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United We Stand: A Case Study about Increasing Equity in the Capacity Building Grant Funding Process for United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg

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by

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Abstract

UNITED WE STAND: A CASE STUDY ABOUT INCREASING EQUITY IN THE CAPACITY BUILDING GRANT FUNDING PROCESS FOR UNITED WAY OF GREATER RICHMOND AND PETERSBURG

By: Katherine Gayle Hansen, Ed.D., Heather Dawn Sadowski, Ed.D., and Martha Carson Tomlin, Ed.D.

A dissertation-in-practice submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2023.

Chair: Beth E. Bukoski, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership

In response to a problem of practice presented by the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg, this case study addresses equity in the grant funding and capacity development processes and how small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit organizations in one Virginia region are affected. Through the lens of Systems Informed Positive Psychology (SIPP), a convergent mixed-methods approach was used to holistically explore the challenges and needs that these particular nonprofits face. Data was obtained through community conversations which included focus groups, individual interviews, and an online questionnaire coupled with Shumate et al.'s (2017) Nonprofit Capacities Instrument, a validated 45-item survey that provides a benchmark in eight different interrelated dimensions of organizational capacity based on the self-report of participants. We found that these organizations are collectively encountering widespread structural and systemic racism, bureaucratic complexity, and a lack of access to resources as well as relational gaps between themselves and funding agencies. As a result of these challenges, they require change in the historical system, practices, and processes of local philanthropic entities along with open and transparent communication between funders and grantees in conjunction with the cultivation of trust-based relationships which support community resiliency through a humanist commitment. Such findings demonstrate the need for the co-creation of an egalitarian and equitable grant funding model between grantor and grantees utilizing the tenets of a more equitably evolved Collective Impact Framework. Findings from our study also raise empirical, practical, and theoretical implications that warrant future consideration particularly regarding the lack of attention and cultural understanding given to minority-led nonprofit organizations and the trauma-informed care which is needed to support them in serving their communities. Findings also indicate that there is a significant opportunity for the philanthropic sector to mirror recent advancements in education and become more community- and human-centered in the structures, processes, and decisions that are made, which requires systemic change.

keywords: equitable systems, equitable practice, grant funding, nonprofit capacity, trust-based philanthropy, systems informed positive psychology, collective impact, humanism, trauma informed care, co-creation, coherence, systemic racism, open communication, United Way, minority-led

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Chapter 1. Introduction

There is a widening wealth gap between the haves and the have-nots in the United States (DiPrete & Eirich, 2006; Sánchez & Rodríguez et al., 2019; Tzoc & Johnson, 2021). Researchers are sounding the alarm to the fact that income inequality is rapidly increasing while "social mobility is steadily decreasing" (Tzoc & Johnson, 2021, p. 335). In fact, according to DiPrete and Eirich (2006), cumulative advantage theory indicates that the detrimental effects on those without systemic privilege compound exponentially. Moreover, Sánchez-Rodríguez et al. (2019) point out how the numerous effects caused by this polarizing situation heavily influence the outcomes for those living in this reality and produce an increasing social distance between individuals and groups. They describe how inequality "leads people to behave more competitively and less cooperatively," which causes them to become more individualistic (p. 1115).

In addition, research (e.g., Drobot, 2021; Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004; Santos et al., 2017) suggests that individualism has been steadily increasing throughout the world in recent years due to such factors as globalization and modernization, which is resulting in this ideology becoming more normative and widely accepted. In their article about the current state of polarization in the United States, social psychologists Heltzel and Laurin (2020) describe how this divaricating occurrence has reached new heights in recent years resulting in "suboptimal, oft-overturned policies that inadequately address societal problems," particularly when it comes to equity issues of communities marginalized because of race and need (pp. 180–181). Thus, America is finding itself in an ever-increasing position of discord and disconnection between members of its society with more and more dire community issues needing to be solved.

From the murder of George Floyd to the January 6th Capitol riots; small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits are responding to social injustices, such as these, with a 'boots on the ground' approach to addressing systemic racism. The impact of these organizations, juxtaposed with the funding (or lack thereof) they receive, leads to a need to focus on intentional equitable funding practices within the nonprofit sphere. According to Tzoc and Johnson (2021), however, all is not lost. They claim that "there is hope if systems of disadvantage can be interrupted and reformed in multiple sectors of American culture and society over the life course [whereby] gains in one arena can most certainly translate into others" (p. 341). Phillips (2021) declares that community development—which is about improving the living conditions in any and all realms of an area's residents— is the catalyst for change and describes how interest in this work is growing in response to increased attention to systemic inequity and inequality. They cite scholars (e.g., Mae Shaw and Marjorie Mayo) who declare that "community development is being rediscovered as a supposedly cost-effective intervention for dealing with the social consequences of global restructuring" (p. 246). They also lay down a challenge to American society "to lift up lessons from those places where equity, growth, and community have come together— and to do so in a manner that helps inform a new national conversation about how to secure prosperity, promote inclusion, and reweave a tattered social fabric" (p. 250). This formidable task is not for the faint-of-heart and requires a special combination of skills, resources, expertise, and societal standing.

Taking up this challenge and leading the way in the United States and beyond is the United Way, who has recognized the urgency of the situation and is committed to galvanizing efforts in order to "fight for equity and strive to create communities where everyone has the resources, opportunities, and support they need to thrive" (Fortune & Moon, 2020, p. 2). During their 106-year existence, United Way Worldwide has engaged with over 1,800 communities; and the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg in particular, is active in 11 localities of the Richmond/Petersburg area to provide direct services and support (United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg, 2021, unpaged). Further, the United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg (2021) has identified specific issues germane to their area and has sought assistance from the researchers of this study to bring scholarly evidence and data to systematically understand the problems they face and fulfill their mission "to empower individuals and address systemic problems to provide everyone with a clear path to success" (unpaged).

Research Overview

In addition to the societal wealth differential, scholars and practitioners (e.g., Chan & Fischer, 2016a; Dorsey et al., 2020; Justice Funders & The Resonance Collaborative, 2022; and Ranghelli et al., 2018) have identified another gap—that which is between funding agencies and nonprofits needing funding, particularly when it comes those who are small, emergent, grassroots, and minority-led. This chasm has been recognized in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area calling attention to the need for the nonprofits not currently being supported by United Way to be identified and connected with in order to understand their organizational needs, expand an equitable funding model to foster their growth, and empower capacity building. Combined, these steps can create a significant impact throughout the region.

Problem of Practice

Together with representatives from United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg (UWGRP), our research team has co-constructed a problem of practice in order to take action and guide efforts in moving forward. We have further conducted an extensive literature review that has provided insights into historical structural inequity of grant awards. We utilized the works from the aforementioned scholars and practitioners to compose the problem of practice which is provided in its entirety as follows:

> Historical structural inequity of grant awards has disproportionately funded traditional, established, large, majority White-led organizations. Systemic racism and the current social unrest highlight social injustices, which leads to a need to focus on intentional equitable funding practices within the nonprofit sphere. Small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits are rising to the challenge of addressing current events and issues, yet those organizations may not have the funding, knowledge, or skills that traditional, established, large, majority White-led organizations have. A gap exists between funding organizations and nonprofits needing funding. Therefore, attention to small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area is necessary to identify organizations within the catchment area who are not currently being supported by United Way, connect with them to understand their organizational needs, expand an equitable funding model to foster growth, and empower capacity building. Combined, these steps will create a significant impact throughout the region.

We proposed that in order to combat this inequity; it is beneficial to evaluate the UWGRP funding process, hear from and listen to the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits who may benefit from additional funding, learn from such communities, and provide our findings and recommendations to the UWGRP as they endeavor to develop a process of equitable grant funding. It is our aspiration that what emerges from our recommendations is a tangible path forward that builds a bridge between UWGRP and the community organizations they are seeking to serve.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to engage the community of small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit organizations in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area in order to connect with them and understand their experiences in obtaining equitable grant funding and capacity building support. To accomplish this goal, we sought to answer the following research questions.

For small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit organizations in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area,

Q_1 How do they describe their grant funding needs?

Q_2 How do they participate in grant funding opportunities? What challenges do they describe in applying for and obtaining grant funding?

Q_3 What do they identify as their capacity building needs?

Research Design

We reviewed the literature to determine how existing research has addressed the following questions:

Q_1 What collaborative models are most effective for collective community impact?

Q_2 What evidence-based models and processes exist for equitable grant funding in the nonprofit sector?

Q_3 What practices have proven successful in implementing inclusivity, particularly in the application review process?

After reviewing the literature, a case study was completed to collect data, draw conclusions, share findings, and provide recommendations for implementing a new practice. The case study took place within the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg catchment area with a plan to engage with the small, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit organizations in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area through focus groups and a survey.

Significance of Study

The ultimate goal of the case study was to provide the UWGRP with recommendations for funding and capacity building based on the lived experiences of small, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit organizations in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area who have been underfunded by grant allocations in the past. We, and our partners from the UWGRP, acknowledged a collective purpose to lead and create a significant impact throughout the region with regards to equitable grant funding and allocations. We anticipated that this case study has the potential to serve as an equitable funding blueprint not only for the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg, but also for United Way chapters across the United States and beyond.

Terminology

Capacity building - Opportunities provided to agencies to increase social capacity, expand reach, and expand impact within their community (United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg, 2021).

Catchment area - A location in which a population inhabits that utilizes institutional resources and profitable “opportunities” (Catchment area, 2022).

Collective impact - The overall effect of organizations from “different sectors” coming together to address specific issues that influence community development (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

Community conversations - Informative focus groups, interviews, and an online questionnaire (Google Form) that captured the valuable voices of nonprofit community trailblazers in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg United Way catchment area.

Emergent organization - An organization that voluntarily forms and exists and may not yet have all the resources and strategies needed for sustainability (Randell & MacDavey, 2020).

Grass-roots organization - An organization that is primarily made up of civilians advocating a cause (Endo Inouye et al., 2012).

Homophily - A connection between similar people that occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people (McPherson et al., 2001).

Minority-led organization - An organization that is led by a race, culture, religion, or another other category of people distinguished by either physical or cultural difference that a society has subordinated (Endo Inouye et al., 2012).

Qualtrics - A reputable digital survey platform used to collect and analyze data.

Needs assessment - An approach to change that examines gaps and needs in order to reach a desired outcome (Altschuld et al., 2014).

Small organization - An organization within the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg catchment area with an income of less than $25,000 (United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg, 2021).

Transformative Needs Assessment with Marginalized Communities (TNAMC) - An action-oriented approach to change that combines a needs assessment and a strategic plan within a marginalized community (Sankofa, 2021).

United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg (UWGRP) - Worldwide branch and nonprofit organization that provides direct services and support to partners in 11 localities in the Richmond/Petersburg area (United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg, 2021).

Summary of Chapter 1

Within this chapter, research has pointed to the findings that small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits are responding to social injustices, gaps in community needs, and programming across the nation, yet may not have all the necessary resources. The UWGRP is seeking recommendations for an equitable model for capacity building funding based on the lived experiences of small, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit organizations in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area. Many of these nonprofits have been underfunded by grant allocations in the past. The UWGRP observes this underfunding and strives to create a more equitable grand funding and allocation process that will have a significant impact throughout the region.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The overall purpose of this literature review was to locate evidence to support the phenomena experienced by nonprofit funding organizations working to provide equitable collective impact to their area. We sought to understand what collaborative models are most effective for community impact; what evidence-based models and processes exist for equitable grant funding in the nonprofit sector; and what practices have proven successful in implementing inclusivity, particularly in the application review process. Our systematic review of the literature as described by Snyder (2019) "[identifies and critically appraises] relevant research, as well as [collects and analyzes] data from said research" (p. 334). It includes academic literature and applied research in addition to program publications and case studies that describe evidence-based models and practices for community collaboration and equitable grant funding.

We utilized Google, Google Scholar, and the academic scholarly search engines from the Virginia Commonwealth University library, which include JSTOR, ProQuest, SAGE, and ERIC. We concentrated our search efforts on sources from 2000 to 2022. The terms that we used to focus our search were "nonprofit development/organizational development", "change strategies/change agents/cultivating change", "marginalized communities", "community needs assessment", "community networking", "community engagement", "equity in grant funding", "inclusive application review", "nonprofit/grassroots organization funding", and "equitable collective impact". We identified more than 150 resources comprised of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations, and industry reports; and using the generally accepted review matrix method, we compiled details about our sources such as foundational theories, methodologies, and findings (Goldman & Schmalz, 2004; Klopper et al., 2007). We then identified relationships between previously disparate elements in order to determine themes and reach conclusions.

We begin broadly by introducing a framework for collective impact implementation and examining its merits as a methodology for community collaboration, both in general and within the United Way organization. We then present the prevailing critiques that have been raised about it and how the framework has evolved through the efforts of dedicated scholars and practitioners around the world. More specifically, we home in on how the framework has been modified by its creators and other collective impact scholars and practitioners to become more equitable through the addition of various evidence-based methods and actionable inclusive practices. We identify a number of equitable practices pertinent to our current problem of practice at hand and contextualize them by sharing empirical cases and examples that can be used as potential models for formulating an equitable collective impact funding and capacity building strategy for nonprofit organizations.

Collective Impact

Inspirational icon, Helen Keller, is well-known for the saying that alone we can do so little while together we can do so much. Improving our communities and making them spaces where members feel safe, supported, included, and healthy is no small feat—and no one entity can do it alone. To truly make a difference and enact meaningful change for the good of a community, multiple organizations must bring together their various talents, resources, and diverse perspectives to enact solutions that benefit all. This act of people coming together to address issues that matter to them is more formally known as community organization or community development, with various methodologies and approaches having been documented to effect change for nearly a century (Phillips, 2021, p. 246). What all of these efforts have in common is that they seek to produce outcomes that have an impact in their community, collectively.

