

WOMEN OF COLOR

Exploratory Study of Women of Color in San Fernando Valley
Nonprofits: Leadership & Services

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INTRODUCTION

Women across the United States have endured major difficulties related to social acceptance, poor health outcomes, educational opportunities, employment, and high incarceration levels. While many initiatives are underway in the last few years, more research is needed to determine the level of support for this population and to encourage nonprofit service organizations to better serve Black women and other women of color. To this end, an exploratory study is necessary to understand how nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley serve women of color (and youth).

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report was to identify nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles and their service to women of color. Learning more about barriers and successes of local efforts and highlighting effective approaches are the first steps in developing a comprehensive plan of action to increase social mobility and success for this population. Hence, the goal of this research is to provide the non-profit sector in the San Fernando Valley and educational stakeholders with an evaluation of successful programmatic strategies that improve learning outcomes and satisfaction of Women of color and the structural models that sustain them. This research project also considered the mission statements of the selected nonprofit organizations (NPOs) to gain insight into their stated values, goals and objectives. The research question was: How do nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles currently serve women of color?

In an effort to gain a composite profile of the nonprofit organizations selected, the interview protocol included structural, organizational, and service related questions.



METHODS

The method for this research was qualitative using telephone interviews with a select group of nonprofit organizations. Qualitative research aided the researcher in gaining insights and understanding of how women of color are serviced by nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley. Creswell (2008) defined qualitative research as “an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding central phenomenon” (p. 645). This study used purposeful sampling, in which the selection of the participants and sites were intentional. Procedures included interviews of organization directors and document analysis of existing information on Valley nonprofits, through websites. Five nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley were identified and deemed appropriate for this study including:

1. **African American Leadership Organization (AALO)**
2. **Boys & Girls Club, San Fernando Valley**
3. **Boys & Girls Club, West Valley (WVBGC)**
4. **Youth Policy institute Valley**
5. **Youth Speak Collective**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Black women in the United States have faced several obstacles towards achieving upward social and career mobility, largely due to gender and racial inequalities. These inequalities are upheld in the workforce and result in difficulty gaining higher pay, employment, and educational opportunities. In the nonprofit industry, racial stratification, “the grouping of one racial group at the leadership and decision-making level within a nonprofit and the grouping of another at the front-line and entry level positions within an organization” plays a large role in employment disparities (Adesaogun, Flottemesch, Ibrahim-Devries, 2015, p. 42).

These disparities in leadership roles within nonprofit organizations can be seen by the demographics of these organizations. In a national study produced by the Common Good Careers and Level Playing Institute (2011), researchers provided that the makeup of nonprofits consists of about 82 percent White, 10 percent African American, 5 percent Hispanic/Latino, 3 percent other, and 1 percent Asian or Pacific Islander.

This study exemplifies the gap between racial groups by stating that as one looks at even higher, authoritative positions within an organization, the number of people of color represented diminishes. For instance, nationally, within nonprofit organizations only 14% of board members are people of color (Schwartz, Weinberg, Hagenbuch, & Scott, 2011). However, this national statistic differs in states such as California which is more racially and ethnically diverse. In California, women of color are more highly represented in nonprofit staffs and make up 28% of board member positions (De Vita & Roeger, 2009).

While there are higher instances of career mobility and employment for people of color within California nonprofits, only 25% of the nonprofit organizations were found to be minority led (Adesaogun, Flottemesch, & Ibrahim-Devries, 2015). While the large gaps in diversity in nonprofit organizations can be seen nationwide, California’s growing population of people of color have been shown to influence the demographic composition: “the diversity of nonprofit staff generally mirrors the racial-ethnic diversity of California’s regional populations” (De Vita & Roeger, 2009). De Vita and Roegers (2009) used Los Angeles as one example of a growing diverse population heavily influencing the composition of staff, with an average of 64% of Los Angeles based nonprofit staff composed of people of color.

Employment opportunities and upward mobility of Black females continue to be hindered by negative stereotypes. In literature presented by Adesaogun, Flottemesch, and Ibrahim-Devrie (2015), “Khosrovani and Ward (2011) argued that Black employees must also combat dangerous stereotypes, including the idea that leadership is an inherent trait for whites, but a trait which must be developed in people of color” (p. 46). Not only do Black women have to face racial stereotypes, they are also held under another level of scrutiny for being a woman.

