with larger organizations receiving a



greater percentage of funding. Interviewees noted how this was accomplished without the barrier of competition that traditionally results when **funders pit nonprofits against one another**. REC members were instead “*willing to shift funding, even away from their own organizations.*” One interviewee commented on how their success would be even greater if funders recognized and supported the **power of participatory funding approaches** instead of disincentivizing coalitions from working together to meet their communities’ needs.

Overall, advocating for and securing funds as a coalition benefited communities, given organizations were not left scrambling and “*chasing money.*” The funds allowed for **direct support in rent and food** among other essential items. Listening to communities’ needs and the abundance of data showing differential / worse COVID impact for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous families, as well as the disability community and other BIPOC communities created **action-packed work and advocacy** to meet community needs that included seeking additional funds to further support communities.

"I look at measuring success in what we do is if we are able to gather and provide resources for our community and we have been doing that and that is when I know it is a success and it doesn't stop there. When we center our community and their needs and we find a way to get that, whether that is approaching a funder, applying for grants, etc. It is an ongoing work and I agree that the system of how grants are where they fund us for only a few years is not sustainable at all because then not only do we do direct service work, we get pulled away from that to always chase money and it is exhausting chasing money."

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Interviewees also pointed to the community feedback they've received and data they've collected as a means of knowing they are meeting community needs. REC members sought community feedback by surveying families, youth, and volunteers. The "gratitude expressed" indicates they are successfully working on community prioritized issues. The dialogues and reflective practice within REC meetings also inform organizations about the coalition and each other's effectiveness.

"I love seeing our results, our data, our numbers that to me shows that we are successful in addressing our BIPOC community needs."

"I mean just by the opportunities for us coming together once again around supporting families through this whole pandemic. Meeting those needs by providing those report backs for the money and the dollars that we spent, like seeing that in terms of pie charts and bar charts and just showing what communities did we serve, how much money did we give out in those communities, in what way did we give out resources was it dollars, was it food, was it support, was it clothing, whatever it may have been. That's when we know we serve the community that we intend to serve by listening and then putting it into action."

WHO IS AT THE TABLE

Other signs of success that several interviewees noted pertained to **who is at the table making decisions**. These interviewees acknowledged their long-standing connection with the communities they serve and that they are part of the community. This **deep connection** was seen as **central to earning community trust**. Others commented on the **collective power** of being part of a coalition composed of **all BIPOC leaders**. Or as one interviewee reflected, being in a space rarely made of “*brown black and indigenous brothers and sisters*.” This has helped REC hone in and center community with **storytelling** and **culturally responsive practices**. Being of the community and in community with each other drives REC’s work.



"Because the organizations in REC are the community and they served the community before they came into REC, I know that the people are getting served. ...They were serving the community a long time ago, they've been serving the community. So, it's not like there's these new organizations that came out of nowhere to all of a sudden started doing the work. This is what they've been doing. I feel wholeheartedly that we've been successful at serving the community just because of people that are at the table."

"I look at my Zoom meetings, and I see all of us brown and black and indigenous and native brothers and sisters on my screen. That is the first evidence that one, we're of the community. We are the community. So that's shown me that it is possible for us to come together in one room and work amazingly together and not be the minority. I've been in many meetings and have been the only BIPOC person sitting there. So just in that seeing how much we represent our communities by being BIPOC ourselves. ...it's the first sign to know that we are knowledgeable, first, and that we can connect and relate. Some people might say oh maybe, you know that's an assumption. No, it's the reality. You have a Samoan kid sit in front of a Samoan person who they'd relate more to. But of white teachers, you know, we constantly hear from our students themselves things like they didn't even hear me. They didn't even understand what I was talking about. They didn't even recognize, acknowledge me as a student. I was already a color to them."

The relationship and trust between REC and UWKC staff who work with REC directly for some interviewees was integral to REC's ability to meet community needs. Some REC members stated that the trust UWKC staff (whose racial identity, skills and external relationships reflected community experience and values) has held towards them has decreased barriers that are often set when funders require extensive data and proof of grantee's effectiveness. These staff's trust supports REC's collaborative, community centered approach. Centering relationships and relationship building between REC members and these staff is seen as a welcomed variation of traditional grantor/grantee relationships.

"A good part about REC is that it's thoughtful about the data collection burden on people and organizations, and so it's not constantly asking us to prove impact like other funders. This approach of deep trust, that we trust each organization to know what needs to happen and that they are doing the best that they can for their communities."

CHALLENGES REC HAS FACED IN MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY IT SERVES

Two overarching themes emerged in response to the question of what challenges has REC faced in meeting the needs of the communities served. This included challenges in facing and **resisting white dominant culture** as well as **navigating internal REC challenges**. Interviewees both named challenges as well as identified recommendations to address these challenges.



FACING AND RESISTING WHITE DOMINANT CULTURE

Many of the challenges referenced issues stemming from white dominant culture that **imposes white, mainstream values and practices universally**, while **marginalizing BIPOC values and practices**. This included reflections touching upon:

- **Racist structural and systemic forces such as discriminatory and racist practices and the resulting trauma this can create**
- **Historical and ongoing challenges that result in persistent inequities impacting BIPOC communities**

The primary challenges of white dominant culture discussed by interviewees centered on the **impact of COVID and experiences with funders**.



COVID

Interviewees recognized **COVID** did not create, but **reinforced long-standing inequities**, forcing more people to face **persistent disparities experienced in BIPOC communities**. This included reflections on the implications of policies that shape practices and affect the **short- and long-term physical and mental health** of BIPOC individuals and communities.



"COVID and the pandemic have added another layer of difficulty. The pandemic has been dire. Discriminatory practices still exist and have been here generations after generation. These practices have kept black people, and other people of color, disproportionately in the higher numbers of people living in poverty. The food insecurity and the need for rental assistance persists."

"There's a host of other consequences that have come out of COVID. There's depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and other debilitating conditions that have come out of COVID for families and we're still living through this. We need to realize that post-traumatic stress is going to come out of this. We don't know what's going to happen after the pandemic has passed. Young people not in school, not with their friends are dealing with depression. Racism has also contributed to this ugliness and physical distress."



FUNDING AND FUNDERS

Many of the funding reflections were framed in terms of the **challenges** associated with **navigating and dismantling white dominant frameworks**. Cutting across many of these challenges was BIPOC-led

organizations having to **expend energy to raise awareness and educate funders**, or finding themselves either engaging in work to **transform funding approaches** or having to **adapt their own approaches to fit**



fundings' requirements. This output of energy generally happens within **transactional versus transformational relationships**, resulting in processes that are **not culturally responsive or meaningful**. While REC has engaged in funder education, too often the requirements remain in place that speaks to the **rigidity** of processes that remain **closed to community wisdom and experiences** that results in more of a one-sided relationship. Instead of demonstrating **reciprocity and openness** to community wisdom, funders offer technical and other assistance to organizations **to fit into their white dominant approaches** including data collection and management.

"I would say having to deal with systems that are still operating in kind of this white supremacist capitalist framework is really, really challenging ... I was definitely conflicted around how much labor we were putting into educating [funders], and how I didn't feel like that was really being reciprocated."

Funding-related challenges

result at times in missed opportunities due to **cultural and linguistic barriers**, or successfully securing grants that then cause **misalignment between the values and practices of BIPOC-led organizations with white dominant culture requirements** that undermine BIPOC led organizations' abilities to effectively connect and support BIPOC youth and communities. As one REC member pointed out, this creates a “burden of code-switching” and “a massive drain on resources.” Examples provided included **rigid reporting requirements**, non-community driven **definitions** of program

success, and imposition of traditional metrics that are **not relevant or culturally responsive**.

In addition to identifying challenges, interviewees offered **recommendations** for funders to enhance the responsive funding practices. These included:

1) Funders incentivize collaboration

- One interviewee shared an experience where a funder awarded **less money** to REC as a coalition than what would have been awarded if organizations applied individually. By awarding insufficient funds to a coalition, **funders foster competition over collaboration**. Implications of competition can **undermine the power of coalitions**, and as one interviewee indicated **increase risk of burnout**.

“

COVID and the pandemic have added another layer of difficulty. The pandemic has been dire. Discriminatory practices still exist and have been here generations after generation. These practices have kept black people, and other people of color, disproportionately in the higher numbers of people living in poverty. The food insecurity and the need for rental assistance persists.





"Especially in the nonprofit world where we are all set up to compete, with high turnover rates and burn out, and of course facing the trauma of what's happening in our communities and families because of racism, COVID-19, gentrification, etc."





2) Funders listen to communities

to create more holistic and culturally responsive definitions of success and measurement strategies that are aligned with BIPOC led organizations' practices and values. Community driven measurement strategies will help resist traditional measures center white Eurocentric values that are not inclusive of what success means for BIPOC youth.

"I am happy that we're part of an organization together where we're willing to have those difficult conversations and we're willing to try to push back around these systems and funders that maybe have a more narrow sense of what success looks like and that we're actively trying to broaden that scope, but it's not always easy to do."

"We are very aligned in terms of seeing youth and families more holistically and using more progressive and holistic measurements. For example, we do not only define our success by graduation rates somehow being the total sum of success of an organization when we know that there are so many other ways that we impact young people that you can't always measure that quantitatively. The impacts that we have individually and collectively are lasting and can continue to be seen over time even well after we're done working with the young people that we work with because we're building long term life skills... I think that we've experienced challenges when we engage with more traditional institutions that have a more traditional way of understanding what success looks like that has historically been driven by more things like grades and graduation rates and doesn't take into consideration all the complexities that young people are also facing or the ways that their leadership shows up differently."

3) Funders and grantees arrive at a mutually agreed upon approach

that **centers community priorities and values**, versus having a one-size-fits-all approach. Imposition of requirements that are misaligned with BIPOC-led organization's values and approaches can result in extra labor for these organizations to either push back or adapt their processes to meet funder requirements, or worse, create harm in communities. As an example, youth may disconnect if asked for sensitive information required by funders (*i.e., foster care or juvenile justice involvement*).

"I think that's our challenge is some of this funding, and some of the grants that or whatever money we're getting is that they have a standard that they don't want to bend, but not understanding the cultural aspect of it. And then we have to work so hard to tell them that hey this is how we are, this is how our community works and still have to prove them. So many ways before we can actually get them say to yes when they should just say okay you guys are different. Okay, we'll make sure that we, you know, this money will fit the way you need it, not the way the funding wants you to be."



4) Funders recognize and honor the deep knowledge and ties BIPOC organizations have with their communities

By doing so, the **labor** required to ensure processes are **community driven** and **culturally responsive** would likely decrease and allow BIPOC-led organizations to build upon their **existing connections and trust** with the communities they serve.

"Communities are best served when they're the organizations that serve them are led by and for the people, reflected in those communities and have the deep expertise in those communities."



"So collectively, I don't even know how many years of knowledge that we have but it has to be hundreds, you know. And so, I think that we have been showing up as leaders in really challenging the question of whose knowledge is truly seen as valuable and who you know who has the ability to best serve the communities."



5) Funders resist the tendency that requires BIPOC led organizations to prove capacity more so than white, mainstream organizations

By doing so, funders will demonstrate **trust in** or acknowledgement of **BIPOC-led organizations' knowledge, connection,** and **ability** to meet the communities' needs in a culturally responsive manner.

"REC has been put in positions more than once where we've had to defend what our knowledge is, what our level of expertise is in ways that maybe white led organizations or larger organizations would not have to do, or even be asked. We've had to advocate and make our presence known when we've already all been doing this work respectively for a long time."

"A lot of the funders out there are still questioning what the hell is REC. I mean how long should we prove that we are as important as other mainstream organizations? Why can't we have the same acknowledgement or recognition? Why do we always have to work so hard to prove who we are? "



6) Funders equitably allocate funding to BIPOC led organizations vs. funneling disproportionate dollars to white led organizations

"A lot of resources are available, but not enough of them are being funneled towards BIPOC led organizations or organizations that are directly serving BIPOC communities who are the most impacted by the pandemics. And so, I think that we've had to really go out of our way to advocate for ourselves to actually be the recipients of these funds, especially when so many funders and people are saying that supporting BIPOC organizations is the priority."

"I know intellectually that the majority of philanthropic dollars go to white mainstream organizations compared to what goes to BIPOC-led community organizations but it was a big difference to feel that with the rental assistance money."

7) Funders provide more unrestricted, flexible funding that is multi-year that allows for greater agency for BIPOC led organizations to continue serving their communities.