The Collective Impact Framework

Collective Impact was born in 2011 when two researchers, John Kania and Mark Kramer, published an article about their nascent conceptual framework in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* based on their experience working with a variety of clients from around the world to address large-scale societal issues from a systems perspective (Ennis & Tofa, 2020; Kania et al., 2022; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Weaver & Cabaj, 2019; Wolff, 2016). Their practical strategies for collaborative change quickly proliferated throughout the social sector and beyond (Christens & Inzeo, 2015; Kania et al., 2022; Klaus & Weaver, 2019; Walzer & Weaver, 2019) with a reception that has been described as "electric" (Weaver & Cabaj, 2019, p. 97). According to Kania and Kramer themselves, their original article became "the most downloaded article in the magazine's history [with] more than one million downloads and 2,400 academic citations" (Kania et al., 2022, p. 12). Klaus and Weaver (2019) attribute Kania and Kramer's success to the fact that their work "seemed to speak directly to many practitioners and funders eager for immediate, profound, and long-term social change" (p. 177). Moreover, the framework's results have been independently proven to be effective and meaningfully contribute to equitable change efforts at scale (Kania et al., 2022; Lynn, 2018; Yawson et al., 2020).

Originally, Kania and Kramer (2011) defined collective impact as "the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem" (p. 36). They then expanded this definition to include "five conditions that together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support organizations" (Yawson et al., 2020, p. 4) as depicted in Figure 1 (Kania & Kramer, 2013). In short, the collective impact framework identifies the commonalities that all complex change efforts face and provides these simple rules to follow, which easily align with other collaborative and comprehensive community change approaches (Christens & Inzeo, 2015; Somekh et al., 2019; Yawson et al., 2020).

Figure 1

The Five Conditions of Collective Impact

The Five Conditions of Collective Impact	
Common Agenda	All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
Shared Measurement	Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
Continuous Communication	Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
Backbone Support	Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

Note. From "Embracing Emergence: How Collective Impact Addresses Complexity" by J. Kania and M. Kramer, 2013 (https://assets.neindiana.com/resources/embracing-emergence-how-collective-impact-addresses-complexity.pdf). *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, p. 1.

Collective Impact at United Way

Since the 2011 inception of what is termed collective impact, United Way has been instrumental in the proliferation and success of this framework throughout the world. In a 2022 article for *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Fortune et al.) and subsequent podcast with the *Collective Impact Forum*, United Way leaders from across the United States share how prevalent collective impact has become within the fabric of the organization. As interim Senior Vice President for Impact at United Way Worldwide, Ayeola Fortune, highlights, “We’ve been working to advance positive community change for decades now and we have increasingly focused our network on impact, namely, how we deliver tangible results to improve lives and address underlying community conditions” (Timmons-Gray, 2022, unpaged). They go on to explain how using the collective impact framework has provided their organizational structure, which covers all 50 American states and 40 additional countries across the globe, with a unified approach and common language from which to work solving complex societal challenges while improving individual local communities.

Three United Way organizations, in particular, have wholeheartedly embraced collective impact, using its tenets to move away from being solely a grant funder. Instead, they have redesigned their role in the community to become a collaborative partner with the organizations they support by sharing ownership and accountability through a much different resource distribution model that is intended to drive systemic change. These leaders explain that while this shift means that United Ways must relinquish some of their power and remove themselves from being the central focal point for producing outcomes, applying a collective impact approach with a systems-change lens allows for equitable solutions that can be applied across an entire community rather than just disparate pockets. Through meaningful engagement and intentional diversity inclusion efforts, the United Way locations who have embraced collective impact are now recognized as drivers of community impact rather than just money collectors. Vice President of Education and Impact at the United Way of Greater Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania, Jill Pereira, explains that “the collective impact framework allowed us to really think about this organic way of organizing and accelerating community-driven solutions to address complex social needs" (Timmons-Gray, 2022, unpaged). They offer a compelling example of how the switch to collective impact has resulted in elevating the voices of small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led organizations and fostering dialogue to allow truth to be spoken to the historically White-led organization of power. They also emphasized how important it is as a longstanding funder to "be open to change and willing to operate differently" (Timmons-Gray, 2022, unpaged).

Bill Crim, president and CEO of United Way of Salt Lake, concurs with this sentiment and offers a poignant example of why and how their organization needed to change their funding model to be more inclusive. When speaking with a community partner at the beginning of their collective impact work and asking them to make a long-term commitment with United Way to reduce poverty in their area, the response given was eye-opening:

> We like you but we don't trust you. Your grant process changes every couple of years. Your priorities change every couple of years or at least the way you frame RFPs and grant requirements. You evaluate our grant proposals in isolation from each other. You have volunteers with little or no experience evaluating those grant proposals and with little or no connection to the specific communities where you're suggesting we do this work. You're asking us to do this, but you have to change first. We might come along with you but you're going to have to change first. If you want us to make a long-term commitment, you've got to make that commitment. (Timmons-Gray, 2022, unpaged)

From that point forward, the United Way of Salt Lake never had another request for proposal (RFP) or grant process. They completely redesigned how they operated and are now recognized in their community as not just a funder but as an organization that builds community partnerships and supports equitable collective impact. What this effort takes is best exemplified by Ayeola

Fortune when they say what is needed:

> Really listening to people and being open even when you were being challenged in some of what you were putting out in the community and sort of centering voices that are not usually part of—not usually heard. Then I also think about bringing in who you're building the capacity in your partnerships, in your strategic resource investment, and making sure that you are resourcing the right efforts, and that you're bringing BIPOC leaders into that. (Timmons-Gray, 2022, unpaged)

The overall benefit of focusing organizational practice on the collective impact framework that Bill Crim attests to is that from their experience using it wholeheartedly, it works and makes a difference far more than the use of collaboration alone.

Critique of the Collective Impact Framework

Despite its meteoric rise, the collective impact framework has not been without its detractors. As with any new framework, Walzer and Weaver (2019) point out that "criticisms are part of a natural development process for a technique or approach as it grows and matures with experience and usage" (p. 14). Fortunately, the collective impact framework has been malleable enough to allow for its evolution and numerous researchers, scholars, and practitioners offer multiple ways in which the major objections to the collective impact framework can be tackled and overcome through modifications, thus bringing the methodology to a more advanced state. The primary criticisms of the original collective impact framework found in literature are concentrated in four main areas—the quality of its research, the extent to which community participation in collective impact initiatives occurs, the effectiveness of shared measurement, and equity issues.

Quality Research. A significant amount of debate in the literature about collective impact has been dedicated to the question of its framework's rigor with regards to academic research. Staunch critic, coalition building and community development expert, Tom Wolff, published a far-reaching editorial article in 2016 that raised ten issues and concerns regarding the collective impact framework. In their critique, they pointedly argue that "Collective Impact, as described in Kania and Kramer's initial article, is not based on professional and practitioner literature or the experience of the thousands of coalitions that preceded their 2011 article" (p. 4). Many other scholars (Ennis & Tofa, 2020; Klaus & Weaver, 2019; Korth & Meinen, 2019; Mayan et al., 2020; Wolff et al., 2016) agree that more empirical investigations and evaluations of peer-reviewed academic research regarding the collective impact framework have been needed to help further its acceptance as a legitimate tool.

Others, such as Mayan et al. (2020), question whether collective impact is indeed a framework or not and from their qualitative study of collective impact practitioners from across North America, Europe, and Australia; they found that respondents had differing opinions. They describe how collective impact (CI) falls along a continuum in the minds of practitioners whereby, "CI is defined as a 'model' on one end of the continuum, a 'framework' in the middle, and a 'tool' on the other end" (p. 521). Even Kania and Kramer themselves candidly acknowledge that their original framework was intended as more of a theory rather than a well-proven, evidence-based formula (Kania & Kramer, 2016; Klaus & Weaver; 2019). As Klaus and Weaver (2019) learned in their research about the inception of Kania and Kramer's collective impact work:

> Their intent was to offer inspiration and practical guidance to those engaged in funding and leading social change. They assumed that the concept would continue to evolve through practice, and were not proposing a final and comprehensive theoretical

framework that met the rigorous standards of academic scholarship. (p. 179)

However, Klaus and Weaver (2019) posit that a potential reason why the validity of collective impact as research has come into question is that it aligns more with action research, which is an often challenged but widely accepted and valid research method (Checkland & Holwell, 1998; Eikeland, 2006; McTaggart, 1998). Moreover, as the collective impact framework has continued to remain relevant and grow in its use by organizations seeking to effect meaningful change, Walzer and Weaver (2019) point out that collective impact "has gained status in the scholarly literature [and] there is sufficient research to assess its main strengths and weaknesses" (pp. 2–3). Therefore, as Klaus and Weaver (2019) suggest, there is ample opportunity "for community development practitioners and researchers to contribute to an expanded understanding of the CI framework" (p. 184). Practitioners from Mayan et al.'s (2019) study agree. Their qualitative data showed that "despite varied definitions of and support for CI, participants believed that CI is indeed worth practicing" (p. 521). It can thus be concluded that the collective impact framework has evolved to the point where it has become more widely accepted by the academic research community as a sound instrument worthy of use.

Community Engagement. A second major criticism of the initial collective impact framework is that it utilizes corporate practices and operates from a top-down approach rather than with bottom-up, grassroots efforts. As Somekh et al. (2019) elaborate on Wolff's aforementioned critique, collective impact "does not explicitly stress the central role of meaningfully engaging community members, especially those in the community most affected by the issues, in the success of CI efforts" (p. 157). Bradbrook (2019) cautions that the framework "lacks democratic processes and has, potentially, a democratic deficit" but offers six practical theories to help those undertaking collective impact improve their practice and better engage their communities (p. 31). Integral to the success of community engagement that Bradbrook (2019) and others (DuBow et al., 2018; Kania et al., 2022; Kegler et al., 2019; Klaus & Weaver, 2019; Lynn, 2018; Mayan et al., 2019; Schwartz et al, 2019; Stiver, 2019; Weaver & Cabaj, 2019; Wolff et al., 2016) stress is that it is a must that end-users not just be asked for their feedback after collective impact initiatives have been enacted. Instead, they should be invited and incorporated into the process from the beginning as equal co-creators of the strategies, plans, and actions that will take place on their behalf. Bradbrook (2019) explains that "the importance of embedding community engagement and participation in the structure of CI is to help address the power imbalance between decision makers who develop responses to problems, those who allocate and distribute resources, and end-users in the system" (p. 19). As a result, by centering the communities being served as equal partners in decision-making, processes and policies will inevitably change. Historical ways of allocating grants and distributing funds will be dropped in exchange for promoting shared aspirations and curtailing divisive competition.

Shared Measurement. Another critique frequently found in the literature is that of shared measurement. In Kania and Kramer's (2011) five dimensions, they stress that having a shared measurement system among collective impact partners is a necessary component for success. In practice, developing shared measures among multiple organizations from various sectors produces a level of complexity that is often challenging to execute and manage. Other critics decry that shared measurement creates barriers to "creative and strategic thinking" from diverse perspectives in the interest of consensus, thus stifling social action (Schwartz et al., 2019, p. 127). In response to these concerns, researchers (Cabaj, 2017; Kania et al., 2022; Klaus & Weaver; 2019; Schwartz et al., 2019; Weaver & Cabaj, 2019) recommend taking a systems approach to collective impact work. Weaver and Cabaj (2019) highlight that "one of the most significant insights gained over the past few years is that CI participants have more success with shared measurement if it is treated as one part of a larger system of learning and evaluation" (p. 106). Even Kania and Kramer "recognize that collective impact has lasting effectiveness only if it is focused on changing underlying systems, not just adding new programs or services" (Kania et al., 2022, p. 40).

Just as the research component of the collective impact framework was intended and continues to evolve, so does the shared measurement piece. Cabaj (2017) writes, "Collective Impact (CI) advocates and participants are busily developing shared measurement systems and practices through a process of trial and error" (p. 2). In their recent reflections on the past decade of collective impact work, Kania and Kramer stress, "As collective impact efforts seek to shift systems, they must also adapt measurement, evaluation, and learning to track and learn from changes in these systems, in addition to changes in individual outcomes" (Kania et al., 2022, p. 43). They also emphasize the exigency to address power dynamics and relationship building within a system, especially if strategies and initiatives are being developed where the voices of the marginalized have been silenced and their powers of self-efficacy have been stripped.

Ways in which shared measurement using a systems approach can be improved are offered by various scholar practitioners. Weaver and Cabaj (2019) recommend decentralizing program design responsibility and allow for broad outcomes within a flexible framework as opposed to holding individual stakeholders to more rigid requirements. Korth & Meinen (2019) promote the practice of collaborative grant writing by community partners who would previously see each other as competitors when seeking funding in order to develop mutually-reinforcing practices and measures. Cabaj (2017) identifies five areas that should be considered regarding shared measurement along with practical examples to help practitioners with their application.

They also describe how the United Way of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania embraced collective impact and created "one of the most coherent evaluation and measurement systems for an early stage group that [they] have ever seen," which is a significant example that is worth noting (p. 15).

Equity and Inclusivity. A fourth criticism of the original collective impact framework that has been alluded to when discussing both shared measurement and community engagement is the omission of equitable practice in its design (Kania et al., 2022; Klaus & Weaver, 2019; Mayan et al., 2019; Walzer & Weaver, 2019; Weaver & Cabaj, 2019; Wolff, 2016; Wolff et al., 2016). As Klaus and Weaver (2019) point out, "One observed that the original Collective Impact framework failed to put sufficient focus on equity and the role of community voice" (p. 183). Wolff (2016), however, gets specific when they write,

> Collaborative efforts then must mobilize to address these issues which can be difficult to do in top-down collaboratives; those with the most power and privilege dominate and control top-down coalitions and often have interest in maintaining their privilege and the status quo. Collective Impact is a great tool for those who already have power, but it is less suitable and more challenging for those with relatively little power who are working to improve the lives of people and their communities. (p. 4)

Wolff's direct assessment put the collective impact architects on notice and Kania and Kramer took the necessary time to reflect and revise, particularly when it came to equity and inclusivity. In a 2022 article for the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, they now declare that "a decade of applying the collective impact approach to address social problems has taught us that equity is central to the work" (p. 39). So strongly do they feel about this premise that they have completely redefined collective impact. Their new definition reads, "Collective impact is a network of community members, organizations, and institutions that advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems-level change" (p. 39).