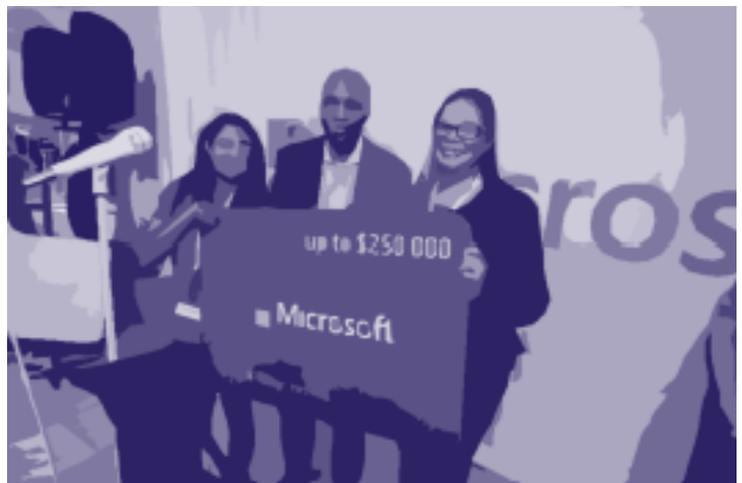


BACKGROUND INFORMATION *continued...*

In combination, race and gender shape the experiences and leadership roles of many women of color. Several stereotypes have been associated with Black women, such as the Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, Crazy Black Bitches and Superwoman (Adesaogun, Flottemesch, & Ibrahim-Devries, 2015). These socially constructed images all create perceptions of Black females to future or present employers, and while “each image has different features, they are all ultimately harmful to Black women and can be detrimental to their career development.” (Adesaogun, Flottemesch, & Ibrahim-Devries, 2015, p. 47).

Black female’s increased awareness of the negative perceptions on them by others creates a dilemma in which to achieve upward mobility, they have to constantly dismantle the stereotypes against them or find ways to “navigate the existing power structures” (Adesaogun, Flottemesch, & Ibrahim-Devries, 2015, p. 47). Rather than relying on their own educational abilities and experiences to be able to achieve upward mobility, Black women have negotiate the barriers introduced from racial and gender inequalities.

While there have been advances in the number of women of color in nonprofit organizations, more research is essential in understanding how nonprofits can better serve Black women and women of color. Therefore, an exploratory study was crucial to identifying nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley who serve Black women and other women of color .



Selection of NPOs

Demographic Profile of San Fernando Valley

San Fernando Valley lies in L.A. County Service Planning Area (SPA) 2 (as shown below). The following profile of the San Fernando Valley is listed on the website of U.S. Congressman Brad Sherman (D-Sherman Oaks).

As of 2012, the population of the San Fernando Valley was 1.77 million. The Valley's population exceeds the populations of all but the four largest cities in the United States – New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston. The Valley's population has increased 3.5% since the 2000 Census.

According to Healthy City.com, there are 9,632 nonprofit organizations (NPOs) headquartered in SPA 2 that are classified by type as: educational institutions, youth development, or human services. For the purposes of this report, I focused on a sample size of 5 NPOs that resembled those classifications. Specifically, I queried NPOs that focused on racially specific targets and diversity targets.



Mission Statements

AALO

To strengthen and enhance the community by harnessing the power of unity through service.



Boys & Girls Club, San Fernando Valley

To inspire and empower all young people, especially those from disadvantaged circumstances, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible, and caring citizens.



Boys & Girls Club, West Valley (WVBGC)

The mission of the Boys & Girls Club of West Valley is to inspire and enable all young people, especially those from disadvantaged circumstances, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible, and caring citizens.



Youth Policy Institute

Transform Los Angeles neighborhoods using a holistic approach to reduce poverty by ensuring families have access to high-quality schools, wraparound education, and technology services, enabling a successful transition from cradle to college and career.



Youth Speak Collective

To empower low-income, at-risk youth and their families with the skills necessary to pursue higher education and create strong communities. The organization's name stems from its commitment to providing youth with the opportunity to 'speak' – to be vocal and empowered, helping develop the very programs they participate in, programs that improve the health of their neighborhoods.



Framework Overview

Figure 1. SOS Framework for Understanding the Black Women Code in SFV Non-profits



Accessible summary of Figure 1 (.pdf)

Presented in *Figure 1* is the *SOS framework for understanding the Black women code in San Fernando Valley nonprofits*, which was customized for the study of Black women in nonprofit organizations. The framework includes themes for the structural diversity, organizational diversity, and service related actions to better understand how nonprofit organizations in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles currently serve women of color, particularly Black women.