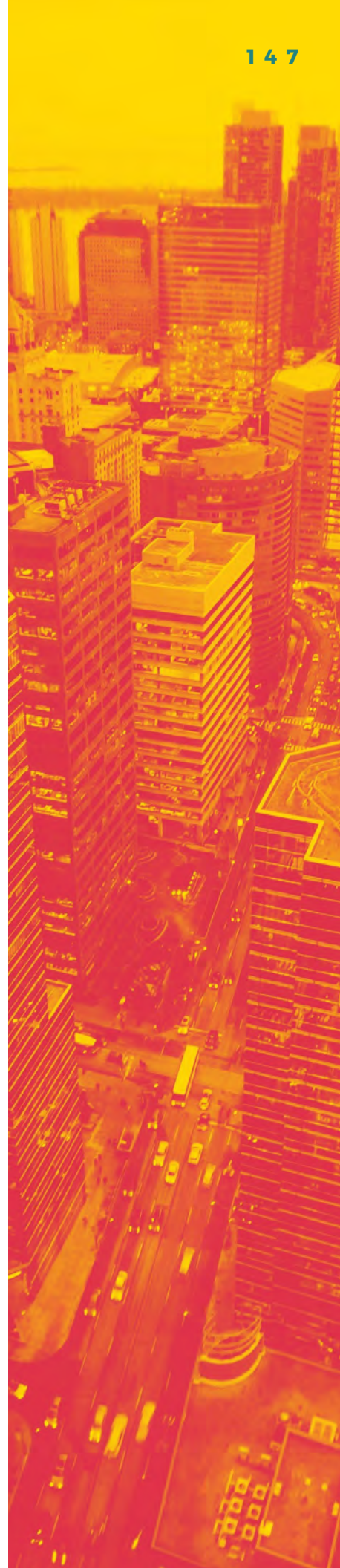
"Unrestricted funding not being as available as we'd like them to be. Because the challenges are not from the community. It's from finding the support and resources that are unrestricted versus restricted."

"I would hope in the future that we're able to be able to exercise more of our agency as a BIPOC-led coalition."

INTERNAL REC CHALLENGES

Interviewees identified **ongoing internal REC challenges**, as well as pointed to instances demonstrating how REC has **successfully navigated challenges** and are working towards actualizing full potential. Identified challenges focused largely on issues of **capacity** that included an **inability to reach every community** that would benefit from REC inclusion and issues of time **particularly for smaller organizations with small staff numbers**. The inability to engage other BIPOC-led organizations was seen as particularly **problematic** due to the frequency of BIPOC-led organizations dissolving as a result of **lack of funding and other resources**. **Honest and full engagement in difficult conversations** that center fairness and equity was seen as one strategy to address these challenges as well as **increased funding to support expansion**. **Continued administrative support** was also mentioned as an anticipatory challenge post-pilot phase.

"There are communities which are left out even within REC. Because I know they have a lot of community of color leaders, and there are different communities throughout the city ... it could be another hundreds of communities which we don't reach out to. So, I think in the future of REC the way I see it is we need to add more people who serve those people if you want to achieve in the end what we are trying to achieve."



"I like the way that everybody is an equal within REC, even though we have some big, big organizations that are in REC, but we also have some of those smaller nonprofit grassroots organizations that are three and four team members strong, but are doing the work of 15 to 20 people. And that speaks volumes to how we lift each other up."

Others spoke to the challenge of reaching REC's full potential, at times tying this to the need to ensure members fully participate with honesty and transparency, and to further coalesce around a unified plan to meet REC priorities and vision. As one interviewee shared,

"People come with their different skill sets and their different experiences, and their different beliefs and so to align all of that so that the coalition is really unison and really strong and independent, and has influence and is a powerful organization where when they show up or speak up, people listen and take notice. The challenge is are we going to get there, how are we going to get there, and what's it going to take to get there?"

Even in the face of difficult conversations, an interviewee shared evidence of how REC has successfully navigated such challenges.

"We had to have a difficult conversation, especially about the money. Like how to divide the funding, which community has bigger need, should bigger agencies get more money, or should smaller agencies get more money? Fairness, equity, and other conversation happened. These conversations happened earlier when we were talking about the rental assistance. And I thought that was the first sort of challenge that REC had faced."



FOSTERING TRUST AMONGST REC

Interviewees spoke to how **fostering trust** is a process that takes time benefitting from opportunities to **build relationships**, having a responsive relationship with UWKC and achieving positive outcomes from REC's collective action and advocacy efforts. For some this process was aided by REC members coming together with a common goal of improving youth outcomes and enacting system change. Interviewees identified other factors contributing to building trust as well as identified ongoing steps needed to further strengthen trust.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO TRUST

Interviewees identified critical factors that contributed to **building trust**, pointing to the initial REC work that allowed for *“a lot of intentional meeting time spent on developing relationships.”* This time created a **foundation** that contributed to the culture of REC where members show up in a respectful and mindful manner by being **authentic, responsive,**

and **transparent**. As one person shared, at times this requires people to be **vulnerable** and to listen to each other and different perspectives. Through these commitments to each other and to REC, interviewees spoke to the building of **strong relationships** amongst REC both on the personal and professional level. Several people, for example, spoke to new **friendships**, sense of **familial connection**, and **beneficial mentors**. One person also shared how trust allows them to **confidently make referrals** to other REC organizations, knowing they will provide culturally relevant services. As this person reflected, *"I wouldn't refer to just anyone. It's about trust."* REC relationships built on **mutual trust** also aided REC's participatory funding process as organizations who do not offer rental assistance were able to confidently **defer** to other REC members who were better positioned to distribute funds.

"We spent a lot of time talking about who we are as individuals ... it was very beneficial to us that this started when we could still meet in person. We were actually sitting next to each other, sharing food, talking and catching up outside of the actual meeting space and really developing friendships. I didn't know any of these people before I joined REC. And so, I feel like I gained like more than 15 new friends and mentors and people who are like willing to support me."



The **alignment of REC values** and the **support offered from UWKC** was seen as another critical component of fostering trust. In part, this entailed ensuring a **community driven approach** versus a rigid, hierarchical approach between funders and grantees. As one person shared,

“

United Way was open to making that space and taking the conversation with King County off of our plate and putting that into another meeting agenda, like that kind of responsiveness and not being rigid about we have to stick to this agenda and we have to get these things done because that's the way it's always been done. I haven't felt that rigidity. I felt actually a lot more flexibility and I know it can't be easy to always be that flexible, but I've definitely noticed that there's been effort to create space for us to focus on the things that are really most meaningful to us.



Several interviewees also named UWKC staff and how their approach fostered trust through “*deep transparency and care*” as well as a willingness to **spend the time supporting REC** and serving as a **liaison and advocate**.

The **positive outcomes** of early REC advocacy efforts were also considered a contributing factor to fostering trust. Several interviewees mentioned REC’s successes in **securing PSTAA dollars** as well as securing and **distributing COVID relief resources directly to their communities**. These efforts were done **collaboratively**.

"The whole process over that year of advocacy around the PSTAA funding to when we got to the final verdict on that was formative. More than anything, it wasn't even all about just the amount of money we eventually got, but it was about that process of coming together and advocating together and getting behind what became Love & Liberation collectively. To me that's really the most important thing. Aside from however much money they said we could or couldn't get, you know, it was really the process of coming together and getting to know each other that way and then, obviously, that leading to Love & Liberation."



NEXT STEPS

While many celebrated the strength of relationships, others noted that more work is needed to “dive deeper.” For some, COVID restrictions **upended the relationship building process** when REC no longer was able to meet in-person hosted at different REC organizations. COVID further caused the need to focus on pressing community needs.



"We need to also take time to build our foundation and REC identity by formulating mission, vision, and values. We tried doing this pre COVID but when COVID hit, so many needs were popping up and so we had to act to bring resources to our community. I think part of the feeling of not trusting each other is because we haven't really dive deep into relationship building. We always say we should but work is always the priority."

An identified next step to foster trust was **continued work on addressing power dynamics** both within REC as well as between REC and funders. Challenging internal REC dynamics were primarily attributed to **differences in REC organizations size and overall capacity**. For some, a commitment to inclusion has lessened these power dynamics, while others shared lingering feelings of guilt for not being able to help as much as some of their fellow REC members. Others believed **continued internal work** must happen to eliminate such power dynamics. As part of this internal work, one person spoke to the need for people to continue showing up and being engaged in the process. To strengthen relationships, several people saw the benefit of “*prioritizing getting to know you activities*” that included the **River of Life exercise**, **small group work** during REC meetings, and dedicating time for **organization spotlights**.

"To work through our different opinions or thoughts definitely will take more time. Each member needs to commit time to attend meetings, so whenever there is a decision that needs to be made, all voices are valued and heard. That's one way we can continue fostering trust among us."

"The River of Life was powerful. It was meaningful. Everyone has a story. Everyone has something ... a reason why they are in this industry, in this field. I believe many of us have overcome stuff in our own lives. We've all been willing to speak up, speak out, and to care for one another, to love one another, be liberated and share openly. The going deep, and looking at strategies and brainstorming, and I think all this has helped us through."



Next steps to increase trust also touched upon **dynamics with external funders and stakeholders**. While the REC-UWKC relationship was considered innovative and something to celebrate, several interviewees spoke to how **other funders tend to apply a typical approach** that is not responsive or community-driven. As one person shared, *“trust looks differently when there hasn't been that sustained shared space.”* Opportunities for REC to further coalesce around a **shared vision** was seen as a strategy to develop more trustworthy relationships with external partners.



"So there's a lot of steps, kind of leading up to that, even in terms of actually talking more deeply about what are our shared values and what does that look like and how do we define racial equity, how do we define social justice, how do we define these things individually but also as a coalition, because we kind of touched on them in different conversations but we haven't really had the time to fully formulate what that is for ourselves as a coalition and so I feel like once we work through those steps, it'll help inform how we work with external partnerships in the future."



REC ADDRESSING AND ADAPTING TO COMMUNITY NEEDS DUE TO COVID-19

Interviewees spoke to the **deep and significant challenges caused by COVID** and how they as organizations and as members of REC adapted and addressed these challenges. As an example, one interviewee reflected on the impact of school closures caused by COVID,

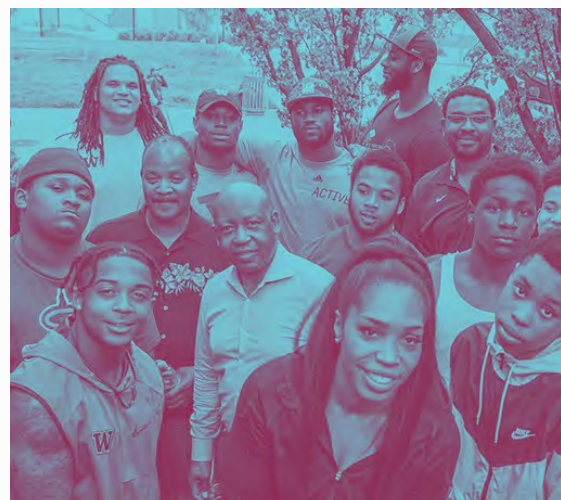
" ... Just imagine what it's like for young people that's out here with no guidance and no hope. They're not in school. COVID comes takes them off the football field, off the track. You don't got no sports, you ain't got no school, you know you ain't got that. What do you got? Well, I got the homies and there's guns everywhere. Who's flooding our communities with guns? Where are all these guns coming from? These kids are buying guns for \$50, machine guns."

COVID also directly impacted REC organizations themselves as they had to meet the needs within their normal programming plus work to provide emergency resources becoming as one interviewee described “superheroes” and “essential workers.” This **required expanding services** to include work they hadn’t done before, requiring the acquisition of new skills to **quickly and effectively meet BIPOC communities in need**. For some of the organizations, COVID also required significant adjustments to standard programming, for example, shifting from in-person gatherings or recruitment efforts to virtual activities.

"I just think that we're all superheroes for the ways that we've continued the work we were already doing while picking up new work and programs and services just all to adapt to be more responsive to the community's needs while still trying to move forward our individual and group agenda. That's just phenomenal. I don't really have another word for it. The passion that everybody has for their communities, the ways that we've all been really willing to like put ourselves on the line. Like all of us were essential workers in my eyes and I always believed that my work was essential, but I didn't know that I would become like an essential worker in the way that it became defined under the context of COVID and we were all doing that."

"Our organization had to make a major shift in our standard programming because our students needed more support than what we normally provide. For example, although we mainly provide direct academic, cultural, social and emotional support for our youth, because of the pandemic, we had to quickly learn how to provide rental aid for their parents/guardians. We are not a housing organization at all. But many of our community members were economically impacted more than our white counterparts because over 80% of our youth had both parents lose wages and jobs during the COVID shutdown. Our community mainly works in the service and labor industries, which were severely impacted in 2020. We just did what we needed to do in order to help our grossly underserved communities. Had we not made this major adjustment, we know that our Pacific Islander communities would be in much worse situations than they could have been in because as a culture, we normally do not reach outside of our own community for assistance or support."