Kania and Kramer (2022) offer a selection of specific actions that they recommend everyone who engages in collective impact efforts must commit to in order to center equity. They also provide five strategies that they have culled from their work with collective impact efforts throughout the world—"(1) ground the work in data and context, and target solutions; (2) focus on systems change, in addition to programs and services; (3) shift power within the collaborative; (4) listen to and act with community; and (5) build equity leadership and accountability" (p. 41). Additionally, more and more scholars and practitioners have committed to engaging in furthering the advancement of collective impact equity and inclusivity practices. In their mixed methods study of 25 collective impact initiatives across the United States, Lynn (2018) writes,

> Equity is a growing concern for collective impact initiatives—with the assumption that lasting and meaningful change is much more difficult or impossible to achieve without explicitly addressing the systemic barriers that keep some groups from being successful. Without an intentional focus on equity, persistent gaps in outcomes and opportunities will persist. (p. 79)

Therefore, there is consensus that equity and inclusivity must be at the heart of collective impact initiatives with serious efforts being dedicated to addressing power differentials and systemic change.

Evolution of the Collective Impact Framework

Critiques of the collective impact framework have not fallen upon deaf ears. As Weaver and Cabaj (2019) describe, the originators of the framework and its numerous supporters have not stopped working to augment the initial five conditions with additional principles, strategies, and practices. In fact, an online community named *The Collective Impact Forum* was created by Kania and Kramer's nonprofit consulting organization, FSG, to coalesce scholars and practitioners into a community of practice and provide resources in order to assist in advancing collective impact work (Collective Impact Forum, 2022). Two "upgrades" in particular have emerged from the collective work that can serve as models for those organizations wishing to engage in collective impact initiatives but avoid the pitfalls that have been raised by its critics (Weaver & Cabaj, 2019, p. 99).

Collective Impact Principles of Practice. In "response to critiques about engaging citizen voice, advancing Collective Impact through an equity lens and ensuring that the collection effort effectively reflects the community context" (Weaver & Cabaj, 2019, p. 98), The Collective Impact Forum developed and published eight recommended principles of practice delineated in Figure 2 which Lynn (2018) stresses "are increasingly recognized as important to achieving population change" (pp. 16–17). These principles came about through a partnership of collective impact practitioners from eight organizations, one of which was United Way Worldwide (Collective Impact Forum, 2016). In introducing these principles, the authors of the document acknowledge how putting collective impact into practice, and understanding all that is entailed, is a continual process that is constantly evolving. And while they acknowledge that the foundational five conditions of the collective impact framework offer many benefits for tackling large-scale issues, they also stress that they are insufficient.

Figure 2

Eight Principles of Practice

Note. From "When Collective Impact Has an Impact: A Cross-Site Study of 25 Collective Impact Initiatives" by J. Lynn, 2018, *Spark Policy Institute & ORS Impact*. doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.23085.13284, p. 17. Copyright 2018 by Spark Policy Institute of Denver, CO and ORS Impact of Seattle, WA.

The Collective Impact Forum recommends that the eight principles of practice be applied in concert with the five conditions in order to achieve lasting and meaningful change. As a result, Weaver and Cabaj (2019) explain that collective impact will then "[advance] through an equity lens and [ensure] that the collective effort effectively reflects the community context" (p. 98). As with other efforts, two of the authors who shared the principles, Brady and Splansky Juster (2016), emphasize that implementing these principles is not the endgame and they anticipate further growth and expansion as practitioners evaluate their application and communicate their experiences.

Collective Impact 3.0 Framework. In a similar vein to the eight principles, Weaver and Cabaj (2019) describe how seasoned change agents at the Tamarack Institute, an organization dedicated to furthering collective impact, also sought to expand its tenets more broadly and deeply in order to combat the limitations of the original framework. In what they call Collective Impact 3.0, the innovators propose that instead of the initial five conditions being focused on a management leadership paradigm like they had been up to that point, they should be reframed and carried out through the lens of movement building. As can be seen in Figure 3 from Weaver and Cabaj (2019), the authors of Collective Impact 3.0 first insist that community be centered within the change process and continuous communication be replaced with authentic community engagement so that the individuals most affected by collective impact initiatives can fully participate in their design and execution.

Figure 3

Collective Impact 3.0 Framework

From	To
The Leadership Paradigm	
Management	Movement Building
The Five Conditions	
Common Agenda	Community Aspiration
Shared Measurement	Strategic Learning
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	High Leverage Activities
Continuous Communication	Inclusive Community Engagement
Backbone	Containers for Change

Note: From "Collective Impact 3.0: Extending the Collective Impact Vision for Community Change in N. Walzer & L. Weaver (Eds.) Using Collective Impact to Bring Community Change" by L. Weaver and M. Cabaj, 2019, *Routledge, an imprint of Taylor and Francis*. https://doi-org.proxy.library.vcu.edu/10.4324/9781315545073, p. 101. Copyright 2019 by Taylor & Francis.

Second, Weaver and Cabaj (2019) write that a common agenda should be changed to shared aspiration in order to acknowledge differing perspectives and allow for "different values, interests, and positions" rather than placing value on conformity (p. 105). Third, when considering shared measurement, an upgrade to strategic learning is recommended because practice has shown that "CI participants have more success with shared measurement if it is treated as one part of a larger system of learning and evaluation" (p. 106). A further suggested change is to move away from mutually reinforcing activities and towards high-leverage activities. The reasons for this switch are that mutually reinforcing activities may cause participants to concentrate their efforts on cooperation rather than results or restrict them from considering alternative or independent ways to reach the mutual target, which may also be in their best interest. Different approaches to a common goal fosters innovation and authors of Collective Impact 3.0 found that when stakeholders of an initiative put the focus on high-level strategies and allow for flexibility among partners to "work as loosely or tightly as the situation requires [and] know when and how to mix cooperation with competition", their efforts are more successful (p. 109). A memorable example of a higher-level strategy for funding organizations that the authors recommend is "to decentralize responsibility for program design to regional and local organizations and hold them accountable for broad—rather than discrete—outcomes" (p. 108). While the authors acknowledge that restructuring responsibilities to be more egalitarian is challenging, they stress that the benefits that can be achieved are well worth the efforts in the long run.

Finally, reimagining backbone support and considering it more as a container for change ensures that the focus of the organization(s) providing the vital and needed support to ground and foster a collective impact initiative is more egalitarian than historical efforts. As Dubow et al.

(2018) explain, the focus of backbone support should be on empowering and supporting the members of a collective impact initiative by providing educational opportunities, fostering trust-building, and facilitating hard conversations. In their qualitative study exploring how a backbone organization can promote the change efforts of a collective impact movement's members, they found that convening collaborative meetings, providing strategic learning, facilitating accountability, contributing visibility and credibility, ensuring top leader involvement, and mentoring as needed proved most effective. Mayan et al. (2019) also stress that effective collective impact partnerships are those that ensure the "whole is given credit for successes rather than individual partners" (p. 519). Weaver and Cabaj (2019) caution that the concept of backbone support has often been misinterpreted and many organizations take on too much responsibility and power which in turn causes "groups and individuals in the CI initiative [to] feel less ownership and responsibility for the change effort" (p. 109). Therefore, to be an effective container for change, those providing backbone support should not only provide participants with a system of protection and support, but also allow for enough dissonance and diversity to move the collective work forward. They emphasize that "creating a container for change is among the most important work done in a CI initiative by CI practitioners and backbone support," and finding the right balance between all of the stakeholders involved is critical to success (p. 110).

Collaborating for Equity and Justice

In their 2016 article, critics Wolff et al. applaud Kania, Kramer, and their colleagues on the work that has been more recently done to address the concerns raised about the collective impact framework. In particular, they acknowledge the Collective Impact 3.0 model and its increased focus on equity and inclusion. They maintain, however, that the 3.0 modifications do not go far enough with regards to social justice. They rather propose "six principles for collaborative practice that promote equity and justice [which] are linked to tools and resources aimed at helping collaborative solutions to succeed" in an online Collaborating for Equity and Justice Toolkit (p. 2). These principles as displayed in Figure 4, provide an additional framework for examining societal disparities (e.g., wealth) and systemic racial injustices. The authors describe their reasoning for utilizing such an approach:

> The principles of Collaborating for Equity and Justice suggest that multisectoral, community-led coalitions explicitly address structural racism, defined as the history and current reality of institutional racism across all institutions, combining to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color. We suggest that collaboratives actively pursue racial justice—which we define as the creation and proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all—particularly for communities of color. (p. 3)

Further, the online toolkit provides practical case studies for each principle to help demonstrate how they can be applied.

Figure 4

Principles for Collaborative Practice

Note. Adapted from "Collaborating for Equity and Justice: Moving Beyond Collective Impact" by T. Wolff, M. Minkler, S. M. Wolfe, B. Berkowitz, L. Bowen, F. D. Butterfoss, B. D. Christens, V. T. Francisco, A. T. Himmelman, and K. S. Lee, 2016, *Nonprofit Quarterly, Winter edition*. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Frances-Butterfoss/publication/314089395_Collaborating_for_Equity_and_Justice_Moving_Beyond_Collective_Impact/links/58b478f045851503bea04ac3/Collaborating-for-Equity-and-Justice-Moving-Beyond-Collective-Impact.pdf, pp. 2–9.

In a 2019 issue of *Health Education & Behavior*, 10 peer-reviewed articles are presented providing a diverse range of community-based examples where organizations are also putting these six principles into practice. In their introductory article for the issue, Kegler et al. (2019) explain how these real-life cases give an insider view on the benefits of collaboration using inclusive practices as well as what challenges organizations may face. They conclude that "power sharing, community organizing, and building the capacity of coalitions to do this work" are the primary strategies that should be used to reduce inequity through collaborative work (p.

6S). They also learned that if those in power positions and community members being served do not start off as equal partners, it is not possible to later restructure in any meaningful way to a relationship where power is shared.

McAfee et al. (2015), in their article *Equity: The Soul of Collective Impact*, also provide numerous examples of equitable actions taken by organizations, but these cases are about practitioners working with the collective impact framework in particular. They offer “six characteristics” displayed in Figure 5 that successful initiatives share (p. 3). The authors go on to address the role of the backbone organization and what they must do to acknowledge structural racism in practice and engage with marginalized communities in order to advocate for their needs and enact meaningful change. In short, they describe ways in which these organizations must embody leadership, courage, discipline, flexibility, and accountability as they seek to enact equitable collective impact in their area.

Figure 5

Characteristics of Equitable Collective Impact Initiatives

Note: Adapted from "Equity: The Soul of Collective Impact" by M. McAfee, A. Glover Blackwell, and J. Bell, 2015, *PolicyLink*. https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/Collective_Impact_10-21-15f_0.pdf, p. 3.

Equitable Practices for Collective Impact

Throughout the literature, researchers and practitioners have begun to identify equitable practices for collective impact that are being carried out and which show promising results. Numerous case studies are being shared and while every context is different, the volume and quality of the majority of those published that have been located by the researchers offer those planning to engage in the practice of equitable collective impact solid models and roadmaps for moving forward.

Funders Openness Practices

One of the founding principles of the collective impact framework is continuous communication. Effective communication requires trusting relationships. In the Collective

Impact Forum's (2018) report *Advancing Funders' Openness Practices: Lessons for the Field from the Collective Impact Funder Action Learning Lab*, the authors submit that the relationship between funders and their beneficiaries is a precarious one wrought with power differentials. They maintain that funders must establish an ongoing practice of openness in order to form and strengthen their relationships with grantees, present and future, as well as community members.

In their 2018 summary report (Collective Impact Forum), the collaborative defined funder openness as

> The process by which funders share their goals and strategies, share how they make decisions and measure progress, listen and engage in dialogue with others, make space for co-creation that builds more community buy-in, act on feedback they hear from current and potential grantees and the community, share what they themselves have learned, and promote sharing between funders and grantees (funder-to-funder, grantee-to-grantee, funder-to-grantee). (p. 4)

Three United Way organizations—United Way of Hancock County, Ohio; United Way of the Greater Triangle, North Carolina; and United Way of the Greater Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania—participated in a community of practice and collective impact funder action learning lab led by the Collective Impact Forum to employ the practice of openness with their grantees. Through this effort, they sought to identify the challenges that funders can face when they embark on such an endeavor, what has worked well in overcoming obstacles, and what tools and resources have proven effective in the establishment of openness.

The group identified five interconnected themes that emerged out of the lessons learned from their action learning projects. These themes—building trust, listening before acting, increasing transparency, building capacity for community engagement, and sustaining openness practices—along with the identified challenges, best practices, tools and resources, and case studies provided; can serve as an excellent blueprint for first steps when embarking upon deliberate efforts to enact an equitable collective impact funding strategy. What is interesting to note is that openness to promote continuous communication also significantly contributes to another foundational condition of collective impact where action should be taken for equity—capacity building. In the article, the authors write, "to strengthen trust in relationships and reap the benefits of partnership, funders should honestly acknowledge the status of existing relationships and invest in the relationships in ways that strengthen them and build the capacity and power of the community" (Collective Impact Forum, 2018, p. 7). Thus, when trust is able to be built between a funder and community organizations as a result of continual open communication, a practice of co-creation between the two can be realized which can lead to successful capacity building.

To illustrate, in their article about how one North Carolina county actively addressed structural racism using the collective impact framework, Hunter and Mpofu (2022) offer tangible tools that were used to promote continuous communication between community members and partners to effect transformative dialogue within their region. The collaborative developed a collective racial equity elevator speech for all to use, adopted the "Affirm, Counter, Transform model" when speaking about race, utilized a style guide to ensure that all used asset-based language in their communications efforts, and trained community members in storytelling—to name a few (Government Alliance on Race and Equity, 2018). Hunter and Mpofu (2022) demonstrate how this diversely represented collective impact team utilized these real communication solutions to build trust and capacity in their community.