As shown in *Figure 2*, the interview protocol included structural diversity questions, organizational diversity questions, and service questions designed to explore governance, logistics, and provisions related to women and girls of color, particular Black women and girls.



Interview Protocol

Figure 2. Interview Protocol

| STRUCTURAL DIVERSITY QUESTIONS | ORGANIZATIONAL DIVERSITY QUESTIONS | SERVICE QUESTIONS |
|--|---|---|
| 1. What percentage of board members, executive directors, and staff in Valley's nonprofit sector are Black women or other people of color? | 1. How committed is your nonprofit organization in creating a racially diverse and inclusive work environment? <i>Provide examples</i> | 1. What work does your organization do and what populations do you serve? [As a follow up, what differentiates you from other organizations?] |
| 2. How many Black women or other people of color are in leadership positions in your organization? | 2. How do workplace demographics play into perceptions of staff inclusiveness and impact career decisions, especially among women of color? | 2. What are your goals for the next three to five years? What priorities will help you achieve them? What barriers are in your way? |
| 3. What does it take to effectively recruit and retain Black women in nonprofit leadership positions? | 3. How do you retain Black women as staff in your organization? <i>Incentives?</i> | |
| | 4. What proportion of your nonprofit organization can be classified as diverse (or minority-led)? | |

Accessible summary of Figure 2 (.pdf)

Data Collection Procedures

The researchers collected empirical data through phone interviews, which lasted between 30-45 minutes. The phone interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed. The research assistants transcribed the interviews. These transcriptions were employed to explore and identify emerging themes within San Fernando Valley nonprofit recruitment of and service to women and girls of color, particularly Black women. Upon transcription, the data was coded and analyzed. The process of coding included open, axial, and selective coding, which was utilized to develop categories and linking relationships of the phenomena (*Note: Coding is later elaborated in the Data Analysis section of the report*). In addition to the tape-recorded interviews, the researcher took reflective notes and analyzed the mission statements of each organization to produce a more subjective interpretation of the course of inquiry.

Although the questions were determined in advance, the interview flowed in the form of a discussion interchange. Although the phone interviews were unstructured, the researcher established the interview protocol to determine participants' descriptions of their perceptions toward structural diversity and organizational leadership. These questions facilitated free dialogue flow between the researcher and the participants. In the next section, the data analysis procedures are provided, and quality assurance and trustworthiness issues are addressed.

Data Collection Procedures

Data Analysis Procedures

The interviews were transcribed verbatim in a Microsoft Word document for data analysis. The data analysis process involved open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding involved the initial identification of key words and sentences. Axial coding was then used to organize significant words and sentences that were commonly stated by the participants into categories. Finally, selective coding was employed to group the categories into themes in developing the SOS framework for understanding the Black Women Code in San Fernando Valley nonprofit organizations. The research team analyzed the data and developed a description of the thematic structure of governance and service to the group under investigation.



ence” (Richardson, 1999, p. 70). We must suspend our predispositions and accept the phenomenon for what it is. This process was particularly important for the researcher and research assistants since they shared some of the attributes of the participants, including ethnic make up.

Validity and truthfulness. In this study, the researcher bracketed himself consciously in order to understand the perspectives of the participants interviewed. The audio recordings made of each interview –the researcher again bracketing himself during the transcription of the interview– further contributed to truth. The participants received a copy of the text to validate that it reflected their perspectives regarding the phenomenon that was studied. A synopsis of the findings is presented next.

Quality Assurance and Trustworthiness

Bracketing. Also called a reduction of phenomenology, the term bracketing means “holding in check any preconceived notions that might contaminate one’s immediate experi-



Results

From the interviews transcribed and analyzed, several themes were developed and fit into three major categories: structural diversity, organizational diversity, and service. Within each section, there were major themes that revealed essential insight into women of color in leadership by the selected nonprofit organizations based in San Fernando Valley. The subsequent sections give details provided by high status employees of five nonprofits in San Fernando Valley through their testimonies.



Structural Diversity

Prioritizing Leadership Roles

While many nonprofit organizations uphold their missions of serving and benefiting people of color, the percent of women of color in leadership positions may share a different view. For instance, while the Boys and Girls Club reported to the interviewer that they are about 90% staff of color, the board of directors consist of only about 20% women of color.