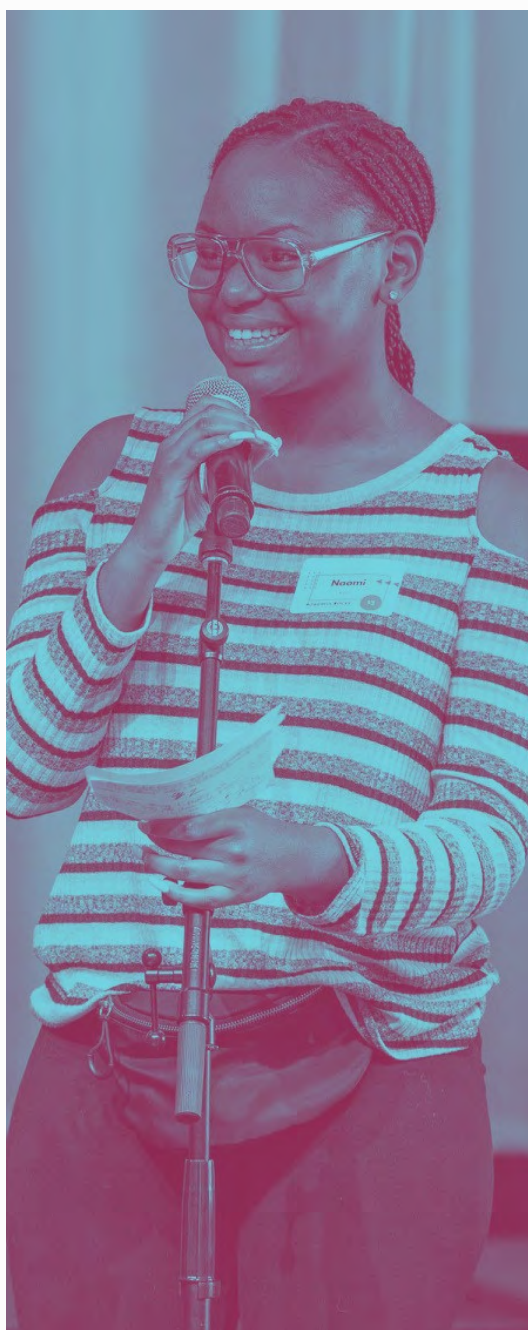
Some REC organizations shared they were not only taking on **new urgent roles**, but also **working with increased numbers of youth and families**. Word of mouth spread information about the support organizations were providing, **filling a gap that governmental sources were not readily addressing**. More specifically, interviewees described how as a coalition, they **secured and quickly distributed rental assistance support to the communities they serve**. For example, REC received **\$750,000 serving 2486 people, 98% who were BIPOC**. Several interviewees noted how these **funds were unique** in that such support was not typically funneled directly to BIPOC-led organizations. The power of REC was noted in **equitably distributing unrestricted funds between the organizations and their communities**. The trust among organizations allowed for this process and also enhanced the trust felt between them.



"It was community organizations like ours that kind of like stepped in in places where there weren't services and there was a lot of scarcity, but with our group there was a lot of abundance and sharing and making sure that if we knew of anybody that had any need that we would figure out how to get it met no matter what. And I was disappointed in a lot of ways by our like larger governmental response, and also like shocked when like large institutions were like calling me, talking about how to feed students."



"COVID has been interesting in that it's highlighted and exacerbated a lot of the existing social inequalities that we had. And it's also been interesting to see just how quickly a lot of barriers could be removed and a lot of emergency money could be made available in the context of this pandemic. So, I think that a lot of resources are available, but not enough of them are being funneled towards BIPOC led organizations or organizations that are directly serving BIPOC communities who are the most impacted by the pandemics."



As a result of facing COVID challenges, REC members began **questioning what policy level and structural changes** need to occur. One recommendation was **increased advocacy to transform funding processes** (please refer to the Future Lessons for Funder section for specific recommendations to transform funding processes). Another suggestion offered by interviewees was REC tackling **root causes** noting that this requires "something greater than paying somebody's rent for a month." Or as another interviewee reflected,

"I'm curious about what advocacy work could have been useful from us in terms of addressing root causes. For example, the rental funds were all going to landlords, but there absolutely was advocacy work that could have been done to support the eviction prevention work, or rent and mortgage freezes, that other cities and local community leaders were advocating for."

While several REC organizations have successfully engaged in **advocacy and organizing for systemic reform and to undo systemic racism**, it was noted that too often, non-profits don't have enough time to address **root causes** given urgent programmatic needs and funder requirements. As touched upon in Section I of this report, interviewees spoke to **long-standing structural inequities** that **disproportionately impact BIPOC communities**. Or as one interviewee shared, *"Katrina no surprise, differential COVID impact was no surprise either, hair has been on fire for awhile."* To address these long-standing inequities, interviewees emphasized how BIPOC-led organizations are **most appropriate** and **know best what works** given their deep connections and understanding of the communities they serve and often belong to. Funders need to trust, **not question BIPOC organizations**, and this may not have happened without urgency of the pandemic.

While COVID relief funding was limited, organizations were able to **connect** one another to resources. For example, an introduction was made to a community member leading efforts to get **COVID testing and vaccinations into BIPOC communities**. Despite limitations, REC never fell short of being **resilient** and benefited from the support from their REC brothers and sisters.



"Moreover, we depended greatly on our fellow REC members to teach us how to provide rental aid and essential needs support. Several REC members taught us how to implement the process, they provided resources for us to create systems to provide the financial support that our communities needed and moral support. It was a major coalition effort to make this temporary and much needed adjustment."

chose certain words. It is therefore important to consider the word cloud and explanations together to fully understand the **intent** of these words and **how they lift up what matters** to a BIPOC coalition – “*work by and for BIPOC*” communities.

One of the more frequently cited word was “*Ruel*”, the UWKC contract manager, who works closely with REC. Some of the **appreciated skills and qualities** shared by interviewees as to why “*Ruel*” is so important to the REC-UWKC relationship included:

- **Progressive and innovative and care centered**
- **Really created a sense of belonging**
- **Understand[s] the work we do, and listen[s] to us so the trust among us was really great**
- **Done such a good job of being transparent, of trying to address power dynamics, of trying to move the needle around racism at United Way, but also offering us access to United Way as a power broker**



As several interviewees pointed out, the described relationship, which is experienced as **transformational and not transactional**, focuses on Ruel and other UWKC staff that **directly and routinely support REC** (*referred to as UWKC staff from hereon in*). As part of this **mutually supportive relationship**, REC supports these UWKC staff so they can be **advocates and champions for REC** both within UWKC and with external stakeholders. This relationship is strengthened by UWKC staff working with each individual REC organization and through bimonthly REC meetings where time is spent determining

processes and practices that center BIPOC priorities. For some interviewees, this level of **care and commitment to BIPOC-led organizations** is not fully experienced across all departments or levels within UWKC where institutionally leadership operates in a more traditional, hierarchical manner.

Trust, the other most frequently cited word, spoke to mutual trust between REC and UWKC staff, how UWKC staff helped create a sense of trust within REC, and appreciation for how UWKC staff expressed trust in REC organizations' abilities to serve their communities. As interviewees shared,

"I feel there's mutual trust and understanding. I don't know any other people at United Way, but the people who I work with, I feel there's mutual trust, and understanding. I'm thinking perhaps because we are all from the BIPOC community. So, there is an unspoken, shared life experiences, even though we may come from different countries or different race and ethnic groups, but we have these shared experiences, and we have a common ground, and a common understanding."

"It has been one of the organizations that see the potential in me. I remember [former UWKC staff], the first time he come to office and we talked. He says I can see that you never had a bigger grant, but ... I'm trusting you now with this grant and I'm gonna give it to you."



"Trust working together bringing high quality organizations together in a creative way and having the support of United Way. They've taken the lead, but also stepping back and saying REC take the lead and do what you have to do leveraging the expertise of United Way. All these things have allowed us to build trust in one another."



Other words were not shared with the same frequency as Ruel and trust, but some of the words appear to be **synonyms**. For example, perhaps other words that could be grouped with “partnership” include “supportive partnership” and “collaboration.”



As part of the explanations for why certain words were chosen, a **theme** emerged focusing on the **uniqueness of the relationship between REC and UWKC staff**, and the desire to see other funders commit to a similar type of “supportive partnership” where funders give up power to ensure “community centeredness and community informed processes.” Examples of reflections that highlight the power of REC and UWKC approach include:

"REC has had success because UWKC is willing to meet us where we are at. Starts with [the contract manager] but also starts with the CEO. To have the support and attention of both and so many folks in-between should not be taken for granted...there is an element of respect and getting things done that UWKC can't get done on their own and we can't get done on our own. So, this is a perfect example of a relationship that really uplifts and elevates the communities that are most difficult to reach. Centering love and compassion and understanding, genuinely listening to each other, which has resulted in trust and that trust is only going to take us further."



As touched upon in the last quote, the power of the REC-UWKC relationship was celebrated in part by contrasting it to the more **traditional funder relationships** that **don't center community wisdom and experiences**, and instead, impose requirements not aligned with BIPOC led organizations' values and practices. Or as one person shared,

"We have really good people within the organization [UWKC] supporting and recognizing ... the work that we're doing in our community and make it fit what we need, and not what they want us to do."

Others spoke to how even within a supportive REC-UWKC relationship challenges can emerge due to **institutional barriers** or "misalignments" that undermine the desire for a "community informed process" that honors and recognizes the **strength of BIPOC-led organizations**. To address these "misalignments" and to demonstrate "equity and inclusivity," one interviewee spoke to the need for **institutional changes where power is shared**. A second interviewee shared,

"At the end of the day we're doing something really novel here and it's very exciting, but we are challenging and uprooting some existing systems that we know haven't been working, but they're still deeply embedded into our large institutions and so we're doing the challenging work of like unrooting some of that uncovering and unrooting, some of those things and so that's never going to be always neat and tidy."

A hope expressed by some of the interviewees is that the power of the REC-UWKC relationship will not only have a positive impact on the communities served, but also will **help guide how UWKC engages BIPOC communities and influences strategic planning**. Or as one interviewee commented, *“and so there is a hope that ... the United Way of King County can really use Racial Equity Coalition as a model on how they can better engage with the BIPOC community organizations that are led by BIPOC leaders.”* Ideally, this would **increase accountability**, and in turn, lessen the need for intensive advocacy for community needs and for community driven processes.



A photograph of two Black women standing at a podium, each holding a microphone and speaking. The woman on the left is wearing a leopard print top and glasses, while the woman on the right is wearing a blazer. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The title 'FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS' is written in large, bold, yellow capital letters across the bottom of the image.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Part four of the interview focused on the **future of REC** including:

- *Having a bigger impact*
- *Critical next steps for REC*
- *Resources needed to support the collective work of REC*
- *Key lessons for community groups*
- *Key lessons for funders*
- *Key lessons for other stakeholder groups*
- *REC elevator pitch*

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REC AND UWKC

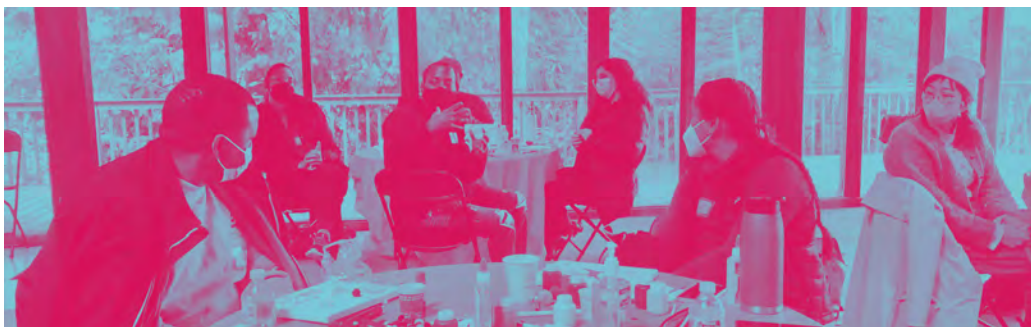
Recommendations to grow REC's impact centered around **solidifying REC processes, expanding membership, documenting REC processes and impact, securing and diversifying funds, and engaging in coordinated advocacy efforts to effect system change.**



SOLIDIFY REC PROCESSES

As part of solidifying REC processes, interviewees spoke of the need to “*build more clarity and consensus around what is our vision and what role we think REC can or should play, over the next five to ten years.*” A further recommendation to increase future impact was “*mapping out priorities*” to “*sort through which funding opportunities we want to go after, what we want to say no to, and what advocacy work we want to push for.*”

An additional benefit from doing this internal work was to provide **clarity and consistency** when new members joined REC or if turnover occurs with UWKC staff. To accomplish this, interviewees pointed to the importance of “*deeper relationship building among coalition members*” and to the need for “*authentic committed participation*” of REC members.