Capacity Building

Capacity building is an equally crucial component of the collective impact framework when considering equity. As McAfee et al. (2015) write,

> While successful programs shed light on the prospects and strategies for change, equity challenges collective impact partnerships to develop capacity to make the systems and policy changes and subsequent investments needed to improve lives and opportunities for entire populations. The rich history and practice of change initiatives in low-income communities and communities of color point the way forward. Systems and policy change are integral to advancing racial equity. (p. 6)

In short, organizational capacity "encompasses virtually everything an organization uses to achieve its mission, from desks and chairs to programs and people" (Walters, 2020, p. 11). Chaskin (2001) elaborates on this definition to be more specific and includes four widely accepted factors: "the existence of resources, networks of relationships, leadership, and support for some kind of mechanisms for or processes of participation by community members in collective action and problem solving" (p. 292). Capacity building, as defined by Riad Shams (2016) is generally "a continuous process to develop innovative capacities in socio-economic settings through on-going development and adaptation of strategies and processes that enable higher advantage in collective and individual levels, compared to the prior strategies and processes to enhance socio-economic development" (p. 671). In other words, when an organization does not have the infrastructure, skills, or resources necessary to operate or compete with others in their field, they need to build their capacity.

The term capacity building has oftentimes been used interchangeably with capacity development, but recently the term capacity development is gaining usage as it better describes the field of intervention. Walters (2020) describes capacity as the ability to perform and sustain; and capacity development recognizes that there is no situation in which capacity does not exist. They go on to pose the question of how to close the gap between actual performance and desired performance—that is sustainable through capacity development. To promote successful capacity development, Walters (2020) stresses that the process must be recognized as a complex and human one that involves change. Further, this change involves shifts in power and identity, and is endogenous whereby the main actor must take responsibility for the process.

Examples of building or developing capacity through an equity lens are becoming more widespread as their outcomes become more publicized. Kegler et al. (2019), in their previously-mentioned 10 articles about collaborating for equity and justice, offer four specific cases where organizations have worked to develop the capacity of coalitions focused on this work. The United Way offers myriad examples of recent capacity building initiatives taking place across the United States. Fortune and Moon (2020) highlight three United Way organizations—United Way of Central Carolinas, United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, and United Way of Central Ohio—who have dedicated their efforts to growing the skills and resources of the small, emergent, grassroots, and minority-led nonprofit organizations in their region through partnerships, training, and the restructuring of funding processes, procedures, and requirements. Added to these three examples, United Way's (n.d.) online resources for equity provide even more examples of capacity building in addition to cases focused on other equitable collective impact areas of focus like communications and community engagement.

Community Engagement and Needs Assessment

To create true partnership with grantees, it is important to understand the communities that grantees serve and the issues they are working to solve, which "goes beyond site visits and often requires funders to get out of their comfort zone" (Dorsey et al., 2020, p. 11). Equitable outreach through a community engagement needs assessment requires the desire to focus on the empowerment of communities through access to philanthropic resources for nonprofits that serve and are led by communities of color. To this end, Altschuld et al. (2014) found that needs, especially those of marginalized groups, are laden with sociocultural and political power dynamics. Thus, in order to holistically understand and assess these needs, they must be examined within the context of the environment in which the needs exist. Further, they state that there is a requirement for investigating both the internal (e.g., organizational processes, structures, and culture) and the external (e.g., neighborhood, sociohistorical, and political factors) environment.

Jagosh et al. (2015) describe how involving the community in determining project focus improves design and delivery due to the community's knowledge of their local needs. They point out how a critical step to developing authentic community engagement is to invest the time and effort into building trust and establishing relationships with the community. Further, becoming informed about the community—such as learning about their norms, values, history, and culture prior to initiating any engagement efforts—is another strategy considered essential for program success. Trust building and continual engagement with the community provide an opportunity to dismantle and at least address some of that imbalance. Jagosh et al. (2015) also state that trust is a foundational element of partnership synergy building. It is a commitment to building and maintaining trusting relationships over the long-term that produces an increase of synergy over time, resulting in the longitudinal outcomes that can be seen in terms of sustainability.

The literature has established the importance of community engagement for the implementation success of community-involved programming. The question may arise as to how to produce this engagement. McNeish et al. (2021) suggest that when there is difficulty engaging with community members, one strategy that can be very helpful is partnering with community influencers/champions to assist with engagement. These influencers/champions can be members of the focus population, other community members who have worked or have been invested in the focus population, or partners from community agencies. The influencers/champions can act as a bridge between grantee organizations and the community.

The Transformative Needs Assessment with Marginalized Communities (TNAMC) is another approach used to specifically address the needs within a marginalized community. As described by Sankofa (2021), the TNAMC combines a need assessment and a strategic plan to increase the likelihood of action. They explain how researchers have found that the TNAMC elevates and centers the voice of marginalized target populations while protecting their privacy and confidentiality. Moreover, data is traditionally collected about the target population and often without their input or voice. A TNAMC elevates the marginalized populations' voice as data throughout all phases, contextualizes those data in the power-laden environment to holistically understand the population's perspective, then action strategizes using data that are primarily the voice of the marginalized population (Altschuld et al., 2014). To be succinct, TNAMC has significant implications for social justice.

Specific to the catchment area of the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg, "Richmond has some work to do to foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, but it also has unique momentum", states the LISC Groundwork Initiative in their 2019 Richmond-specific report entitled *Portfolio of Strategies for Strengthening the Local Inclusive Entrepreneurial Ecosystem* (p. 47). The authors of this report go on to state that the economic indicators show a resource and network gap by race while also indicating that various interventions exist to help connect historically disadvantaged individuals and communities to the ecosystem at large. The authors describe how these interventions generally direct attention toward these groups rather than attempt change within the dominant, generally White and upper-class ecosystems. Further, the economic indicators reveal that White entrepreneurs hold the greatest advantages in the ecosystem and the median earnings gap between races is growing, while that between sexes is declining. The authors also discovered in their research that a considerable wealth gap exists between races. For example, the census tracts with the highest rate of White residents also have the highest rates of homeownership, and there are many more White-owned businesses per White resident than African-American/Black-owned businesses per African-American/Black resident. While all groups examined had majority-access to good or promising jobs, African Americans had the highest rate of low-quality jobs. The authors concluded that these numbers show that in various aspects of economic participation, the Richmond ecosystem is increasingly built in a way that allows White entrepreneurs to get ahead.

Equitable Grantmaking Process

If there is any question whether grant money is getting to those who need it, or if there is a discrepancy in how grant funds are distributed, consider what Chan and Fisher (2016a) put forth when they report that in 2013 “less than 7% of grant dollars” went toward ethnic or racial minorities, even though these individuals comprise nearly “40% of the U.S. population” (p. 1). Batten et al. (2020) explain that “because philanthropy is the process by which private wealth is allocated to advance social goals, philanthropy must also grapple with how racism has shaped the ways that wealth has been put to use” and then philanthropy can work to make amends for these embedded practices (p. 6).

Use a Racial Justice Lens. Helfer and Omar (2018) recommend that grantmaking processes be revised using a racial justice lens. This work includes agreeing on racial justice expectations of grantees, as well as accountability measures. They explain that this can be done by establishing ways to surface an applicant's racial justice analysis and strategy through questions on application materials and by collecting and evaluating organizational demographics. Further, they stress that racial equity and inclusion should be not just a goal, but a daily practice. It means continuous reflections on how each of our decisions and actions can perpetuate the same inequities that are trying to be addressed. Race intersects with other marginalized identities; including gender, sexual orientation, and disability, and Helfer & Omar (2018) emphasize the importance of reflecting on all these different intersections in an equitable grantmaking process.

Ultimately, according to Towey and Bertstein (2019), all nonprofit organizations want to "refine their ability to articulate and communicate who they are, how they serve their [communities], how they understand their mission and priorities," and how they secure funds/grants to achieve these goals (p. 311). At the same time, Dorsey et al. (2020) detail how "non-profit organizations led by people of color receive less money than those led by Whites, and philanthropy ends up reinforcing the very social ills it says it is trying to overcome" (p. 1). They explain how these inequities are the result of structural racism that is embedded in our historical, political, cultural, social, and economic systems and institutions. To achieve improvements in the area of social well-being (the stated goal of many philanthropies), Batten et al. (2020) say that it will require us to undo systematic injustice, including examining the way that many organizations have been traditionally funded.

Address Barriers. As described by Chan and Fisher (2016a), the traditional grantmaking process tends to favor organizations that have existing relationships with funders and dedicated development staff, which better position them to garner philanthropic support. They emphasize that this traditional process is not an equitable process. Therefore, in order to move from the traditional model to a more equitable model, they suggest that barriers to equity need to be addressed, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles need to be embedded into the grantmaking process, and the human experience must be centered in the process.

Research presents a number of ways to address barriers, embed DEI, and center the human experience in the grantmaking process in order to be more equitable. First, Dorsey et al. (2020) recommend that barriers to equity in the grantmaking process must be acknowledged in order to address these inherent problems and thus, break down the barriers. They explain that these barriers represent ways that unconscious bias can work its way into the institutional processes—while unintentional they are still damaging. Further, leaders of minority-led nonprofits consistently encounter the same four barriers during the grantmaking process which they identify as

1) getting connected to social networks that enable connections to the philanthropic community;
2) building rapport because of bias, mistrust, and micro-aggressions which create a power imbalance and inhibit relationship building;
3) securing support for communities when funders may not deeply understand the issues facing those communities; and
4) sustaining relationships through the renewal process because there is misalignment on how to measure progress. (p. 6)

Fortunately, Dorsey et al. (2020) offer researched-based ways to address these barriers which include diversifying sourcing pools, embracing humility by dismantling unconscious bias, building a portfolio of a more diverse set of grantees, and considering grantees as partners in order to empower them (pp. 7–11).

Embed DEI Principles in Grantmaking. According to the experts, breaking down barriers will not happen without simultaneously understanding the best practices for incorporating DEI into the grantmaking process. Chan and Fischer (2016a) offer a set of recommendations for embedding DEI principles in grantmaking. These recommendations include:

1) re-evaluating risk tolerance and following up with organizations whose financials raised questions;
2) awarding grants for capacity building, like staff training to have an ongoing impact;
3) making the application process less cumbersome and more accommodating through simplifying/consolidating/streamlining questions;
4) considering compensating certain applicants for applying-up to $50/hour to complete the application; and
5) identifying applicants through multiple channels to broaden the applicant field. (unpaged)

Through the implementation of these recommendations, Chan and Fisher (2016a) explain that funders will be able to ensure they are reaching the full range of vulnerable target populations.

Use a Human-Centered Approach. With these recommendations in mind, Randell and MacDavey (2020) recommend using a human-centered approach when creating a grant funding process. They explain that a human-centered approach “expressly leverages the knowledge, experience, and input of the end user—the person benefiting from a product or service-in order to design potential solutions to social problems" (p. 19). They go on to describe three key phases of the human-centered approach—inspiration, ideation, and implementation—that when adopted, lead to a human-centered, participatory grantmaking process. To elaborate, the inspiration phase as depicted by the authors, “challenges grantmakers to get as close as possible to the lived experiences of the people they are designing for” (pp. 21–22). The ideation phase involves reflecting on what was learned during the inspiration phase, pinpointing possible design solutions, and then starting to test what was identified. Then, implementation takes the ideated solutions to the field in the grant-review process (preparation, timelines, articulating value proposition, communication plan, event planning, evaluation, etc.). Through this process Randell and MacDavey (2020) demonstrate how the grantmaking process becomes participatory and funders are able to do more than just “check the box” resulting in truly getting closer, both literally and figuratively, to the groups they are impacting in the community (p. 29).

Create a Process. When considering all of the elements that go into ensuring that grantmaking is equitable, Chan and Fisher (2016b) emphasize that a tangible process must be created which uses a racial justice lens, identifies barriers, incorporates DEI, and centers the human experience. While there is copious research around the many grantmaking processes, our research indicates that the following four steps culled from Chan and Fisher’s (2016b) checklist provide a basic roadmap for establishing one that is equitable.

1) Grant Application Identification: To achieve a diverse and comprehensive applicant pool, extensive time must be put into soliciting applicants. Community foundations and intermediary organizations working on the grassroots level should be polled to solicit applicants, grantees can recommend organizations to apply, and an open call should be held for all potential applicants.
2) Grant Application Process: To improve the application process, grantees should

consider eliminating written grant applicants and replace the process with site visits and conversations, or shorten the application to make the completion process take less than 10–15 hours. Stipends to applicants to compensate for time spent on the grant is also an idea to make the process more equitable. Applicants should be allowed to submit proposals prepared for other funders or in lieu of an application submit an LOI (letter of intent) to screen potential grantees prior to completing the full application. Smaller organizations may benefit from additional time to complete the application, an offer to review drafts of the application, and clarity to demystify the grant-making selection process.

3) Grant Decision Making: A peer-review process that does not include a scorecard creates a balanced review, along with due-diligence as it relates to biases towards certain organizations, practices, or financials. During the decision-making process, reviewers should communicate directly with applicants if there are questions about their application or if they have honest feedback to provide.
4) Miscellaneous Considerations: Other things to consider in the process of grant-making include having a simple renewal process, an open-door policy, an advisory committee of grantees, board training, unrestricted grants, multi-year grants, and capacity building grants. (pp. 4–10)

To summarize, an equitable grantmaking process will assist in ameliorating systemic inequities by lowering unintentional but harmful barriers that have prevented smaller, underrepresented organizations from effectively entering the philanthropic funding cycle. To do so, the communities that these organizations represent must be included in the grantmaking process from the origin of the philanthropic endeavor and be resourced so that they may compete with more experienced and better staffed organizations. From finding applicants to determining grantees, every step of the grantmaking process must be reimagined if systemic inequities in philanthropic funding are to be addressed.

Inclusive Application Review Process

The processes for holistically soliciting grantees and having an equitable application process can fall short of achieving true equanimity should the process by which applications are reviewed not also be completed through an inclusive and equitable lens. An inclusive application review process for grantors follows a practice that provides equal access to opportunities and resources for organizations who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized. To move towards grant review practices that support inclusion, researchers focus on board composition and training, individuals with lived experiences on the review committee, and homophily.