On the other hand, AALO has a staff that includes 80% women of color and 70% women on their board. AALO emphasizes the need to prioritize women within leadership roles as stated below:

“We wanted our board to reflect the people that we were serving and helping, to show that we understood from their lenses and their perspective the things that were going on.”

Diversity

noun di-ver-si-ty \ də-ˈvər-sə-tē , dī- \

Feature of a mixed workforce that provides a wide range of abilities, experience, knowledge, and strengths due to its heterogeneity in age, background, ethnicity, physical abilities, political and religious beliefs, sex, and other attributes.

Outreach Methods

In search for people of color to serve on boards or leadership roles, the data retrieved from the nonprofit organizations revealed that there is need to reach out to underrepresented populations, specifically, Black women. The Boys and Girls Club recruits their board members based on monetary donations. One interviewee stated it this way:

“We struggle to find Black women with time or interest to participate.”

From his experience of reaching out to high-level executives, the interviewee concluded that:

“Especially in the Latino community, it's not a cultural thing to serve on boards like this.”

Combating Recruitment Challenges

Recruitment of Black women proved to be a re-occurring hurdle due to difficulty with outreach and a high focus on community representation. In order to tackle difficulties in getting people of color to serve on their boards, one interviewee from the Boys and Girls Club surmised:

“What we are trying to do is align ourselves with more HR departments of bigger companies that can help us identify specific people that would be interested in serving on our board that represents our community in general.”

Results *continued*



Another interviewee from the Boys and Girls Club spoke about the high number of Hispanics over other people of color in the organization and the need to expand “diversity”, meaning to have more African Americans within the organization and not just have Hispanics serve as the only people of color. She emphasized that she did not want to “lose sight of diversity” and in order to apply this she began to produce events with focused outreach on African Americans. One example was a Black History event, as well as targeting Black churches in the area. To reaffirm this, the interviewee stated:

“You have 16 black churches in the northeast San Fernando Valley and beyond in addition to the other organizations that have phenomenal young people. Therefore, I made it my business to go out and look for young people. It was a challenge. It is like pulling beets. Outside of the church, it was pulling beets.”

Youth Speak Collective works against recruitment challenges of women of color. They state:

“We try to uplift employees and reinforce equity in the workplace and promote mentorship for the employees. We also acknowledge and work to disrupt gender and racial stereotypes about women in the workplace.”

Diversity in Recruitment

Within recruitment, the need to maintain a diverse staff generally went hand-in-hand with representing the communities of color that non-profit organizations were serving. Youth Speak Collective admitted difficulty in reaching out to Black students without feeling like they were disingenuously targeting them. A Youth Speak Collective interviewee stated,

“I have always been very conscious of making sure that we try to serve a more diverse group of people of color, but I guess my problem has always been how do I do it without being very obvious that I am trying to recruit more black students to come into our program.”

Therefore, while they may want to increase diversity by outreach to Black students, the problem lies in methods of contact, rather than ignoring the inclusion of other people of color.

Fulfilling a certain “quota” also acts as a standard for many organizations in employment of people of color. While this can be restrictive, the Boys and Girls Club sees pass the quota, stating:

“I want the best staff, which means I'm not going to sacrifice a hire based on color if I have folks over here who have a passion and they're excited about what they do and they're willing and ready to serve all youth regardless.”

While the quota can act as a useful tool to hiring more people of color, BGC also recognizes that

“the quota can do more damage in the long run, actually the short run and the long run depending what your mission is.”

Results *continued*

Organizational Diversity

Generally, of all the nonprofit organizations interviewed, there was a high drive to create a diverse/inclusive atmosphere within the organization by having employees be demographically representative of the target population they are serving. While this can be a beneficial strategy, there were cases in which other racial groups were left out if the focus was solely on recruiting one racial group in particular.

Opportunities for Leadership Expansion

While the nonprofit organizations struggle to be able to provide monetary benefits to their employees, they do encourage and help employees in achieving higher goals and increase employment assets. For employees at AALO, the interviewee asserts,

“They (Employees) really are focused on helping. Now does that mean we don’t point out life skills or some work skill sets that they themselves are going to get out of it? Absolutely not. That may be something like how to do public speaking, how you can approach different diverse populations or communities, because they may not be as comfortable with that.”

Employees are generally there for altruistic reasons; however, life skills, work skills, and communication skills can all contribute to upward mobility. The Youth Speak Collective is determined in showing employees this. The interviewee mentioned:

“Showing that there is upward mobility, that you are valued as an asset to that organization and professional development. I think being able to connect those people of color with other people of color will help boost their career.”...