EXPAND REC MEMBERSHIP

A second recommendation was to **expand membership** focusing on engaging other BIPOC led organizations and youth. For some interviewees, expansion of membership requires determining which communities are **not served** by REC and **who is missing at the table**. As one interviewee shared,

"We need to have more organizations coming in. We have to look where we are lacking. We have to look which communities are we not reaching. We have to look what is missing."



Membership expansion also included **engaging youth** to “develop the next generation of BIPOC leaders to carry on our mission and our work.” For some interviewees, developing **youth-centric engagement** requires additional work including rescheduling REC meetings outside of school hours. Identifying youth-centric processes ideally will benefit from REC’s shared “value of youth leadership and the practice of actually putting youth in the front.”

DOCUMENT REC PROCESSES AND IMPACT

Documenting REC’s processes and impact was another recommended step towards increasing REC’s impact. **Evaluating** REC was seen as a

means to identify what is working and what needs to happen next within REC, as well as to **raise awareness** about **the power of coalitions composed of BIPOC-led organizations**. Sharing the REC model potentially will support other communities interested in adapting or adopting **a similar approach** and will **transform funding practices** to become more community-driven and culturally responsive.

"I think as time goes on and even we start to better understand what our strengths and successes are and start to learn from all these things we've gone through together in the last year or so that we'll figure out how to work together even more."



"... this is really important work to share because we're probably one of like few examples in our region, even in the country of something like this happening... this is a model that should be shared in our process and our successes and our challenges are good learning for other organizations, and for other funders to hear."

Documenting REC's impact was also seen as beneficial to securing additional funding by **demonstrating the power of REC**.

SECURE AND DIVERSIFY FUNDING

Numerous interviewees spoke to the importance of **diversifying funding sources** and / or **securing larger funds**. As one interviewee questioned, “how can we maintain [REC], how can we continue, and how can we get more funding so that we can serve more youth in our community?” Others spoke of how REC’s successes ideally will lead to other more BIPOC aligned funding opportunities locally as well as at the federal level. One person spoke in particular to the desire for more “hub and spoke” models of funding:

"Providing opportunities and resources for us to create those hubs that we need. I mean, because just imagine if in each city that REC is serving and we had community hubs that are in partnership with United Way, so resources can be deployed into those communities immediately. Kind of like what we did with the COVID dollars. Like, that will be so transformational of communities and in the players and the powers that be that it could change lives for a long period of time and not just in the immediate need circle, I'm talking about lasting impactful change."

ENGAGE IN COORDINATED ADVOCACY EFFORTS

Advocating and engaging in system change efforts represent the final recommendation shared by several interviewees. Identified benefits or impact of

advocacy included **influencing policymakers, transforming funding practices, and making a difference for BIPOC youth and their communities.**

While some interviewees focused on advocacy happening within REC, others spoke to the importance of **collaborating with other grassroots groups** not directly involved in REC. As one interviewee reflected “we can start collaborating on more policy level, like systems things going on and really connecting with some of the grassroots organizing that's happening around defund the police and things like that.”

"REC could have a bigger impact when we start working together to address not just resources of services for the community but to address the high end, high level, systemic racism. That happens through systems, and through government entities. So I think that we could get to a point where we're literally drafting legislation or pushing for systems to change. And collaborating together to use our influence and our collaborative power, and our collaborative political clout to go and push systems in the direction they need to be pushed for equity."

"We need to have a collective legislative agenda. And if we have those legislative agenda regarding system reform and policy recommendation, then we will be able to send our voices together collectively to make the impact on the policy, and to be able to do that, we actually need to have somebody who is working with us, kind of dedicated time to address the policy issue."



CRITICAL NEXT STEPS FOR REC

Interviewees reflected upon the **critical next steps for REC**. Key themes identified across interviews in no particular order were:

- *become more autonomous*
- *solidify REC foundations*
- *strengthen relationships*
- *advocate*
- *expand REC membership*
- *tell the story of Love & Liberation and REC*

BECOME MORE AUTONOMOUS

Several interviewees spoke about the need for REC to become more autonomous and less reliant about UWKC. The intent was not to sever ties from UWKC, but rather to take on some of the critical steps UWKC staff currently do to support REC including setting agendas and facilitating meetings.

As one person shared,

"Is REC going to grow up, are they going to grow, find their power, their voice, their strengths, their leadership, away from United Way? Now the partnership needs to remain and leaning on United Way to be what, the fiscal holder, whatever term you want to use, in terms of managing the funds/contracts, absolutely, but not running the meeting, showing the meetings, sending the reminders, sending the text reminders, you know, basically, I call it hand holding. No, it's time to cut the cord and let REC flourish on its own, or not."

To better prepare for greater **autonomy**, interviewees spoke about the importance of ongoing work to **strengthen REC's foundations** and ensure a **shared vision and goal**. People pointed to the important foundational work completed early on in REC's development such as determining decision making processes and identifying core values. Additional "internal work", however, was considered a critical next step in part to ensure REC's "longevity" and to move towards **shared understanding and commitment**. Additionally, REC needs to map out "the why, the how, and the timeline" to **becoming more independent**, as well as discuss how to be **accountable** (i.e., what does accountability mean and what does that look like). In essence, REC needs to develop a plan to ensure **policies, practices, and infrastructure** are established to sustain REC.



"Establishing our policies, practices and procedures. I think those are critical, I think, you know, we kind of have moved so quickly that I would like to see us really just kind of get those nuts and bolts tightened, so that we continue to grow our understanding of each other and our trust that we're all going to continue moving in the same direction. Although we are different size sizes and maybe move at different speeds. I think so far the work that we have accomplished is a good start. But in order for us to see longevity, I would like us to focus on those things."



"Continuing to do the relationship building, continuing to do the values and vision work, which I think the REC is part of. Clarifying who we are and what we're about. We keep saying anti-racism but we all have different nuanced understandings of that, and how it shows up, and how we're addressing racism and other systems of oppression in our work. And learning from each other has been so useful. So, we get to continue having those conversations along the way and we'll refine them, and making sure we do all this work on top of a solid foundation of relationships."

STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS

Building a “solid foundation of relationships” represents another critical next step identified by interviewees that focused on **strengthening relationships amongst REC members**. Benefits of stronger relationships included **increased understanding of each other and the work** one does in their communities, as well as **increased trust**. Several people spoke of the value of the in-person REC meetings at the start of the project that were hosted at different REC organizations. For some individuals, the need to meet online due to COVID has hampered relationship building and they look forward to resuming in-person gatherings when it is safe.

"My thinking is like we need to create an environment where we meet each other personally. And just to talk, or maybe come to my office, you know, in a 30-minute coffee or whatever. And then those will build a relationship and we will be in a position where you can decide for me when I'm not there, and I wouldn't have a problem."

"...After this COVID to really see each other personally to really develop better relationships because we see each other by zoom, but it's different when you actually see people and have a chance to hug or understand or learn more about other people by seeing in person."

In addition to strengthening relationships amongst REC members, others spoke to the **value of building relationships with UWKC leadership**. Supportive relationships already exist with **UWKC staff** directly involved with supporting REC. A hope was that stronger relationships with UWKC leadership will lead to **greater awareness about REC** and serve as a means to have a voice in **shaping UWKC policies and practices**. As one person shared,



“

It is about continuing to build relationship among REC members, build relationship with the United Way, and also build relationship with more executive level of United Way. So that we will get the greater support and, we will be able to influence the higher up decision-making level people in terms of advocacy, funding, and policies.

ENGAGE IN ADVOCACY

In addition to building awareness and engaging in advocacy within UWKC, one interviewee also pointed to the need for **increased school-based organizing to effect system change**.

"... Expand our capacity to do even school-based organizing, which is really our jam. We really want to support school-based organizing, especially with young people returning back to in school education. Most of them are not really looking forward to it. And it's not just about them not wanting to go to school but a lot of them are saying they don't feel safe in school, they don't feel supported, they don't feel welcome. And I would love for us to be able to be a space where we can hold that with them and provide them the tools and the resources and the education and the connections to be able to address those things and do it in a way that is on their own terms as well."



EXPAND REC MEMBERSHIP

Another critical next step identified focused on membership including **youth engagement**. Reasons for increasing membership included **ensuring more youth and their communities** are served and providing support for other BIPOC-led organizations. Several interviewees spoke to the importance of REC's "internal work" as a means to guide membership decisions.

"We need to be open to new organizations, and asking for more money so we of course can divide more money between more organizations. Specifically, organizations that are smaller, and that are growing up. And, of course BIPOC communities. I really think is many very small organizations that are very hard to be successful in the job that they do because they need more money and more help."

In looking towards developing a youth advisory board, one person highlighted the need to think through how to engage youth in a meaningful manner. As this person reflected,

"Putting together a plan for how we want to start engaging youth in REC and making it something that's really accessible in terms of when we meet, how we meet, what space do we create for young people to have a voice and take leadership."

TELL THE STORY OF LOVE & LIBERATION AND REC

A final next step identified focused on “writing our own narrative” to **demonstrate short and longer-term successes**, pushing back on metrics imposed upon REC that will not tell the full story. In part, this was seen as a means to **celebrate and raise awareness** regarding REC’s work and impact to a wide range of stakeholders. Part of writing the narrative, as one person suggested, requires **listening to the families served by REC** and **amplifying their stories** to demonstrate to stakeholders how REC has “*impacted individual*



communities, and how it's impacting our city and our county.” Showcasing REC’s work ideally will lead to **increased sources of funding**, which was a need numerous people identified as central to REC continuing to grow and flourish.

"[The] next critical step is really writing our own narrative and getting it out there, and maybe even doing spotlights of organizations like going around doing a little filming and putting together a clip of the organizations that could be broadcasted on all United Way platforms to say hey, this is something that we put together a few years back to challenge the system in ways to reallocate dollars or allocate dollars in ways they hadn't done before. Here are the organizations that we are partnering with. Here's the great work that they're doing. Now go give them more money."

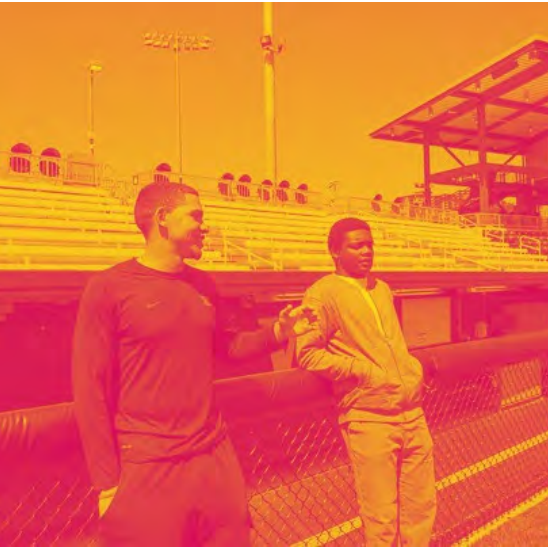


RESOURCES NEEDED TO SUPPORT THE COLLECTIVE WORK OF REC

Resources needed to expand and strengthen REC included **increased funding and staffing** to build capacity, involve youth, and engage in advocacy work.

FUNDING

In addition to diversifying and increasing funding, several interviewees talked about the importance of **connecting with responsive funders** who have **priorities and processes aligned with REC values** versus funders that operate from more of a white supremacist framework characterized in part by rigidly imposing metrics and definitions of success. Others spoke about **multi-year, unrestricted funding** where



mutual trust between grantor and grantee exists. Funding diversification included seeking local, federal and foundation grants, as well as building an independent major donor base.

"Unrestricted funding and trust from our funders, with just creating processes to allow us to show funders how we use the money and how it's being used well to alleviate the problems that we're facing society."

"You always need dollars, but you also need voices of reason, you also need people that's gonna listen, people that can understand. And then you need to be able to tell the story to those high-profile funders, like those foundations, Seattle Foundation, Raikes Foundation or foundations like that who you know has a lot more dollars to play with and are more flexible, so that it helps us continue to live up to the narrative that we write for ourselves."

Sharing resources was another funding-related consideration, similar to what occurred when REC received COVID relief funds. With the relief funds, **REC members reallocated funds** to those REC members able to quickly distribute funds to their communities in need. As the interviewee shared, "we have to check with each other and see which organizations have more time and don't have the resources to do something."