Examine Board and Committee Composition. In their peer-reviewed article about how nonprofit leadership boards create value for the organizations in which they serve, Hinna and Monteduro (2016) stress that having a diverse makeup of members is necessary due to the complex nature of nonprofit work. The benefits of a heterogenous board that they found in their research include providing "more diverse perspectives, knowledge and expertise [which] can lead to improved decision-making and eventually to improved task performance" (p. 941). In addition, when there is a "differentiation in a group's belief structure, [it] increases the search for information, enhances the probability of change, and produces increased innovation" (p. 942). In their empirical study of 88 nonprofit foundations, the researchers did discover, however, that diversity of board membership alone is not a panacea. The "individual and professional background of board members" must also be taken into account and the two should be considered in concert with one another (p. 956). When considering the grant application review process, Franko et al. (2022) offer some best practice recommendations to ensure inclusivity. They suggest that organizations take the following steps regarding the makeup of their review panel.

1) Make concerted efforts to ensure that diverse experiences and perspectives are represented.
2) Actively include people from underrepresented groups in peer review.
3) Diversify by recruiting former awardees from underrepresented groups and networking within the community applying for grants.
4) Reach out to affinity groups directly using social media.
5) Contact professional societies with special interest groups. (p. 615)

Others, such as de Wit et al. (2018), found that utilizing end-users who have first-hand experience to assess grant proposals from their perspective can offer an additional layer of inclusivity as they represent the target group under consideration. They suggest that standard guides be developed for both the end-user reviewer and the organization along with a standard grant application form.

Conduct Board Training. The application review process is more than just measures of conventional achievement noted on an application, according to Posselt (2014). To truly have a holistic review process, they suggest that it will require new ways of thinking that look not only at the merit of an applicant, but also the diversity they bring—and incentivizing them for that diversity. They also stress that decision makers need to "become more self-critical about their own instincts" (p. 518). Franko et al. (2022) recount how publishers and grantmaking organizations all rely on peer review, but disparities and biases have been documented in the review of both publications and grants. They explain from literature how there are several approaches to reducing bias in peer review, all of which rely on collecting and analyzing demographic data of applicants and awardees to determine whether any populations are underfunded. Once an underfunded population is identified, there are then concrete, actionable steps that funders can take. They also found that reducing bias in peer review by offering anti-bias training to grant reviewers supports an inclusive grant review process. They recommend that organizations encourage or even require such training for their reviewers in order to improve their desired outcomes.

Incorporate Lived Experiences. Lived experiences can also assist with an inclusive application review process. Research from Rittenbach et al. (2019) found that people with lived experiences "are best situated to understand the most impactful questions and gaps in knowledge" (p. 3). In their study to determine best practices for including persons with lived experience in the grant review process, they invited a group of individuals to join a grant process steering committee as valued partners from the initial development of the grants to their final award. The authors learned from this experience how

> Trust is needed between the team members, which may be hard to quantify but is easy to recognize when it is not present. A cornerstone of that trust is a mutual respect for different ways of knowing and interacting. Without that trust, it is difficult to capture the diversity of perspectives. (p. 2)

Further, the authors stress the importance of including people from marginalized communities who have lived experience in the grant review process to guard against power imbalances. They emphasize that "the shared commitment to achieving the common goal must be clear, with members feeling solidarity with each other and experiencing reciprocity" (p. 2). In other words, such shared governance should never be a barrier and only utilized to enhance a process.

The benefits of engaging with people having lived experiences that Rittenbach et al. (2019) uncovered in their study were significant. First, these individuals "can legitimize or add credibility to the research conducted" as well as the process, provided tokenism is avoided and they are allowed to fully participate (p. 2). Second, as long as there is an educated and equity-minded board who will review applicants, those with lived experience of the project by which funds will impact allows for the grantor and the grantee voices to be truly integrated. Further, by including the voice of someone with a lived experience at the table, it can ensure that the project addresses a gap that those with the lived experience view as important. For example, if the project is funded, it will address that gap and improve the community experience. In contrast, parts of the project that are not feasible from the perspective of the people with the lived experience will be called out.

Address Homophily. According to McPherson et al. (2001), homophily is one of the most common explanations for inequitable distribution of resources. They explain that homophily is the principle that "contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (p. 416). In terms of grantmaking, Marquis et al. (2007), expect that homophily will play a role insofar as grantmakers will be most interested in those proposals that best reflect the community norms used by the foundations to determine what is an appropriate application. Further, others (Cantrell et al., 2008; Gautier & Pache, 2015) contend that given homophily, grant proposals from areas which do not share the same community norms of professionalism, but may suffer from more severe problems and greater needs due to the lack of effective interventions or resources, may not win competitive grants because they may not have access to the kinds of professional grant writers or other advice and resources needed to prepare proposals that are consistent with the professional norms. It is the hope that more equity-focused goals and recommendations will ultimately lead to more equitable outcomes. Foster et al. (2009) offer three parameters that impact the grant application review process, and each aspect must be equitable: “1) the source of the funds, 2) the types of decision makers, and 3) the motivations of the decision makers” (p. 35). Recognizing that each of these criteria are like three legs of a stool that should work in accordance with each other can help decision makers ensure that they have a fair and balanced approach to their funding practices.

Summary of Chapter 2

Inclusive practices are taking place in the nonprofit sector throughout the nation and the world. With regards to grantmakers, Dorsey et al. (2020) highlight that some “are incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) statements into their funding processes; some are hosting anti-oppression [board]/staff training; and others are convening leaders of color from the community. And yet, inequities persist” (p. 2). An interview with the former mayor of Minneapolis by McAfee et al. (2015) illustrates the pressing issue:

> Often we would find ourselves in meetings with the top people from our philanthropic institutions and social service agencies, which was a good thing, but the racial make-up of that meeting was often all White or predominately White people trying to solve the problems of communities of color. We had to racially and ethnically expand the table so we could have an authentic conversation about who we are ultimately trying to help, understand the difference and similarities in experiences of an African American youth living on one side of town versus a Somali immigrant youth living on the other side of town, and make collective decisions based on that knowledge. (p. 5)

Powell et al. (2018) contend that the opportunity to undo these inequities comes when “shared values and illustrative practices are identified [and there is] an opportunity for grantmakers to adopt consistent, effective, value-driven practices” (p. 37). Furthermore, research suggests that equitable practices, which emerge out of diverse input and collaborative action, prove to be most effective and sustainable (Weaver & Cabaj, 2019). The collective impact framework is a model whose proponents have taken this sentiment to heart and codified it in increasingly relevant and actionable ways. Gone are the “grasstops efforts” that critics have decried (Christens & Inzeo, 2015, p. 428). Therefore, now is the time for organizations to engage with their community and co-create meaningful solutions to address the ills that are dividing our society.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Since we were presented with the problem of practice at hand; we, as scholar-practitioner researchers, grappled with how best to epistemologically approach such a weighty and consequential undertaking while keeping in mind our positionality. As three White women, we acknowledge that we have been afforded the privileges that accompany our racial identity, both socially and economically as well as educationally. We begin this methodology chapter with our positionality statement, followed by detailed descriptions of our epistemology, theoretical framework, research design, data collection methods, analysis procedures, and study trustworthiness—all framed through a humanist viewpoint.

Positionality Statement

It is our steadfast belief that with our position comes great responsibility, and our commitment to anti-racism guides us in our strategies and decision-making throughout our work. To illustrate, we collectively made a significant impact through a prior research study at an elite private, liberal arts university by conducting a diversity audit with methodology provided by leading scholars (e.g., Chun & Evans, 2019a; Chun & Evans, 2019b, Cox, 2001; Sharma, 2016; Wilson, 2018) that prompted meaningful action and change. With one of us also identifying as queer; we three are intimately committed to equity and inclusion and strive to value all individuals regardless of age, national origin, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, historical and geographical location, and other equally important identities. It is for these reasons that we initially considered viewing our research through the lens of critical race theory (CRT).

Taking CRT into account, we examined the work of Coule et al. (2022) regarding critical nonprofit studies as they point to the need for further attention and development in this area in order to “[create] more equitable and sustainable practices rather than preservation of the unjust and destructive social and economic systems many managers, management practices, and organizations serve to reproduce” (p. 479). We also contemplated the research of Jung et al. (2022) who caution how grant funders with good intentions often end up propagating assimilationist racist ideas with their philanthropic efforts because they do not challenge structural and systemic racism, confront White supremacy, and undertake anti-racist actions (p. 10). While we aspire to meet the aforementioned needs and prompt anti-racist actions in our current study, we have also considered Coule et al.’s (2022) additional point that although sometimes not easily distinguishable, when it comes to taking a critical stance, there is a difference between radical criticism and that which is reformational—also recognized as an effective stance for “open[ing] the door to more radical change” (p. 479). Further, we consulted the work of Millner (2007) who cautions those who “conduct research with and about people and communities of color” (p. 388). They describe unforeseen dangers that can be

> hidden, covert, implicit, or invisible in the research process [that] when researchers are not mindful of the enormous role of their own and others' racialized positionality and cultural ways of knowing, the results can be dangerous to communities and individuals of color. (p. 388)

In being mindful of our role in this study, we concluded that even as we are committed anti-racists, we are still nascent in our journey and practice. Therefore, we turned inward to ask ourselves two questions. What are the strengths that we possess? What can we offer UWGRP and their community from our particular positions in order to achieve meaningful impact?

Epistemology

We are all long-time educators; two of us are experts in health and wellbeing and one is a seasoned professional in human and organizational development. When first meeting with UWGRP and sharing with them our positionality, it was important to us to emphasize that we would confront uncomfortable truths with loving hearts and with the intention of creating shared understanding, productive dialog, and actionable solutions. This initial aspiration for affirmative collaboration was bolstered by our literature review pointing to the merits of collective impact and was further highlighted as a significant component of our group interviews with a focus on co-creation. We therefore sought out a lens that could embody both what we stand for and our collective talents so that our methods, decisions, data analyses, conclusions, and recommendations could come from a place of confidence and authenticity. We found our guidepost in Kern et al.'s (2020) Systems Informed Positive Psychology (SIPP), described in more detail in the Theoretical Framework section, which we followed in formulating our work through a checklist for equity.

Throughout our data collection process, we aimed to look for opportunities to lift up the strengths and assets of the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area. SIPP, and the positive lens it brings, framed the decisions we made throughout this entire project, as it aligns with our professional strengths as mentioned within our positionality statement. We strived to bring care and compassion to the project, the UWGRP, and the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the UWGRP catchment area. Further, we sought to build trust, mutual respect, and generate hope towards a co-created outcome of the most equitable practices towards grant funding. We have used SIPP as our guiding light when creating focus group questions, interacting with the community, analyzing and interpreting the survey data, and ultimately developing our recommendations. Through this humanist lens, we attempted to find out if small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits felt that their perspectives were being heard and considered in funding processes, and if they wanted to have a role in the creation of an equitable funding process with the UWGRP.

Theoretical Framework

Kern et al.'s (2020) Systems Informed Positive Psychology (SIPP) framework utilizes the work of positive psychology along with concepts from systems sciences to reach a level of "optimal functioning" for both ecosystems and human potential (p. 705). The creators of SIPP state that its purpose is "to cultivate the wellbeing of human social systems, enable system co-evolution, and create positive unimagined futures" (p. 708). We, as scholar-practitioner researchers, brought our expertise through appreciative inquiry (AI)-based questioning to elicit responses from focus group participants who aimed to reach those "unimagined futures."

Moore et al. (2016) state that "AI is a philosophy, as well as an approach, for motivating change that focuses on exploring and amplifying strengths" (p. 52). They explain that AI does not focus on weaknesses and problems to fix, rather it provides a path to encourage and acknowledge strengths and imagine possibilities in order to find solutions. To illustrate, we utilized focus group responses to guide collaborative processes. Therefore, when creating our focus group questions, interactions with communities, analysis and interpretation of our survey data, and ultimately the development of our recommendations; we used AI's positive psychology perspective that is embedded within the SIPP model. Leaning into what we learned within our literature review, and to enhance the work of the nonprofits within the catchment area of the UWGRP, we rephrased the term capacity building as capacity development, wherever possible. This terminology denotes a strengths-based interpretation for building capacity and aligns with the tenets of AI and SIPP.

Positive psychology has been rooted in human development with the work of Maslow (1954) and the foundational theory that basic human needs must be met in order for humans to thrive. The SIPP model encourages practitioners to frame their work by looking through ecological social systems and human potential collectively, rather than through positive psychological intervention alone. To elaborate, if we as researchers only look at the positive psychology components of a situation and ignore the social forces that have an impact upon the people we are serving, then we are doing a disservice to those individuals' wellbeing. For the sustainability of the SIPP model, there is a need for "collective wellbeing, and a need for intentional application of systems thinking principles, and approaches to positive psychology theories, research, interventions, and practices" (Kern et al., 2020, p. 707). The SIPP framed our work to look at the collective synergy of the individual, their community, and their surroundings which are interwoven in human existence.

Within Figure 6 from Kern et al.'s (2020) SIPP framework, we provide a visual of our study's theoretical framework. As we consider the SIPP framework, and move in a clockwise direction to guide our project, it highlights a shared purpose. When creating this shared purpose, all perspectives must be considered. For our study, we sought to hear multiple stakeholders' perspectives, and to center those of the nonprofits. As Kern et al. (2020) suggest when it comes to sustainability, the shared purpose needs to be a co-created outcome from the workings of both the UWGRP and their catchment area nonprofits.