The Boys and Girls Club supports employees in future leadership opportunities by staying supportive of continuous education. It was stated this way:

“The Boys and Girls club are always supportive of continuous education so we would work with schedules to allow employees to go to school and set the schedule for them to still work at the club... In some cases those employees went on to school, while they still worked at the club, got their licenses or their permits or vocational training and then turn around and come back to help us make pay to the facility. Or leverage their field in terms of working with young people.”

Community Demographics

Each of the organizations indicated that it was important for their employees to look like the community they were representing. One interviewee from the Boys and Girls Club stated:

“We need to have staff that represents what [the children] look like so they can look at those individuals as mentors....I would say that where we live 75% of our kids are Latino kids and the rest breakdown in the other 25%... It’s a very, very diverse place in the valley so we have to look like the kids that we serve.”

Another interviewee from the Youth Speak Collective said it this way:

“I think that’s what really kept me there is knowing that there is somebody else like me that was in leadership and I saw myself in those shoes.....that they are a part of the team and that their voices are just as important as your white counterparts and that because you are a person of color servicing a community of color,

Results *continued*

Organization Values

Most of the interviewees indicated the value of their organizations to women of color. One interviewee added:

“it's because of the foundation that black folks built here that allow for other people of color to benefit....I wanted them to see the young people that are just as qualified to be a part of the leadership programs as other nonblack youth are.”

Still, another interviewee had this to say with regard to the value of the organization:

“Knowing that this community is a very traditional Latino/Mexican community for the most part, you've got a lot of barriers that young women face as women of color.... that we've got stereotypes and expectations in our households that keep us from being successful, so if we don't have that one teacher that says I see you, things can go very different and I say that from experience because that was me.”

Perception of Workforce Diversity

The researchers wanted to get a sense of the interviewees' attitude toward workforce diversity. One interviewee stated:

“Not only do I talk about it [inclusive working environment] but they talk about it with their youth development professionals and we do training around it.”

At the Youth Policy Institute, they are able to shape employee perception of diversity and inclusiveness by offering a “variety of different training just about diversity, including individual disabilities.

Service

Growth and Goals

Future growth and obtaining goals is highly dependent on infrastructure, funding, and in-

creased employment. One interviewee from Boys and Girls Club asserts that they are in “*growth mode.*” Another interviewee from BGC expanded on the former's comments by explaining that:

“We plan on expanding the building physically because there's a large lot out front which is taking up small portions and small portions are taken up by our playground...That will not only increase our capacity for staffing and the incentive to attract more staff, but also to serve more youths.”

The Youth Policy Institute also provide a lot of education resources to youth and more opportunities to secure employment.

Funding

Each of the nonprofit organizations expressed the notion that funding was a barrier and main long term goal. One interviewee from BGC stressed that their only barrier in expanding BGC was funding, stating:

“That's the biggest barrier, is being able to find the support to be able to hire the staff to be able to make the impact.”

The major reasons for increased funding were primarily for an increase in resources, infrastructure, and building. The Youth Policy Institute insists on a strong need for more funding, affirming:

“We do see a great need is support with funding into areas, more money to support youths to access short term vocational training programs because we do feel, for example, helping someone get a job...potentially having that certification training may allow that individual to have a higher minimum wage if you will, that may ultimately lead to self sufficiency.”

Discussion Points



- ⇒ Need to prioritize women within leadership roles
- ⇒ Need to reach out to underrepresented populations, specifically, Black women.
- ⇒ Recruitment of Black women is a reoccurring hurdle
- ⇒ Difficulty with outreach and lack of focus on community representation
- ⇒ Black churches can become a high focus target area for outreach and recruitment
- ⇒ Strengthen the methods of contact in recruitment, rather than ignoring the inclusion of other people of color
- ⇒ Quotas can act as a useful tool to hiring more women of color in leadership roles
- ⇒ Encouragement in achieving higher goals and increasing employment assets
- ⇒ Life, work, and communication skills can all contribute to upward mobility
- ⇒ Staying supportive of continuous education for your underrepresented staff
- ⇒ Shape employee perceptions of diversity and inclusiveness through trainings and in-service training
- ⇒ Restrictive federal plans limit the expansion of vocational training programs that benefit underrepresented youth
- ⇒ Funding continues to be identified as the biggest barrier to inclusive workforce recruitment for women of color, particular Black women

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