STAFFING

Several **staffing** recommendations emerged including a **dedicated grant writer** and a **policy analyst**. Both of these positions need to center REC voices and values. **Continued administrative support** was also identified as a necessary resource, raising the question of what this may look like once UWKC stops fulfilling this role. One interviewee also suggested continued support around “*evaluation and story-telling of the REC as a whole.*”

"If we're gonna stay with the model where United Way is going to be the administrative and the financial support for the Racial Equity Coalition going forward, then I would say we need a note taker and we need an administrator operations person. We need someone to bring us together to set up Zoom."



"We need somebody who can respond really quick to any policy related issues in our community, and who can analyze data ... so we can use REC voices to say it to any policy makers in a systematic way. Currently, REC is in passive mode. We passively respond to any issue that comes up. If we can have policy analyst support to work with us creating policy recommendations regularly, then REC can proactively come together to address what are the major issues we want to see changed, and create documentations, strategic plans and action steps. And we, step by step, address those policy changes or system reform, then we can have much greater impact together."

CAPACITY BUILDING

Many of the capacity related recommendations focused on providing **technical assistance** and **finances for smaller organizations** to ensure they succeed as organizations and as members of REC. Or as one interviewee shared,

"I think just getting more finances out to the teams and maybe even where they're doing some technical assistance for the smaller organizations that don't have a big enough staff to have a director of development or a director of finance or HR person or CEO or Director of programming and director of operations. I think REC needs to get more finances out to the organizations and then also provide technical assistance to make sure that these organizations are successful with the finances in their programs."

Other capacity related reflections spoke to **supporting smaller organizations that are not part of REC** and who struggle with securing funds. As this interviewee shared,

"I would love to see more smaller organizations that maybe don't have the kind of staffing or budgets that a lot of the orgs on REC has. But even fiscally sponsored organizations that are just getting their start, trans-led, queer led organizations that are oftentimes not doing the kind of work that mainstream funders want to pay attention to. I want to see us be a coalition that can provide that platform to really get those kinds of organizations to the level that they need to be to fully sustain themselves. And so that's going to require us to kind of grow, also in our own pedagogy as well."

Another interviewee spoke to building capacity, investing in, and compensating community members who can help **support and sustain programmatic efforts to support youth of color.**



"We're fortunate to get a lot of volunteers, a lot of support in our community. Because I feel like we cannot depend on the government or foundation because at some point that might not be existing anymore. So how do we use our community as a resource?... I think for me it's like more education, more outreach so that the community understand the needs, and how can they become a part of it in the long term. Because I think I look at community as the best investment we can have because it's a long-term thing besides funding."

Capacity building reflections also spoke to the work REC does to build capacity for other stakeholders, including funders. Often, this can be labor intensive and uncompensated. Moving forward, REC should be **compensated** for this additional work. As one interviewee shared,

"I think that it will continue to take a lot of resources to support and sustain this group, let alone like the resources that we're trying to generate to do our individual work. But I do think it's important that this work continue to be, you know, compensated for how much we show up and plan and collaborate and work on metrics and provide advice and support or feedback. I think a lot of people will want to speak to us and already want to speak to us and work with us."



YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Resources are also needed to ensure REC creates a more “youth centric” space to support **youth involvement** in REC and ensure their stories and experiences remain at the heart of how REC functions. In part, this requires funding to compensate youth, but also requires thinking through what is needed to support youth as actively engaged members of REC. As one interviewee shared,



"It's not enough to just invite young people and they're just there without intentional thought to leadership, space, facilitation, timing, etc... Creating a youth centered space and that means making a lot of changes. And so, you know, there should be like support and time to think about what that looks like and compensating those young people for being there. And, you know, that will also just require another investment. It's not enough to just put young people in that space and expect them to be able to participate in something that's like deeply adult centric and not sort of like geared towards them. It's like we have to make it a safe space for them to talk and feel their power and for them to lead and for them to input and like. Adults also need to learn to share and transfer power with youth. Even the current way that we're meeting young people are in school, so like, fundamentally, we're running a system where they can't participate."



ADVOCACY

Identified **advocacy** needs that require resources included engaging school systems to effect change and ongoing joint advocacy work with UWKC to effect change within all levels of UWKC and King County Council. Needed resources for increased advocacy efforts include a dedicated policy analyst as well as other support to ensure REC members have the time and capacity.



"I would like to see us find ways to infiltrate more of our work with the school systems in the area. Since they have our youth so much of the time and our youth have to go through their particular system, it would be great to find people that could be allies within the particular school systems to help advocate for our work, and be able to really partner with CBO's."



KEY LESSONS FOR OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS

"I'm learning more and I'm loving having the opportunity to work with all the other BIPOC REC organizations. We're all continuing to work and continuing to shine the spotlight on the power of unifying and the power of supporting one another as a BIPOC coalition."

Interviewees identified **key lessons for community groups** on whether and **how to adapt or adopt the REC model** to best serve BIPOC communities. These lessons centered around the importance of being **community driven, building relationships** within REC, dedicating time to develop processes and practices **aligned with coalition's values**, actualizing the **power** of BIPOC coalitions, and **securing funds** that provide flexibility that allows REC to accomplish its goals.

Community Group Lesson #1: Create a coalition that is community driven and "rooted in community."

"Coalitions are necessary to do your best work. I would say that making sure that your work is rooted in community and not just rooted in a product, not just rooted in a single campaign, but really is physically in some way rooted in community so that the work that you are doing is constantly driven by the communities that you're serving."

Community Group
Lesson #2: Focus on
relationship building to
“uplift” each other and
recognize that this takes
time to coalesce where
people “support each
other in a way that feels
inclusive, valued and
productive.”



"Before we started REC, we were individuals...Now we have people to talk to. Now if you don't know certain things you have someone to ask. And if you need help you can get [it] from the REC. We are kind of like you know family now and we are kind of like a team where you can reach someone if you have some questions....it's much better than when you are individual."



Community Group Lesson #3: Take the time and commit to the process to develop a shared vision, common goals and “best practices and policies.”



"It takes time. It will really take time for a group to come together, and people need to be willing to come up with the shared vision, shared understanding and values and willing to listen to one another because we have different opinions. But if we can all focus the prizes in the community, the youth who we are serving, then things are possible. We need to be willing to share with one another whenever that's needed, and understand that what we are doing is for the larger community, not just individually for the organization."

Community Group Lesson #4: Embrace more equitable participatory budgeting and processes to “strip away colonial constructs and barriers” that too often result in competition that divides communities causing “claws to come out.”

"And you can do a participatory budget, where you could all work together to figure out what the resources look like and how we should split. I've seen organizations in REC, say, “Well no, we don't need any money this time. You guys go ahead and give it out to, split it among other organizations or give it to another organization, we're good. We got enough money right now, to do what we need to do.” I mean, that to me was amazing to see that happen a number of times. It's really so amazing. How people can collaborate and work together, that's what the REC makes a model of showing."

Community Group Lesson #5: Actualize the power of BIPOC coalitions to:

1. **dispel the myths created to pit BIPOC led organizations against each other that uphold white supremacist practices**
2. **leverage resources**
3. **create collective and organizational-level benefits for BIPOC communities, and**
4. **support non-REC involved BIPOC organizations with shared experiences and commitments.**

"We need to go beyond organizational support. We should practice inclusion and advocacy any time another BIPOC community experiences injustice. For example, the Asian American "model minority" myth is a construct created to pit races against one another, to the benefit of white supremacy. AAPI communities are not alone in that fight. That's just one example. We dismantle racism when we speak up and reject harmful narratives and practices when it affects any one of our communities."

"One of the advantages instead of showing up to advocate instead of one organization, there's 10 organizations or however large your coalition ... [while] not feeling alone addressing an issue."

"We should practice inclusion and advocacy to other BIPOC organizations experiencing injustices."





Community Group Lesson #6: Secure “multi-year, unrestricted” funding to provide flexibility and sustainability.

"The fact that this coalition is built around robust, multi-year, unrestricted organizational funding. There are just so many coalitions that are trying to get people in the room but if an organization isn't actually supported to be there and share their expertise or their leadership, what you get is a lot of white mainstream people who have the time or have the positions funded to be working at this level."

KEY LESSONS FOR FUNDERS

Interviewees identified a range of **lessons for funders**, which for some interviewees signal a “paradigm shift” from a more traditional grantor / grantee dynamic to one that is more **community driven**, marked by **deep respect for community wisdom and experience** as well as by a **relational** versus transactional orientation. Overall, responses pointed to the need for mainstream white funders to **fundamentally change**, moving away from being “snowcapped [or] white at the top and brown at the bottom” and simply applying the lessons without deep structural changes that include diversifying leadership, centering BIPOC community values and priorities, and committing to ongoing and continuous reflexive practices to eradicate the imposition of white dominate cultural practices. As one REC member shared, it is not about funders “copying and pasting these lessons.” Instead, it requires **structural change**.

To further solidify the provisional funder lessons, one REC member recommended REC engage in ongoing work to more fully analyze how **each REC organization** and **the coalition as a whole** want to see grant making processes and systems change or be dismantled. As previously mentioned, for some REC members, this requires a **paradigm shift**, for others, it is **changing the relational dynamic** with funders to be more reciprocal and mutually determined, and for others, it is **decolonization** that in part lifts up and preserves indigenous knowledge and leadership.

"The United Way approach really aligns well with what I know of a lot of our traditional values and tribal communities and people within them that still live and uphold the culture, because that is what is helped our people survive this long, for millennia and unthinkable hardships. This is really part of the process of decolonization. ... it starts within the hearts of leaders demonstrating leadership from the ground up, leading from the back forward. I would love to see more well-meaning white folk just pause and try to rethink the way they've been programmed to think about things, their own ways they've been colonized, people that want to really help others through foundations or funding, but they don't know how."

Others spoke to the need to eliminate processes that perpetuate **white supremacist beliefs and practices** that can uphold hierarchical power dynamics and fails to center community voices and priorities.



"Funders have the opportunity to invest in powerful work, to repair a historical and current wrong, and they are lucky to partner with us. To be fair, the funders at least in King County are so much better than they were 10 years ago in terms of analysis around oppression and understanding the ways they are perpetuating the white supremacy problem. But there's always a power dynamic."



Other key lessons included:

Funder Lesson #1: Trust community and BIPOC

leadership to know how to best serve their communities. Interviewees spoke to the need to trust BIPOC led organizations to know how to best support and engage their communities. The notion of trust **contrasts** to several interviewees' experiences with having to **constantly prove themselves to funders**. For some interviewees, part of trust building requires building relationships amongst coalition members and between funders and coalition members. **Relationship building requires funder investments.**

"Trust community. Back the leadership of BIPOC community. Less bureaucracy. Move more money. So often the dynamic is, oh, you need to prove that you and your work is worthy to the people who are holding the power and holding the money."

"I think that piece around like how do [funders] truly support BIPOC organizations and like are they legitimately putting their money there. Are they trusting the knowledge that BIPOC organizations have? Are they incentivizing the collaboration and the coalitions that they say that they want to see or are they creating competition? I would also say just like [REC] is a positive model of what can happen when you're willing to start putting that idea of shifting power into practice."

"I would share with funders the importance of having meaningful relationships with stakeholders as well as with organizations as REC and its partner members. Get to know organizations on another level, not just as an organization you fund but know their stories and know their history. Our stories live on, our history lives on. How the organization was born – who was involved and the “why” of the organization. Learn about the communities they serve. What it has taken to get where they are, and the impact individually on people as well as collectively on communities."

Funder Lesson #2: Engage with BIPOC led organizations

vs just telling such organizations what needs to be done. This requires **actively listening** and being **responsive** to communities in setting priorities and determining what constitutes success and how best to measure success. In essence, place the community in a decision-making role.

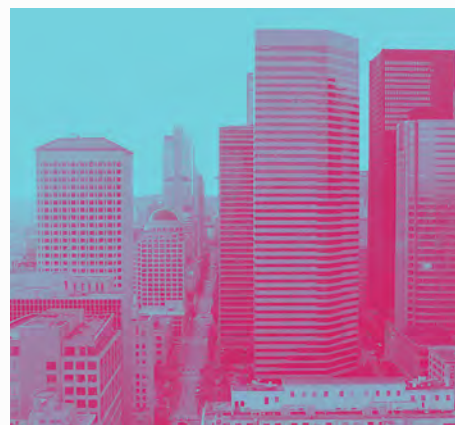
"Take a backseat when it comes to always being the ones to define the terms, like define those terms in collaboration with the people that you're calling your grantees, that you're calling the communities that you serve, and really seeing their work as an element of organizing. Seeing their work as, in a way, like a program more so than in grants, and conducting it in a way that is more relational and less transactional."