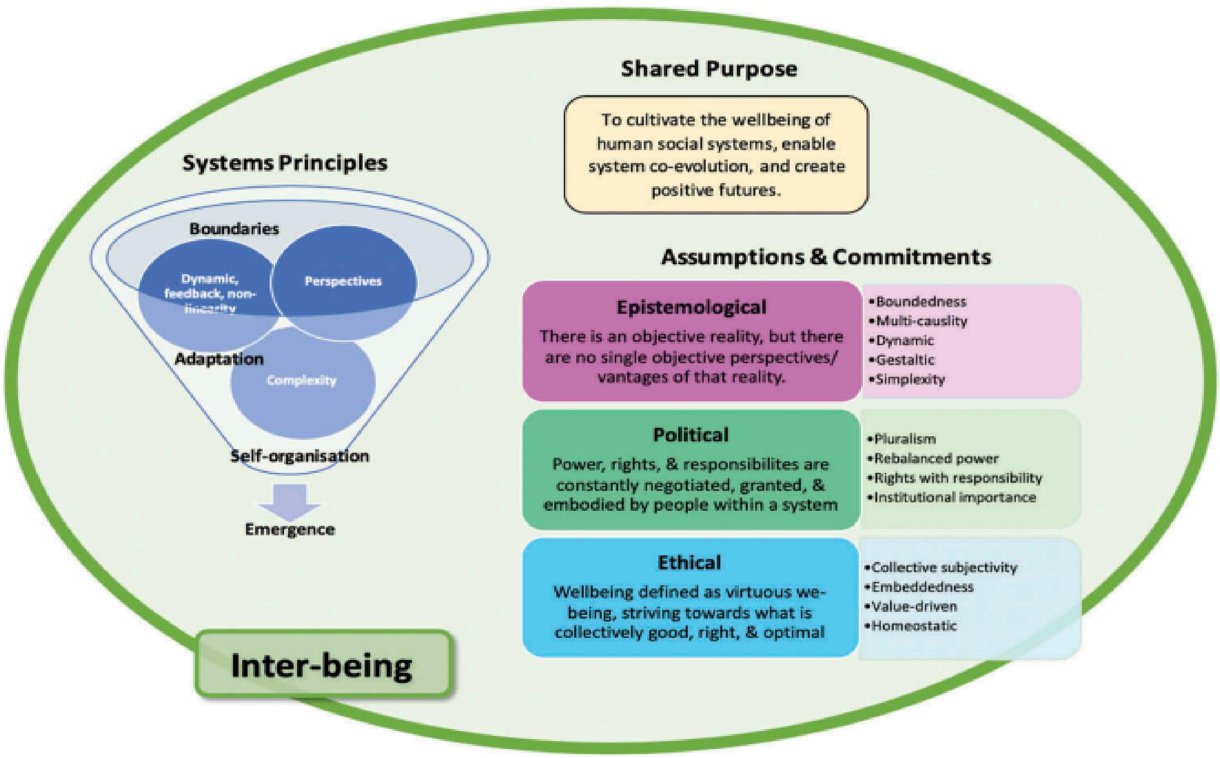
Moving within the visual of Figure 6, we focused on the assumptions and commitments of SIPP, described by Kern et al. (2020), as we made decisions. Taking their three philosophical assumptions of SIPP under consideration—epistemological, political, and ethical— we were committed to identifying truths and uncovering opportunities for growth and evolution. These assumptions and commitments are defined as

- Epistemological Assumption: There is an objective reality, but there are no single objective perspectives/vantages of that reality.
- Political Assumption: Power, rights, and responsibilities are negotiated, granted, and embodied by people within a system.
- Ethical Assumption: Wellbeing is defined in terms of virtuous we-being, striving toward what is collectively good, right, and optimal. (Kern et al., 2020, p. 709)

Throughout our study, we were mindful to recognize and ensure that our epistemology was in alignment with these guiding assumptions while considering the collective lens of optimal functioning for ecosystems and human potential. We hoped that this intentional focus helped us to learn the reality of the UWGRP catchment area; and if their power, rights, and responsibilities could be negotiated, and embodied by funders.

Figure 6

Systems Informed Positive Psychology



Note. From “Systems Informed Positive Psychology” by M. L. Kern, 2020, *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 15*(6), pp. 705–715. doi:10.1080/17439760.2019.1639799. Copyright 2020 by Taylor & Francis.

As we continued to move clockwise with the SIPP model visual of Figure 6, we considered system principles. Within the system principles of SIPP, we could address the historical power imbalances that were brought out during our review of the literature. We worked to uncover if small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the UWGRP catchment area felt if there was (or was not) an intention toward achieving wellbeing as well as what was collectively good, right, and optimal in the current systems that could be built upon in order to achieve equitable funding practices.

Encompassing the visual model in its entirety is what Kern et al. (2020) terms "inter-being" (p. 708). They explain that "SIPP assumes that humans interdependently co-exist with themselves, others, and the environment in which they exist" (p. 709). Within our context, we determined that there is a need for co-existence between UWGRP and those being served within their catchment area. All stakeholders are part of the same ecosystem and cannot reach their optimal potential when functioning independently. It was our goal to provide actionable solutions in a co-creation format that could lead to shared possibilities for both the UWGRP and the communities they serve. So we asked ourselves, how do we support the community members' individual wellbeing, build a system that fosters opportunities for community co-creation of an equitable grant funding process, and strive for sustainable ecological system change for the UWGRP catchment area that leads to optimal inter-being? We have aspired to bring forth this answer by utilizing the SIPP framework to guide our project. SIPP's shared purpose, assumptions and considerations, and systems principles focused our recommendations for an equitable grant funding process as best represented in this project through a case study of the nonprofits of the UWGRP catchment area.

Research Design

The purpose of our case study was to center and amplify the voices of the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit organizations in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area in order to gain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding from multiple perspectives as to the degree to which philanthropic funding in the local region is equitable and where gaps in supportive capacity lie. As Billups (2021) describes, the use of a case study design ensures that "the viewpoints of all stakeholders are integrated [and] the findings provide an intricate, collective perception that contributes to understanding the phenomenon under study

[and] provides a richness and multidimensional picture of how people function within organizational or historical incidents" (p. 6). Therefore, the case study research method not only aligns with our SIPP epistemology, but as Billups (2021) suggests, it also facilitates and guides the process of ascertaining how all who are involved describe the current state of equitable funding which will inform future practice.

Our case study was intrinsic as defined by McMillan (2022) in that we focused our research efforts on the particular nonprofit funding phenomenon that currently existed within the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area at a particular point in time through the perspectives of organizations who identify as small, emergent, grassroots, and/or minority-led. Our design used a convergent mixed methods approach in accordance with Creswell and Creswell's (2018) definition where both qualitative and quantitative data are collected, analyzed, and compared in order to determine whether the "findings confirm or disconfirm each other" (p. 300). We used qualitative methods starting with focus groups in particular as they are widely accepted as being effective in eliciting "perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (Billups, 2021, p. 97). In keeping with our humanist, participant-focused perspective, we encountered individuals during the focus group scheduling process who were either uncomfortable engaging within a group setting or faced obstacles (e.g., time, resources, etc.) which prevented their participation. We therefore added individual interviews and an online Google Form using the same interview questions. Our questions, which followed Billups (2021) protocols and were designed utilizing Ehlen et al.'s (2017) co-creation wheel, ensured that we comprehensively addressed all areas necessary for robust content collection and adequately captured responses according to proven and accepted tools. The focus groups, individual interviews, and online form were used to collect our qualitative data and answer all three research questions. We then administered an online survey using the Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact's (2022) Nonprofit Capacities Instrument to collect quantitative data in order to further answer research question number three. We hoped to discover through this research design whether what we heard in our qualitative interviews about capacity development needs could be supported through data and strengthened by more specific detailed measures defined by the quantitative survey.

Data Collection

We defined the population for our study as leaders of small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area. We quickly learned, however, that there was no list or existing mechanism that easily identified any or all of these organizational descriptors. Therefore, in order to be able to determine our sampling procedures, we first needed to conduct secondary research in order to familiarize ourselves with the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg's catchment area. Using the knowledge that we acquired through this research, we developed a strategy for purposeful sampling as defined by researchers (e.g., Billups, 2021; McMillan, 2022) where we hoped to identify and intentionally engage with individuals who would represent the characteristics of our target population and offer a balanced cross-section of the chosen region while being able to provide us with rich descriptions and "detailed information based on their unique experiences and perspectives" of the local philanthropic landscape (Billups, 2021, p. 3).

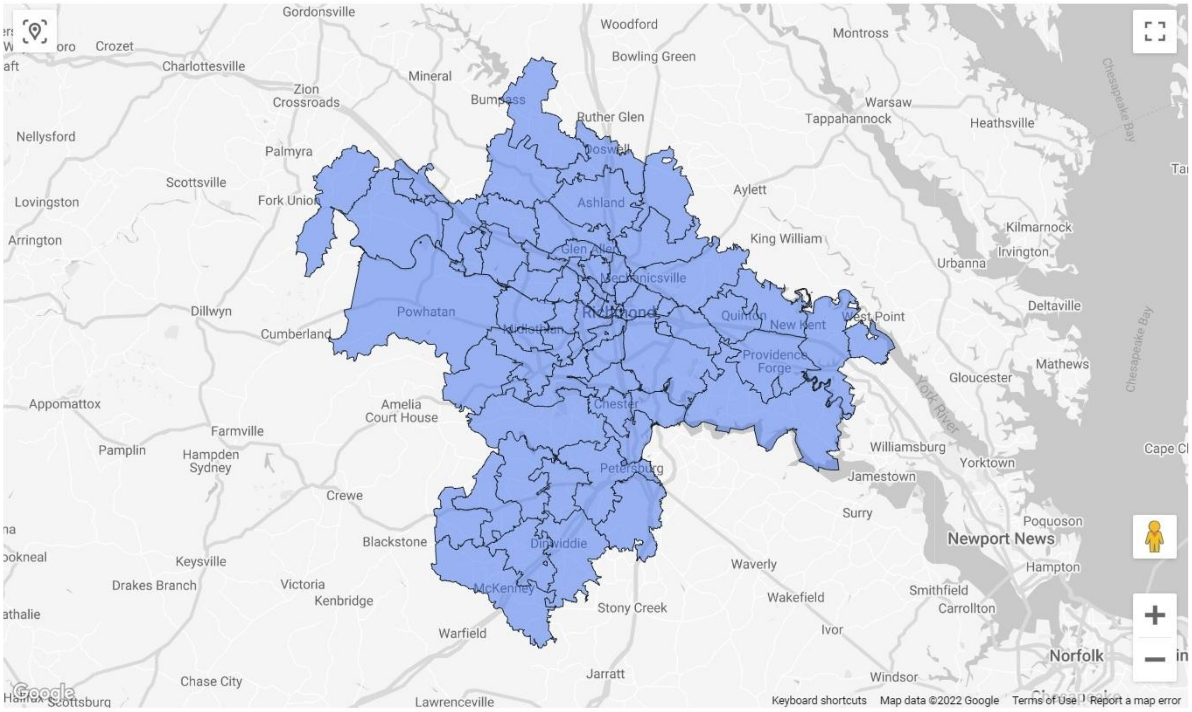
Secondary Data Analysis

To determine the sample for our primary data collection, we first needed to know who the community not being served by UWGRP's current funding model was. From UWGRP's website, we ascertained that their catchment area encompassed eight counties and three cities with 55 organizations receiving funding at that particular point in time. We compiled a list of these entities along with their addresses, area served, and revenue. We then created an interactive map of UWGRP's catchment area, as depicted in Figure 8, identifying the 104 zip codes included in the region. Further, as shown in Figure 9, we determined the zip codes of each organization served by UWGRP and plotted them on the catchment area map to show where and to what extent areas were or were not being funded.

Next, we set out to collect secondary data about the community. We selected data fields (e.g., population, population density per square mile, median household income, median home value, male, female, White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander, other race, two or more races) and located data sets from reputable sources (e.g., Candid. GuideStar, National Center for Charitable Statistics Data Archive, United States® Census Bureau, and United States Internal Revenue Service).

Figure 7

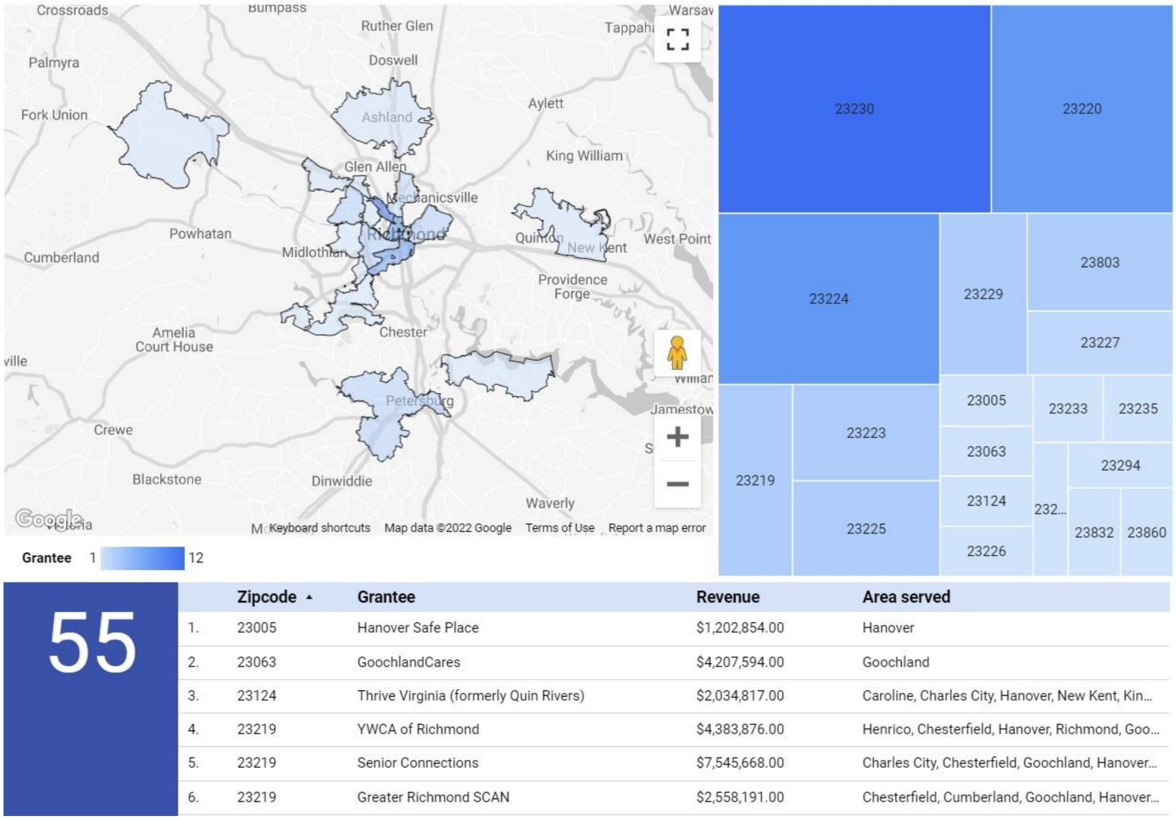
United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg Catchment Area per Zip Code



Through data analysis, we identified the makeup of communities per zip code in the catchment area (e.g., size, population density, racial makeup, and wealth); communities per zip code in the catchment area reached with funding; and organizations in the catchment area not funded (per demographics). We discovered from our data analysis that UWGRP funded 55 out of 5,077 (1%) registered nonprofits in their region, 78.2% of the region was without a funded program, and the area with the highest minority population (23223) received just .05% of UWGRP funding. Further, we identified 2,106 registered nonprofit organizations within UWGRP's catchment area that had an income of less than $25,000 per year that could be considered as emergent, and plotted their locations.