"Continue to hold us accountable. Continue to ask us those tough questions about if we give you this \$1.5 million, how do we know you're going to invest it in the right areas in the community, be at the table with us, helping us spell this thing out, instead of just pushing some documents over with a list of criteria, say meet this criteria and we're going to be good and squared up."

Funder Lesson #3: Adopt equitable participatory budgeting.

Such an approach allows involved communities to **determine how to prioritize and allocate funding**. For some interviewees, this can help shift the dynamic of competition to collaboration.

REC has shown me how you can bring resources to the table. And you can do a participatory budget, where you could all work together to figure out what the resources look like and how we should split. I've seen organizations in REC, say, "Well no, we don't need any money this time. You guys go ahead and give it out to, split it among other organizations or give it to another organization, we're good. We got enough money right now, to do what we need to do."



"And so this is again a powerful example of what happens when you actually let community make the decisions about where the funding is going to go and all those different things and I think that we've come up with some really powerful process of thinking through that and how we address equity issues and funding within our organization by like determining priorities and people being willing to forego funding so that an organization with greater need or greater impact to the community that should be served can have that like. I think that that is a bit of an uncommon example and one that should be lifted up."

Funder Lesson #4: Offer unrestricted funds to allow for more community driven work. Increased access to unrestricted funds would allow for **greater flexibility** and for some interviewees, ensure that their funding decisions better **align with the values and priorities** of their organization.

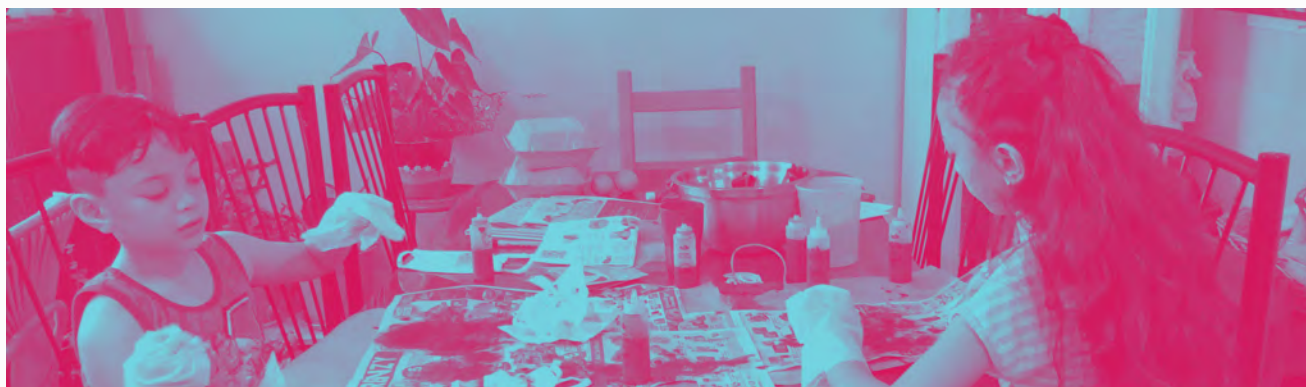
"Two words restricted versus unrestricted, like stop putting so many strongarm holds, chokeholds on these dollars. Like if you say you have a certain amount of dollars that you want to give out to organizations, just give it to them... we have our own mission and vision, we have our own core values, we have our own outlines and agendas that we want to run. Don't come in and say hey, I'm gonna give you \$200,000 but I want you to do this. Then you take me away from being my true authentic self by me doing this work and if you take that away from me, the work is not going to get done in the way it should. So free up some of those dollars to unrestricted funds so that we can use them in ways that we know that our community and our constituents need them to be used and resources are important, they are imperative for success and stability within our communities. So, to the funders, I would just say, give us a chance to show you what we truly can do and don't give us crumbs."



Funder Lesson #5: Support smaller organizations. For some interviewees, a need exists to better support smaller BIPOC organizations. This support would enable smaller organizations to **grow capacity** and be better positioned to secure future funds to **sustain their programs**.

"Creat[e] new initiatives that are in response to what communities, especially BIPOC led small community orgs are saying that they need in order to even be eligible for funding from major foundations that they've had felt like in the past have been just too far out of their reach."

"You have a lot of wealthy funders out there who has the resources to end homelessness, to end systemic racism, to end systems of oppression, you have funders with deep pockets that are out there, and I would just challenge them to really put their money where their mouth is and give some opportunities to these young organizations."



Funder Lesson #6: Revise grant making processes. A final recommendation was to engage communities in determining how to revise “grant making processes.” The identified lessons represent a **starting place** on how to make such revisions. To further inform strategies to enhance the funding process, one interviewee pointed to the value of **listening sessions**. Others spoke of learning more about REC and **adopting or adapting the REC model** with the caveat that the REC process is unique and **must be driven by BIPOC-led organizations** with power over deciding how to equitably distribute funds to best uplift BIPOC communities.

"I've noticed kind of a handful of funders who are starting to have those conversations with their grantees and holding listening sessions and actually taking that feedback and using that to revise their grant making process."

"I would say that funders need to pay attention to what coalitions like REC are doing and to think about how can they adapt a similar model."



KEY LESSONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to sharing lessons for other communities and funders, interviewees identified recommendations for other **stakeholders** that included legislators, parents, and people working within the school system, or as one interviewee shared “*school administrators, even teachers, janitors whoever has any kind of gatekeeping capacity when it comes to the lives of young people.*” A theme cutting across these lessons was the **importance of building relationships** within the coalition, and between the coalition and stakeholders. Building connections with stakeholders ideally will inspire these stakeholders to further engage or invest in racial equity work.

"The outcome is important, like the rental assistance and our ability to do that, but we are only able to do that because our relationship building is where we're investing our time and energy. And so, I think that's an important thing that I would convey to policymakers and funders about rethinking the way that they engage or they invest."

To build relationships with stakeholders, one interviewee suggested **sharing stories** and keeping them informed to raise awareness about the **power** of REC's approach. Others spoke to the value of building upon existing relationships to increase impact.

"The outcome is important, like the rental assistance and our ability to do that, but we are only able to do that because our relationship building is where we're investing our time and energy. And so, I think that's an important thing that I would convey to policymakers and funders about rethinking the way that they engage or they invest."

"Legislature is one area that we want to continue to build better relationships and utilize each of the Racial Equity Coalition members' relationships with many of the legislators or decision makers and come together collectively to share our agendas."



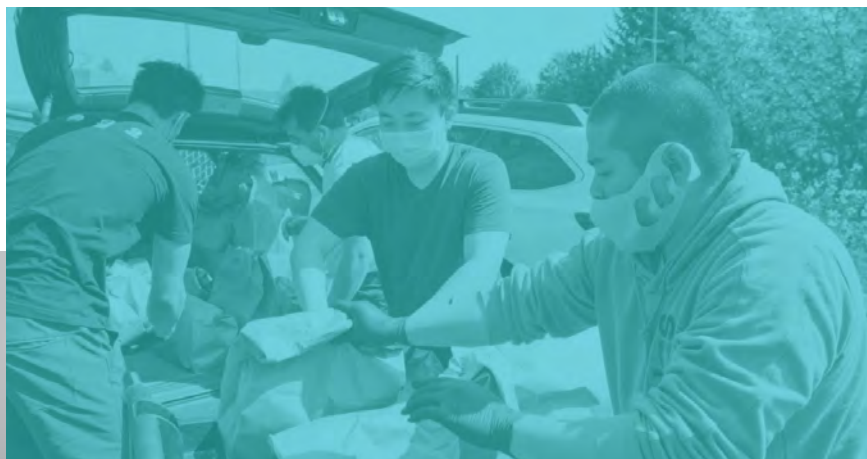


The idea of building upon **existing and new relationships** ties into the idea of REC's formation and growth as exemplifying "real movement building" where other stakeholders "have a role" and "a place at our table." Or as this interviewee reflected,

"Just being aware that there's these other groups out there that could be involved in our work in a more meaningful way and how that can build out into a movement that could be just a lot more expansive even beyond what our individual organizations are doing. So what could it look like to engage parents in the work that REC is doing, what can it look like to engage school administrators in the work that REC is doing, teachers, counselors, anyone who has any connection to the young folks that we serve? I feel like there's a role that they could be playing in collaboration with the work that we're doing internally. And for me that's what real movement building looks like."

In addition to relationship building, a final lesson for stakeholders was the importance and value of **BIPOC-led organizations serving BIPOC communities**. BIPOC-led organizations have **deep connections** to the communities they serve and are well positioned to provide **culturally responsive support and resources**. As one interviewee shared, too often white dominant systems drive how BIPOC communities are served and how this can result in “*huge disconnect*.” More specifically, this interviewee shared,

There's tremendous, tremendous value in people of color serving people of color and communities, identifying what their needs are and solving their own problems. And I think systematically, it hasn't worked that way, it hasn't worked with that mentality... Jobs are created by dominant society to work with, and in communities of color, and unfortunately most of the time there's a huge disconnect. So, this coalition is the perfect example of a shifting of organizations led by people of color working within their [respective communities].





REC ELEVATOR PITCH

Interviewees provided their **elevator pitch** describing why REC's approach is **important and innovative**. Many of the interviewees spoke to how REC's approach is innovative in part due to **who sits at the table** and drives the **decision-making**, or as one interviewee shared "by people of color, for people of color." Another interviewee shared,

"REC approach is important because we are a community of BIPOC people that belong in the communities we serve; all from different backgrounds and experiences working towards systematic change to dismantle white dominant culture that oppress and create the disparities of lacking resources for our communities. REC works towards getting those resources for our communities to flourish!"

As touched upon in the elevator pitch above, other themes that emerged across interviewees' responses spoke to the **values and priorities of REC** that included:

- Trustworthy relationships with communities served
- Culturally responsive and community centered
- Collective action

TRUSTWORTHY RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of being BIPOC led centered in part on how BIPOC led organizations have existing trustworthy relationships with the communities they serve. These relationships coupled with their own lived experiences ensure a greater understanding of what are the community priorities and how best to address them. As one member shared,

"[REC is] actually trying to forge a new relationship between a funder, between funders and organizations, and because it's actually being led by BIPOC leaders who have long standing existing and trusted relationships in their community and who are willing to engage in an intentional relationship process to be able to collectively serve our communities better."

"It takes a village to raise a child. REC is the village and the child is the BIPOC youth. The villagers know the challenges and needs of the child because they experienced what the child is going through now and they care for the child's wellbeing and future the most.

They see the potentials of the child and are committed to do whatever they can to provide opportunities for the child. Likewise, the child sees role models in the villagers, feels love and sheltered to grow confidence in themselves. This is the beauty of how each REC is taking care of their youth individually and as a group."



CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE & COMMUNITY CENTERED

Others spoke of how BIPOC-led organizations develop more **culturally responsive, community centered solutions** to address persistent structural inequities. Community-centered approaches were seen as a means to produce more **meaningful and long-standing changes** that do not “*rely upon dominant society to fix problem[s]*” and instead **honor the power and value of BIPOC lived experiences**. This work helps shift the narrative to define communities of color by their aspirations rather than by their deficits. As one interviewee shared, “*decisions are driven and actions are taken from community and from no one else. And that will result in a deeper, more impactful outcome.*” As one interviewee elaborated,

“

It's very important to empower and enable nonprofit organizations who are from the community, who are a part of the groups that are experiencing the problems to become a part of the solutions. For some odd reason, historically, people have thought, oh let's bring someone outside of the community to come and be the savior of this community because they're failing and they're suffering. No, we know why we're failing, we know why we're suffering. So, we should be a part of the solutions. We should be a part of the decision making. We might not have all the funds but if you partner with us and we take the lead on it. Yes, we'll give you credit funders. That's no problem we just want and need to get the work done, and it's so much easier when you involve BIPOC led organizations to do the solutioning.

And did we make the top floor yet? Ding.

POWER OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

In addition to reflecting upon organization level actions that are responsive to emerging and evolving community priorities, interviewees also spoke to the **power of collective action** coming out of REC. As one interviewee shared *“building power together is the only way to ensure real change”* while another pitched how REC is a *“symbol of community, collaborating, working together for one common cause to heal your community.”* Part of the collective action for some interviewees focused on **dismantling white dominant systems** that fail to fully support youth of color.

Interviewees pointed to REC’s ability to **come together, advocate and secure funds to support youth of color**. In doing so, REC has worked to **transform relationships with funders** that includes employing **participatory grant making** as well as inclusion of **community centered language in RFPs**. As evidence of REC’s impact on their communities, interviewees pointed to their **successful distribution of rental assistance** and other resources during COVID. By understanding the community and having already developed **trustworthy relationships**, REC engaged in **collective action** to secure funds, and then offer a more streamlined and community relevant process that ensured a **timely response to families in need**.





DISCUSSION

The original impetus for the participatory research was to understand **how and why BIPOC organizations are more effective at achieving outcomes for BIPOC youth compared to mainstream organizations.**

Findings highlighted the **importance of BIPOC organizations** and pointed to why BIPOC organizations are **uniquely positioned to serve BIPOC youth and communities.** In addition, key themes that emerged from the interviews centered around:

1. Why system change is needed to address persistent educational and other disparities
2. Recommendations to transform the educational system
3. How to shift and transform the ways funders operate and support BIPOC organizations

BIPOC ORGANIZATIONS ARE UNIQUELY POSITIONED TO SUPPORT BIPOC YOUTH

The participatory research illuminated the many ways BIPOC organizations are **critical** to addressing educational and other disparities that BIPOC youth too often face. This centered around how **BIPOC organizations foster positive cultural identity** and **provide opportunities for youth leadership.**

IMPORTANCE OF BIPOC ORGANIZATIONS

REC organizations are for the community by the community. BIPOC organizations differ from mainstream organizations because they are a part of, from the communities they serve, and **know firsthand** the issues. Importantly, the ties and relationship with community make them **directly accountable** to the communities they serve.



REC organizations are efficient, effective, nimble, innovative. BIPOC organizations can be relied upon to be **effective and impactful**, as we saw from prior data showing **better outcomes** not just for BIPOC and for all youth compared to mainstream organizations. **BIPOC organizations are efficient, nimble and innovative, and nowhere was this more apparent than during the pandemic.** COVID prompted immediate programmatic shifts, and organizations supported basic needs all the way to vaccine efforts. The effectiveness of BIPOC organizations was exemplified in the nearly complete vaccination rates of elders in the Native Hawaiians / Pacific Islanders; accomplished by partnering with the Pacific Islander Community Association (PICA), and the highest vaccination rates for American Indian/Alaska Natives (AIAN), where urban / tribal health entities were successful in getting their communities vaccinated.

REC organizations center racial justice in their values

Organizations live by their values with racial justice being a central tenet by which organizations operate. Pushing for racial justice and equity as BIPOC organizations was the commonality REC members shared. This is why **organizing work** in support of BIPOC communities is emphasized. Organizations ensure all programs, practices and decision-making are **aligned** with organizational values, mission and vision of family / youth centered and equity driven.



REC organizations provide a range of services to meet community needs.

BIPOC organizations provide the full gamut of **human services**, from housing to employment to criminal justice diversion. Organizations were able to **expand** during the pandemic, **offering critical services** such as rental / food / utility assistance, transportation, and beyond basic needs to work that could only be done by trusted community partners, such as addressing vaccine hesitancy in BIPOC communities.

REC organizations have a holistic view.

In keeping with the above point on offering wide ranging services, organizations have a more **holistic view**, recognizing the **interconnectedness and overlapping issues impacting BIPOC communities**.

Organizations recognize the fates of their communities are intertwined and dependent on the liberation of all BIPOC communities.



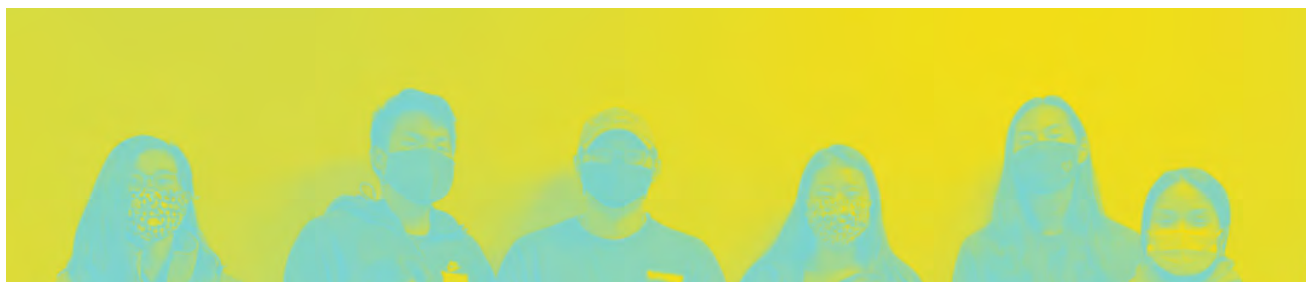
WAYS APPROACHES FOR BIPOC YOUTH DIFFER

REC organizations understand positive cultural identity

is critical for BIPOC youth. BIPOC organizations recognize that for BIPOC youth, **socio-emotional well-being is inherently tied to having a positive cultural ethnic identity.** This includes **purposefully de-centering white dominant culture** and centering youth's cultural and language needs. Contrary to mainstream's deficit view of BIPOC youth, BIPOC organizations recognize youth as talented and work towards helping youth realize their dreams and potential. Organizations help youth work towards **dismantling oppressive systems** that continue to cause harm. When students are judged only by the white dominant metric of academic achievement and deemed a failure when they don't meet this standard, this destroys youth's self-esteem. Instead, BIPOC organizations view youth from a **strength-based perspective**, seeing the **wisdom inherent within youth** passed down from elders, and nothing but **power, potential, promise and bright futures.** BIPOC organizations' programming include **culturally responsive curriculum** that centers the "*history of our people*" and help support youth by recognizing harm that can result from biased systems and the need for **healing.**

REC organizations focus on youth leadership and

support. While outcomes include typical metrics, such as high school graduation, college and paid employment, these are considered **secondary.** What matters most is providing a **supportive community**, having youth be "*community ready*," and growing **youth leadership**, helping youth recognize their **power / agency** to advocate and / or organize against systems of oppression. The result is **long term impact for youth**, such as sustained engagement, youth giving back to their communities, and becoming powerful change agents.



WHY SYSTEMS CHANGE TO ADDRESS PERSISTENT EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER DISPARITIES

While REC members started by responding to community needs, they gradually realized that **because systems have not changed, the same issues kept repeating / recycling with the next generation**. Hearing from youth, REC organizations moved to **systems reform and policy change**, because systems are not responsive to BIPOC youth and challenges have not been addressed. Organizations spoke about how **their programs recognize systemic factors** and how **they engage youth in advocating for system change**. This includes **purposefully de-centering white dominant culture** and **centering youth's cultural and language needs, nurturing youth leadership, and building power among young people** to affect policy and systems change. Specific examples of system change included disrupting the school to prison pipeline and advocating for food justice. System change includes recognizing who serves BIPOC youth best, e.g. BIPOC organizations, and giving organizations the funds to use in ways they know best work for youth. For example, de-siloing and holistic approaches used by BIPOC.



THE POWER OF REC

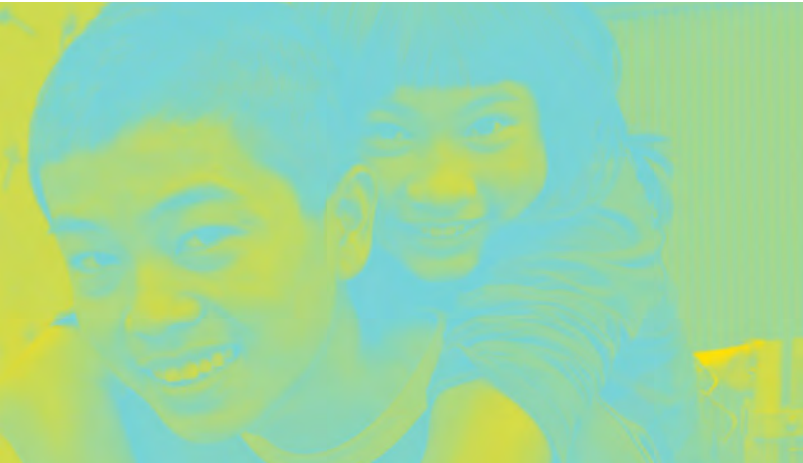
Interviews yielded **organization- and coalition-level insight** regarding the challenges and successes of being a part of REC and spotlighted a common challenge across different ethnic communities of **navigating white dominant culture**. Several recommendations were made as to how to **shift and transform systems**. Cross-cutting themes that emerged include:

- The importance of trustworthy relationships built on shared values and commitments.
- The power of BIPOC coalitions to support youth of color and affect system change.
- The ability for BIPOC organizations to support BIPOC communities while facing the challenges caused by COVID.



These themes highlight why **funding BIPOC organizations to support BIPOC communities is essential**, why **system change is needed**, and point to how to make this happen.





POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout their interview responses, REC members pointed to the importance of **trustworthy relationships** that formed amongst REC members. **Camaraderie and a community of support** were seen as

important to address isolation many REC members described experiencing, as if working in a silo without a community of support. The strength of relationships in part resulted from bringing together like-minded leaders that put **BIPOC communities and anti-racism at the forefront of their work**. REC members saw alignment in their organization's mission, vision, and the reasons they show up for the work, which is to **empower BIPOC youth and their families**. The shared experiences of having to navigate and contend with systems that too often dismissed or failed to center BIPOC youth further strengthened REC relationships. Elements of trustworthy relationships included:

- **Developing a strong sense of community, family and friendships among REC**
- **Honoring and valuing differences amongst REC members, and recognizing that every person has a story and an opinion.**
- **Giving and receiving support from fellow REC members and sharing resources**
- **Learning from each other to build capacity that strengthened their own organizations and REC as a coalition (*i.e., learning about coalition building, power sharing, participatory budgeting and youth engagement strategies*)**



By developing **trustworthy relationships**, organizations felt they could push back against competition and infighting and were **stronger together** to collaboratively engage in advocacy and racial justice organizing to support BIPOC youth and communities. With so many external forces trying to tear BIPOC communities apart and sow distrust, REC members considered ongoing relationship building within REC as **essential** with a desire to reach out and include other BIPOC leaders who are not currently part of REC.

POWER OF BIPOC ORGANIZATIONS AND COALITIONS

While there were other general advocacy groups for youth, **REC was formed to fill a void of youth advocacy specifically from a BIPOC viewpoint**. REC members saw the importance of **partnership** that included learning about each other and the different ways each REC member serves their communities. **Coalition**

work was seen as one of the most **powerful organizing tools for social change**, recognizing interconnected issues facing BIPOC communities, and building a larger net of aligned community members. By supporting each other, they could better support their own community. This included **advocacy efforts to secure PSTAA funding**, making the case to **King County** for why they are best positioned to address educational and other disparities facing BIPOC youth and communities. For example, a **collaborative approach to securing grants** helped REC members share the workload where different organizations took lead responsibility for grant writing and reporting. Collaboration furthermore combats the *“NPIC [non-profit industrial complex]-fueled isolation between BIPOC organizations created by a competitive philanthropic culture.”* **Coalition building resists white supremacy culture that pits BIPOC against each other.**



Examples of the ways REC embeds **equity and respect** in its processes include:

- **Equitable resource sharing, taking only what you need and/or recognizing where another organization has a greater need**
- **Honoring specific ways an organization does the work to ensure resources are accessible to community members**
- **Sharing skills, knowledge, information, resources and support (*i.e., data collection strategies, securing government funding and negotiating contracts*)**
- **Being able to refer youth to other REC organizations as needed, knowing they would take care of youth/community members in the same manner they would.**

REC increased advocacy efforts through collective action. Working collectively was seen as a more effective means of accomplishing shared goals such as **disrupting institutional racism and effecting system change**. Institutional racism requires BIPOC organizations having to work “*triple hard*” without making any mistakes in order to prove themselves in ways non-BIPOC organizations do not have to do. The collective voices of REC created a **united movement** that led to a bigger impact.