Figure 8

United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg Grantees



	Zipcode	Grantee	Revenue	Area served
1.	23005	Hanover Safe Place	$1,202,854.00	Hanover
2.	23063	GoochlandCares	$4,207,594.00	Goochland
3.	23124	Thrive Virginia (formerly Quin Rivers)	$2,034,817.00	Caroline, Charles City, Hanover, New Kent, Kin...
4.	23219	YWCA of Richmond	$4,383,876.00	Henrico, Chesterfield, Hanover, Richmond, Goo...
5.	23219	Senior Connections	$7,545,668.00	Charles City, Chesterfield, Goochland, Hanover...
6.	23219	Greater Richmond SCAN	$2,558,191.00	Chesterfield, Cumberland, Goochland, Hanover...

Sampling

Taking what was learned from the secondary data into consideration, our plan to procure our purposeful sample for focus groups and the subsequent survey was two-fold. First, we identified minority-led agents for change in the catchment area through our personal, professional, academic, and community relationships. We intentionally sought to reach and engage with minority influencers who already recognized the need for equitable funding practices and had not been a part of or were tangential to traditional long-standing funding conventions. Our purpose in connecting with these trailblazers was to listen and learn about how they thought we should proceed, who they recommended should be involved in the focus groups, and what they proposed was the best way to elicit participation. In other words, we strived to create conditions where we would be invited into community spaces so that trust could be established before proceeding to next steps also determined by the community. In accomplishing this goal, we were cognizant of the fact that we did not want to place a burden upon these contacts with our requests and conveyed our willingness to carry out the required work. Based on the direction that we received, we facilitated the coordination of focus groups keeping in mind the areas and demographics not currently being met by UWGRP that we discovered from our secondary research. We followed the lead of our contacts as to whether they felt they should initiate discussion or invite participants to be involved in the focus groups with our support or direct us to contact individuals or organizations directly with their involvement. We also elicited their input as to how they thought it would be best to conduct our survey instrument for the benefit of the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led, nonprofit community as a whole.

Our second alternative, had our initial plan of action for participation in our study proven unfruitful, was to examine our identified list of 2,106 registered emergent nonprofits in the catchment area to determine who was minority-led. Through website and Internet research, we would compile a specific list and initiate contact through email inviting them to participate in our focus groups and survey. In our communications, we still planned to make every effort to center our potential participants within the process while striving to demonstrate benefits to them. We also recognized that these two directions for building our participant sample may not have been mutually exclusive and we considered that we might have needed to utilize both in concert with each other until we amassed enough respondents for an appropriate sample size.

Based on the number of registered emergent nonprofits, we set our goal for a sample size to be 200, which was approximately 10%. Through our planned efforts, we were able to compile a solid list with valid contact information of 143 individuals who demographically and geographically represented the participants that we required to conduct our study, which determined our sample.

Procedures

As previously mentioned, we collected data through focus groups, interviews, an online questionnaire (Google Form), and a validated survey. We originally planned to solely conduct focus groups and a survey but upon engaging with the community, we determined that certain members preferred to meet one-on-one in an interview, or to provide written feedback, as opposed to verbal, so a Google Form was created. However, the same eight questions were asked regardless of the setting, with additional probing questions created for the focus groups and interviews, should they have been needed.

Engaging with the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg catchment area was initially difficult for us as researchers who do not work in the world of nonprofits and because there was not a comprehensive list of organizations who met these criteria. One researcher had a personal connection with an individual who worked in the nonprofit community at a small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit, and who kindly took time to help us better understand this community and how to reach them. Simultaneously, a fellow classmate also had a personal connection with another member of this community and facilitated an introduction. Further, a representative from UWGRP who had conducted workforce partnership outreach shared potential contacts that fit our criteria. In addition, we also met with the United Way's Community Impact Council (CIC)—a group charged with reviewing data and research around best practices in the industry—and from that meeting, a few additional organizations were added to the ever-growing contact list. In each communication that we sent out, an opportunity was provided to contact researchers directly to add additional names to the contact list, or to speak directly with a researcher. From these connections, a list of 143 organizations was ultimately created to engage the community in the dialogues.

One of the original two contacts shared, early on, a sentiment of mistrust between the nonprofit community and funding organizations. Because of this lack of trust, and the fact that we were working directly with a funding organization, we were intentional about how we engaged with the community. The first thing that we did was reframe the traditional term of "focus group" to instead be called a community conversation, thus removing the stigma of rigorous research and instead looking at the time together as an opportunity to have a conversation with other like-minded community members—for the duration of this paper, focus group and community conversation will be used interchangeably. As researchers, we never asked to enter, but waited to be invited into a space to host a focus group or interview.

Once focus group dates, times, and locations were established, we set up an anonymous Google Form for individuals to RSVP to attend the community conversation that worked best for them. At the same time focus groups were being created, the contact list was growing and each new addition would get the same invitation to attend a focus group or set up an individual interview. After each focus group, we contacted those who participated twice. First, to thank them for their time, provide them access to the online Google Form should they have additional feedback, and to request their contact information to pass along if they were interested in having their organization submit a request for proposal as part of the Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education's Capstone process, which served as one form of reciprocity.

The second email, post participation, provided participants the opportunity to review the verbatim de-identified transcripts from each focus group through a Google Doc, which was restricted to only those who were in attendance the day of said focus group. After the initial focus group, one attendee suggested the creation of a Google Form to allow those who could not attend a focus group to still provide feedback, or if additional thoughts arose after attending a focus group, the feedback could be ongoing. Similarly, between the first and second focus groups, researchers recognized that there was the need for an additional community conversation in the new year due to the holiday season and scheduled one more focus group, proving to attract eight additional voices.

When it came time to distribute the survey, we worked directly with the creator of the Nonprofit Capacities Instrument to have direct access to it in order to edit, distribute it, and manage results. Once this access was granted, we adapted the instrument and began to solicit responses using the digital survey platform, Qualtrics. We sent an email to each of the contacts on our list with two follow-up emails asking them to participate and reminding them of the valuable, individualized report with resources that they would receive upon completion of the survey, which was automatically provided by the Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact at Northwestern University.

While the data collection process was rooted in the traditional research process, as researchers, we were intentional about building trust through honest and open communication with the nonprofits who offered their voices to the conversation. We believe the data collection process gave way to having a fundamentally trusting relationship between the nonprofits and the research team, which provided rich information and valuable feedback for the United Way.

Methods

The methods that we used for data collection in our case study were both qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative method for data collection consisted of a survey known as The Nonprofit Capacities Instrument, which is a validated tool that will be described in more detail within this section. The qualitative methods included focus groups, interviews, an online questionnaire (Google Form), and field notes. Field notes that were both descriptive and reflective were analyzed by the researchers to take the spoken and written words of the nonprofits along with the data collected and showcase them into valuable research findings in order to make recommended changes within the UWGRP grant funding processes.

Focus Groups, Interviews, and Online Questionnaire (Google Form). As mentioned prior, the Co-Creation Wheel from Ehlen et al. (2017), a validated conceptual model displayed in Figure 7, was used to frame focus group discussions, individual interviews, and an online Google Form in order to find out if and to what extent there was interest in co-creating an equitable funding process from the participants. Ehlen et al. (2017) define co-creation as "a collective process of teamwork across organizations that is creative and geared to generating and developing new products, processes, and services which cause incremental improvement or radical innovations" (p. 630). Their model provides proven elements for successful implementation of co-creation efforts. Therefore, we began our focus group, interview, and Google Form questions from the center of the Co-Creation Wheel: Urgency. We then concentrated on each of the four dimensions of "Construction, Relation and Emotion, Expertise, and Action," in order to ensure a balanced and comprehensive approach to our data collection efforts (p, 633). The aim of collectively developing a new funding process guided our direction for the development of focus group, interview, and Google Form questions with the ultimate goal being radical innovation of grant funding processes.

Figure 9

The Co-Creation Wheel

Note. From "The Co-Creation Wheel," by C. Ehlen, M. van der Klink, J. Stoffers, & H. Boshuizen, 2017, *European Journal of Training and Development, 41*(7), pp. 628–646. doi:10.1108/EJTD-03-2017-0027. Copyright 2017 by Emerald Publishing Limited.

To meet participants' availability, and comfort levels with providing feedback, we provided three different modalities for responding to the same questions: focus groups, interviews, and a Google Form. Prior to each focus group discussion or interview, verbal consent for participation was obtained by participants, which is outlined in Appendix A. Three focus groups, three interviews, and a Google Form were set up, with each event comprised of between 1–8 participants who were asked eight questions during a period of time that lasted no more than 90 minutes. For one of the interviews, Zoom was requested and the request was honored. The focus groups, interviews, and Google Form respondents consisted of known smaller, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits who expressed an interest in providing feedback to researchers in order to expose the inequities in grant funding processes and co-create a better process moving forward. After securing community-focused locales most convenient to the nonprofits participating in the focus groups and interviews (as outlined in Table 2), i.e., places that were neutral to all organizations in attendance; we extended an invitation to participate and provided a variety of refreshments during the sessions according to previously-elicited dietary preferences. In-person focus groups and interviews were audiotaped and videos were recorded when using Zoom after obtaining informed consent. Recordings ensured that the data collected could be accurately transcribed, and as communicated to participants, which would be subsequently destroyed upon completion of the research project. Following the focus groups and interviews, participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms and any additional identifying information remained private, secured, and confidential for the duration of the study. The focus group and interview moderator's guide, protocols, and questions can be found in Appendix B.

Survey. The Nonprofit Capacities Instrument (Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact, 2022), as can be seen in Appendix C, served a dual purpose. First, as previously stated, it provided a self-assessment benchmark report with supportive resources to the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits who completed it. Second, it generated quantitative data through a validated instrument that provided UWGRP with a snapshot of who they could begin working with, and what their current capacity was, so that a starting line for capacity development planning could be determined.

When it comes to measuring organizational capacity, there are countless tools to choose from—even when it comes to nonprofits. There are books offering frameworks with corresponding self-assessment tools and plenty of online templates and platforms available. What we found in our research, however, is that the bulk of the resources that could assist in determining nonprofit capacity needs came at a significant cost, required a highly paid consultant to administer and interpret their results, or both. Fortunately, after assiduous efforts, we located the work of Dr. Michelle Shumate at the Network of Nonprofit and Social Impact at Northwestern University. Like us, she and her team also recognized the lack of affordable and equitable resources available, especially for smaller organizations, and have dedicated their learned expertise in addressing equity within the area of nonprofit capacity. In their groundbreaking article introducing their arduously tested and validated survey, The Nonprofit Capacities Instrument, Shumate et al. (2017), elucidate that "many existing capacity instruments are time consuming and require an external facilitator. This is problematic in that many organizations do not have the budget for external evaluation or lack the technical capacity to conduct the evaluation" (p. 156). Not only have these researchers developed a comprehensive measurement tool that rivals the corporate sector, but they have also backed it up with rigorous academic research and provide it free of charge to nonprofit organizations along with evidence-based resources and tools to support its implementation and long-term sustainability—also at no cost.

Another reason for us choosing The Nonprofit Capacities Instrument and its supportive materials that is worth highlighting is their use of asset-based language, which aligns with our epistemology. For example, when defining capacity, Shumate et al. (2017) write, "our definition of capacity is consistent with definitions from across the decades that emphasize capacity as ability" (p. 156). Further, the instrument and accompanying tools have been intentionally developed to allow an organization to self-assess, receive a benchmark report, and access meaningful resources designed to assist with organizational performance improvement. And finally, the use of expansive language from capacity to capacities demonstrates that the researchers recognize that capacity "building" is not a singular construct with uniform or prescribed cures. Instead, it is a multi-dimensional schema that requires systems thinking along with contextualized and differentiated solutions because where one individual or organization is lacking may not be indicative of failure but rather access to the remedies.

The Nonprofit Capacities Instrument tool itself poses 45 questions to respondents in the areas of: "financial management, adaptive capacity, strategic planning, external communication, board leadership, operational capacity, mission orientation, and staff management" (Shumate et al., 2017, pp. 159–161). The researchers provide succinct definitions for each capacity in an "online ready-to-use PowerPoint deck", which are outlined in Table 1 (Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact, 2023, unpaged).

Also, a testament to the grace and humanity of Dr. Shumate was her willingness to consult and advise us on the use of the instrument. She permitted us to adapt the tool to our study's context, add two questions in order to gather demographic information germane to our research, and provided the mechanism where we could collect our respondents' data while also being able to automatically generate and transmit the benchmark report to our survey completers.

Table 1

Definitions of Nonprofit Capacities Instrument's eight capacities

Capacity	Definition
Financial Management	The ability to accurately and completely report financial aspects of the organization, including revenue, budget, and diversified funding sources
Adaptive Capacity	How organizations adapt to changes in their environment
Strategic Planning	Creating, following, and evaluating plans for the nonprofit's future activities
External Communications	Public relations activities and marketing ventures
Board Leadership	Board reporting, performance, and decision making
Operational Capacity	Existence and use of documented procedures; ability to set goals for programs and activities, and assess their outcomes
Mission Orientation	Organization's and their stakeholders' abilities to adhere to the mission and the purpose of the organization
Staff Management	The capability to train and manage competent staff; staff skills

The survey instrument was adapted to add two demographic questions, which are provided as follows.