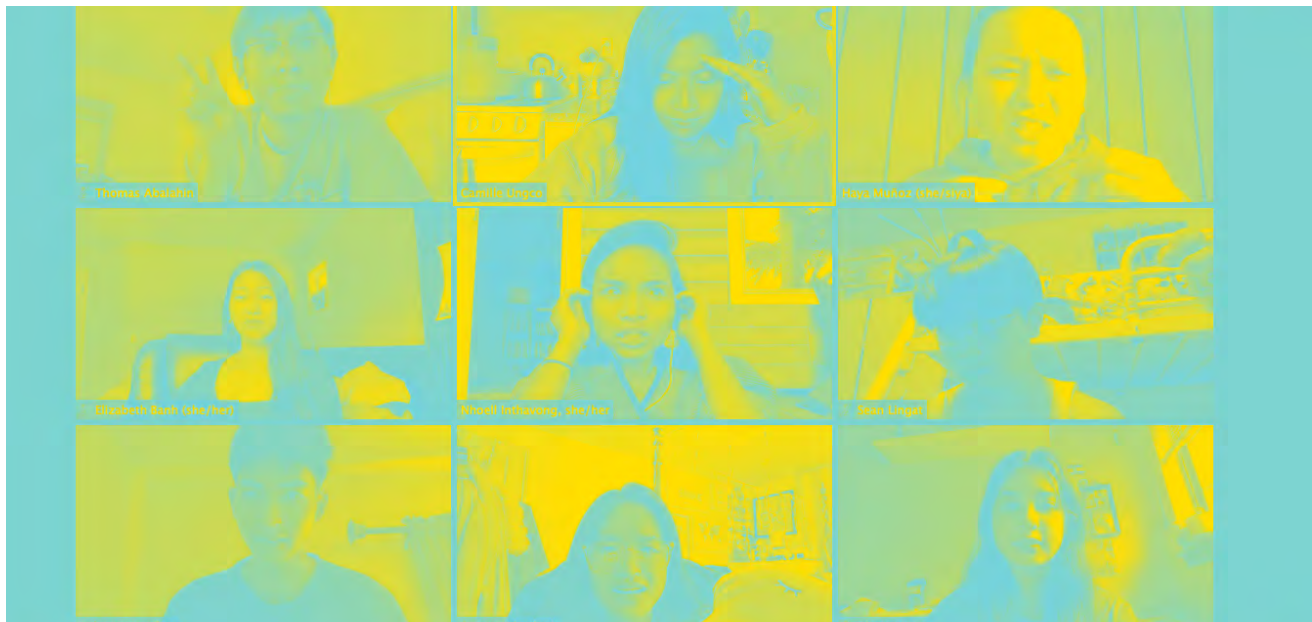


There was **power in having 14 organizations sharing strategies** and all saying the same thing, and helping funders to understand community perspectives. Organizing together, REC was able to:

- **Secure competitive PSTAA funds, an indicator of the power of group advocacy to receive needed funding to ensure resources go directly to BIPOC communities particularly crucial during COVID where BIPOC communities were hit worst, yet not prioritized for support/resources.**
- **Change grantmaking structures to be culturally responsive for BIPOC communities, shifting from paternalistic relationship with funders to one that honors self-determination and sovereignty.**
- **Push funders to act differently and challenged the status quo of how philanthropy operates. For example, REC successfully advocated for changes within existing structures including how COVID relief funds were dispensed. Due to REC's success in distributing COVID rental assistance, King County adopted REC's "hub and spoke" model in the next round of COVID relief funds.**



One REC member spoke of the need to *“shake them out of their comfort zone in a loving way...for the greater good to dismantle systemic oppression.”* Ideally, this will raise awareness of **persistent inequities** and what it takes to *“create a more equitable world to undo historical harm and trauma.”* Aligned with the importance of **self-determination**, one REC member shared, *“we need to rest in the truth that our communities can generate their own solutions and preserve our culture”* and that *“people in power can ally with resources and other support without overstepping or fixing the community.”* The group felt having a **strategic, united front as BIPOC organizations** taking bold action could lead to real shift, compared to existing systems work that has led to little change and even caused things to backtrack.




Systems change and collective action was also viewed as a place where REC could have an **even bigger impact**, such as tackling the **root causes of long-standing structural inequities**. As one interviewee noted, COVID response is “*greater than paying somebody’s rent for a month.*” Examples might include REC supporting student advocacy efforts to **end the school to prison pipeline**, bringing **ethnic studies** to classrooms, increasing the pool of **BIPOC educators and social workers**, supporting **students with disabilities**, or getting **healthy and culturally responsive school food**. Organizations do not have enough time to address root causes given urgent programmatic needs and immense funder requirements. Adequate funding to specifically support systems change work is needed.

POWER OF REC FACING PANDEMIC OF RACISM

"Katrina no surprise, differential COVID impact was no surprise either, hair has been on fire for a while."

The impact of COVID was a recurring theme in terms of **accomplishments and challenges**. COVID did not create but



exacerbated long-standing inequities experienced in BIPOC communities. BIPOC communities were **hit worst by the pandemic**, and BIPOC organizations had to **pivot immediately to meet massive community needs**. With the abundance of data showing **differential / worse COVID impact for Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous families**, as well as the **disability and other BIPOC communities**, the pandemic created action-packed work and advocacy.

One interviewee described REC organizations as “*essential workers*” and “*superheroes*” in pivoting to meet community needs and in successfully securing COVID relief funds and **distributing those funds equitably** amongst REC members. Funds were **not distributed equally** to each organization, **but based on where the need was greatest**. True to REC’s holistic view, COVID relief provided by REC organizations ran the gamut of basic needs of food and rent to meeting education needs and addressing digital divide all the way through to vaccine efforts. Organizations that did not have the ability to provide food or rental assistance themselves were able to turn to other REC organizations to assist their communities. **The impact was significant**, and REC was able to document and share the story of what REC accomplished with the received COVID funds.

A recurring challenge is **systemic barriers that impede BIPOC organizations receiving funds** where money instead is funneled towards white mainstream organizations, and COVID relief funding was no different. BIPOC organizations demonstrated the ability

to **efficiently distribute COVID relief funds to community members.**

Yet the bulk of COVID relief funds went to mainstream / institutions, such as government, United Way, large white mainstream CBOs, and large landlords. Given the success BIPOC organizations demonstrated in efficiently getting COVID relief funds to community members and boosting vaccination rates, **they should continue to be relied upon and funded as part of COVID equitable recovery efforts.**

CHALLENGING WHITE DOMINANT CULTURE

As part of changing systems, REC members identified a major challenge for BIPOC communities, which is **dealing with and navigating white dominant culture**, and how **white supremacy shows up in grant making and funding requirements.** Organizations spoke to the enormous time and energy expended to **educate mainstream on BIPOC needs / values.** Having to fit or meet white dominant culture standards stifles the ability of BIPOC organizations to adequately meet community needs and the ingenuity and responsiveness of their approaches. For example, REC wanted to create an “*equity fund*” to **move funding to where support was most needed**, but this did not fit into government, white dominant structure and was rejected. Another example includes **collecting data required by funders** that does not align with the program’s values and feels extractive. Consequently, information gathered tells only **part of the story**, and **misrepresents** impact or worse, **creates harm.** This can create tension and a sense of disconnect, given many BIPOC communities’ holistic approach that accounts for contextual factors that impact BIPOC communities such as systemic racism and other forms of social inequities. **Colonial constructs** fail to acknowledge cultural traditions as well as other socioeconomic factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

REC organizations accomplish **exemplary work** as documented in their results, **yet are still not trusted by mainstream institutions / funders**. **BIPOC organizations have proven time and again their effectiveness in serving their communities, yet they remain sorely underfunded**. Despite these challenges, REC members remain hopeful for a different relationship to emerge.

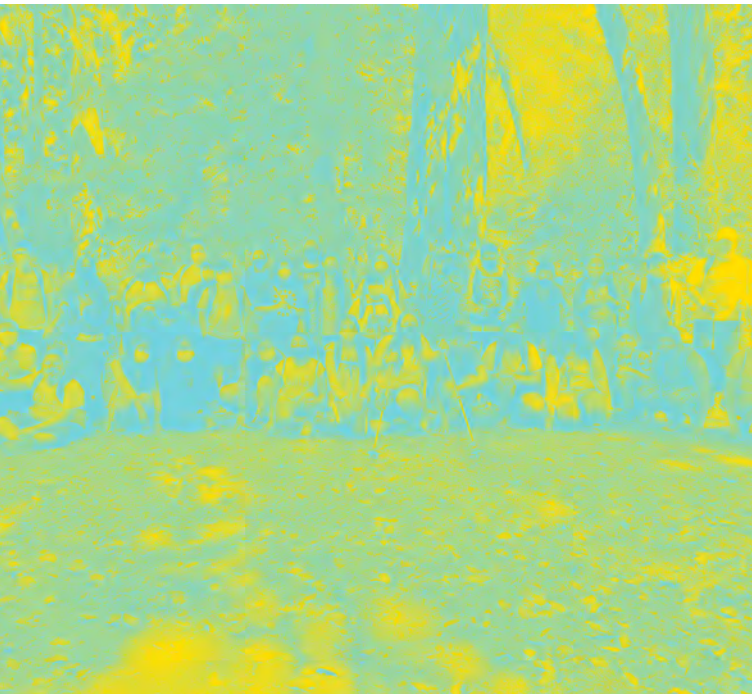
A range of lessons for funders were identified that would signal a “paradigm shift” from a more typical grantor / grantee dynamic to one that is **community driven**, acknowledges community wisdom and experience and that is **relational** versus transactional. There is a need for funders to fundamentally change, moving away from being “snowcapped,” “white at the top and brown at the bottom” to deep structural changes that include **diversifying leadership**, centering **BIPOC community values and priorities**, and committing to ongoing and continuous reflective practices to **eradicate white dominant practices**. It is **decolonizing** the relational dynamic to be reciprocal and mutually determined.



Recommendations for funders include:

Trust community and BIPOC leadership to know how to best serve their communities rather than over-monitoring and having them constantly prove themselves. **BIPOC organizations know how to best support and engage their communities.**





Acknowledge the importance of

relationships, the deep ties and connections BIPOC organizations have with the communities they serve and supporting relationship-building among BIPOC as an alternative to competition. Trust-building requires building relationships amongst coalition members and between funders and coalition members, **AND relationship-building requires funder investments.**

Acknowledge the deep wisdom / expertise of

BIPOC communities by **hiring BIPOC** from affected communities into leadership positions and give them decision-making power, particularly as pertains to funding allocations.

Engage with BIPOC

organizations rather than telling organizations what needs to be done. This requires actively listening and being responsive to communities in setting priorities and determining what constitutes success and how best to measure success. **In essence, place community in a decision-making role.**



Account for long term systems change work instead of focusing solely on immediate outcomes.

Change outcomes and measurements instead of privileging white dominant way of determining impact (*e.g. counting numbers*) that don't center community priorities.

Listen to BIPOC leaders to develop **culturally responsive measures of success**, rather than focusing on immediate outcomes that don't account for long term systems change work.

Such BIPOC oriented metrics include centering the following components:



Relationships, relationships, relationships. As always, the most important metric of success is **strength of relationships**. This includes organizations' relationships with youth, as well as youth's relationship to others, such as peers and elders, creating a steady net of support to combat negativity received in school. Organizations maintain **deep connections with youth**, and relationships are key to sustainability, as they bring long lasting impact beyond the life of the program. *Examples include maintaining connections with program alumni as volunteers, staff or board members.*

Positive cultural and ethnic identity. This is key for BIPOC youths' socioemotional well-being and strengthened community and cultural connections.

Community readiness. Youth develop confidence in themselves and their identity, understand who they are, have peer / adult support from the greater community and are community ready -- **ready to contribute and give back to their community.**

Self-determination and agency. This includes advocacy / organizing skills to affect systems change, organizing where people who experience a problem define a solution and build power to change systems and current power structures, offering greater power to disrupt and change oppressive systems.

Adopt equitable participatory budgeting. Such an approach allows involved communities to determine how to prioritize and allocate funding and shifts the dynamic from competition to collaboration.

Offer unrestricted funds to allow for community driven work. Increased access to unrestricted funds would allow for greater flexibility and ensure funding decisions better align with the values and priorities of BIPOC organization. Examples of identified actions to be taken with additional unrestricted funding include addressing harm caused by assimilation, investing in staff development and providing space and opportunities for communities to heal and flourish.

Support smaller organizations to enable growth and to be better positioned to secure future funds to sustain their programs.

Engage communities in determining how to revise “*grant making processes*.” The identified lessons represent a starting place on how to make such revisions, allowing BIPOC organizations power over deciding how to equitably distribute funds to best uplift BIPOC communities.

Learn how to model and implement the REC process of community design that is driven by BIPOC organizations.



FINAL WORDS

“

REC approach is important because we are a community of BIPOC people that belong in the communities we serve; all from different backgrounds and experiences working towards systematic change to dismantle white dominant culture that oppress and create the disparities of lacking resources for our communities. REC works towards getting those resources for our communities to flourish!

Across many of the interview responses to “What would be your REC elevator pitch?”, REC members spoke to REC’s innovative approach pointing to who sits at the table and drives decision-making: “by people of color, for people of color.” This report illuminates the importance of BIPOC organizations, particularly when it comes to addressing long-standing disparities and systems change. BIPOC organizations' approaches are very specific to their communities. They are the only ones who can do this work due to the deep connections with the communities they serve and because staff are from the community and know the issues **firsthand**.

Our partings words:
“Just fund them.”