1. In which of these ways does your organization identify? (check all that apply)
    - Emergent - An organization that voluntarily forms and exists and may not yet have all the resources and strategies needed for sustainability.
    - Grass-roots - An organization that is primarily made up of civilians advocating a cause.
    - Minority-led - An organization that is led by a race, culture, religion, or another category of people distinguished by either physical or cultural difference that a society has subordinated.
    - Small - An organization with an income of less than $25,000.

2. In which of these ways does your primary executive leader identify? (check all that apply) - Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latinx, White, Other race, Two or more races, Male, Female, Nonbinary, Transgender, Agender, LGBTQIA+, Individual with a disability, Other identity: ________.

The adapted survey was electronically distributed through email to the identified 143 small, emergent, grassroot, minority-led nonprofits in the UWGRP catchment area. It was created and distributed through Qualtrics, a reputable digital survey platform used to collect and analyze data. A link from Qualtrics was embedded in the email sent to participants. Upon completion of the survey, a report was automatically provided to each participating organization supporting that nonprofit in better understanding their current capacities—which also provided participants with a form of reciprocity for their time and effort.

Field Notes. Field notes, both descriptive and reflective, are described by researchers (e.g., Billups, 2021; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018; McMillan, 2022) as being fundamental for rigorous qualitative research. Billups (2021) describes how when field notes are used, they provide researchers with an extra layer of detail that can be used to formulate thicker descriptions of what took place during data collection. Field notes were especially important for us as we each documented such instances as physical reactions, utterances, displays of emotion, and voice inflections in order to consciously pay attention to the needs and viewpoints of our participants as well as use them for points of discussion between ourselves as we sought to check our biases individually and collaboratively. We consistently used our field notes to compare and contrast our individual perspectives in order to align and determine mutual norms for how we would collectively communicate, in our interactions and when writing, with a unified voice.

Table 2

Representation of participants

Event Type	Date	Location	# of Participants	Various classifications of orgs represented
Focus Group #1	December 2, 2022	Sankofa Community Orchard	**5**	Emergent, Grassroots, Minority-Led, Small
Focus Group #2	December 15, 2022	University of Richmond	**4**	Emergent, Grassroots, Minority-Led, Small
Focus Group #3	January 12, 2023	Libbie Mill Library	**8**	Emergent, Grassroots, Minority-Led, Small
Interview #1	December 5, 2022	Libbie Mill Library	**1**	Emergent
Interview #2	December 15, 2022	Zoom	**1**	Grassroots
Interview #3	January 9, 2023	Common House	**1**	Minority-Led
An online form was provided for individuals who either could not, or preferred not, to attend in person.		Online Questionnaire (Google Form)	**8**	Emergent, Grassroots, Minority-Led, Small
Capacity Building Survey	January 18-29, 2023	Online	35 participated **29** completed	Emergent, Grassroots, Minority-Led, Small
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS			***57 (bolded)**	Emergent, Grassroots, Minority-Led, Small

Description of Participants

The pool of participants was composed of small, emergent grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg catchment area. These participants self-selected into the case study. The data collected was in the form of both qualitative and quantitative to answer the research questions. The qualitative data collection included focus groups, interviews, and an online questionnaire in a Google Form format. The qualitative data collection totaled 28 participants, and is visually showcased in Appendix G. The quantitative data collected from The Nonprofit Capacities Instrument (Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact, 2022) had a sample size of 143 with 35 nonprofits participating, and 29 nonprofits completing the instrument. This is a response rate of 25%. The collective demographics of the identities of the nonprofits' primary executive leader, and nonprofits' identities of participating respondents are displayed in Appendix G. From the listing of 35 quantitative data collection participants of nonprofits, the pool is diverse in identities of their primary executive leader, and nonprofits' identities that they represent. There is a representation of eight unique identities of primary executive leaders; one nonprofit did not disclose the identities of their executive leader. There are seven unique nonprofit identities represented with the quantitative data participant pool; one nonprofit did not disclose their nonprofit identity.

Data Analysis Procedures

Our design uses a side-by-side convergent mixed methods approach, as depicted in Figure 10, in order to holistically evaluate the challenges and needs that the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits in the UWGRP area face. Data sources, aligned to research questions are listed in Table 8. A convergent side-by-side mixed-methods design is a technique in which qualitative and quantitative data are first gathered simultaneously and then analyzed separately in order to determine if the triangulation of results "confirm or disconfirm" each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 301). The reason for choosing this combined approach as opposed to a singular qualitative or quantitative method is that according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a better and more complete level of understanding can be achieved by utilizing multiple forms of data. Thus, convergence can provide more depth to results and enable researchers to reach more specific conclusions.

Figure 10

Overview of mixed-methods analysis plan with anticipated findings and products

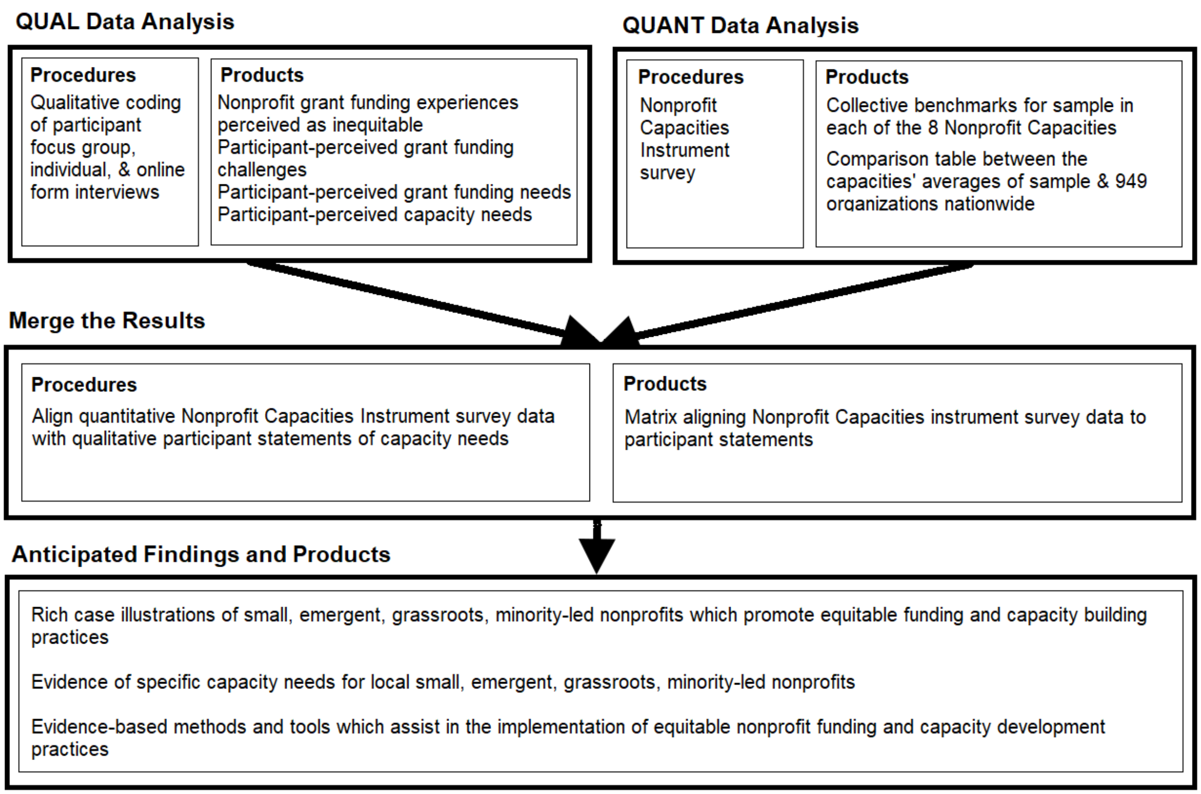


Table 3

Data sources aligned to research questions

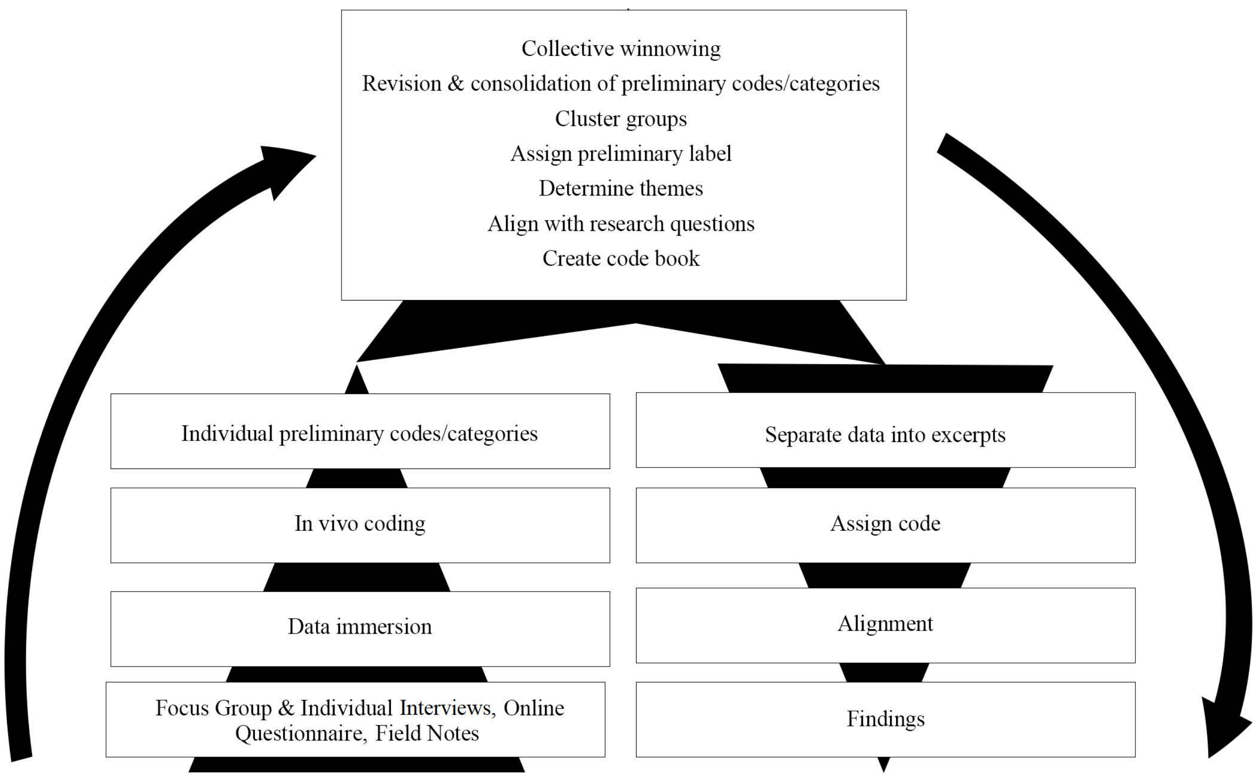
Data Source	RQ(s)	Method
Semi-structured Focus Group interviews	1,2,3	Qualitative
Semi-structured individual participant interviews	1,2,3	Qualitative
Online Google Form questionnaire	1,2,3	Qualitative
Field notes	1,2,3	Qualitative
The Nonprofit Capacities Instrument survey	3	Quantitative

Qualitative

To process our qualitative data from the verbatim interview transcripts, Google Form questionnaire, and field notes; we used a combination of inductive and deductive analyses as described by research experts (e.g., Billups, 2021; McMillan, 2022) and depicted in Figure 11. The transcripts, form responses, and field notes were uploaded into the coding tool Dedoose and three cycles of coding were performed.

Figure 11

Qualitative data analysis procedure



For the first cycle of coding, each of us individually "[immersed ourselves] in the data by reading [our] notes holistically", as recommended by Billups (2021, p. 83). We then used in vivo coding where we utilized the words of our participants to derive our individual preliminary codes, which reflected the perspectives and actions of our participants. The use of in vivo coding enabled us to gain an in-depth understanding of the stories that our participants shared along with profound insight into their ideas, perspectives, and interpretations of their experiences. As McMillan (2022) explains about the emic data produced by the in vivo coding process, "by capturing language, actions, expressions, terms, and explanation, as voiced by the participants, the richness, depth, and authenticity of the findings can be addressed" (p. 389). All of these time-consuming steps, from transcription to codes, were very important to us as they directly applied to our epistemology of being participant-centered.

We then came together multiple times for our second cycle of coding. We talked through our individual preliminary codes or categories and conducted collective “winnowing,” which Billups (2021) defines as “[clustering] the raw data into units or chunks that share similar qualities” (p. 83). We then followed Billups’ (2021) guidance and conducted secondary coding where we collectively developed our codebook through the revision and consolidation of our preliminary codes or categories. From there, we began to cluster groups of related, preliminary coded/categorized data and assigned them a preliminary label which formed the basis of our thematic or content labels. Through this process of thematic groupings, we were able to achieve “meaningful themes, which relate back to participant words and allow meaning to be assigned to themes” (Billups, 2021, p. 84). We also inductively recognized something that emerged through our analysis, which was that these themes and their sub-themes aligned with our three research questions. We subsequently created a mutually-agreed upon definition for each category and theme that we put into our code book (Appendix D), and we discussed at length—using sample excerpts from our transcripts—how we would assign codes in order to norm our individual coding practice.

With our themes, code book, and process solidified; we divided the data equally among ourselves and engaged in deductive top-down coding where we individually separated our respective data into discrete parts or “excerpts” and assigned each a code from our code book. We regularly communicated to ensure that we, as a team, remained aligned in our efforts and we immediately initiated discussion with each other if there was an anomaly or question that arose. We made adjustments to our code book and individual data accordingly and continued the process until all data had been coded. We reviewed our final work multiple times until we were all in agreement that we had a strong basis for constructing our findings.

Quantitative

A primary reason for choosing the Nonprofit Capacities Instrument as our method for gathering quantitative data was because it has been tested and proven effective by experienced academic researchers. Shumate et al. (2017), developed and validated this 45-item instrument measuring eight nonprofit capacities through a two-study approach with a sample of 949 nonprofit organizations (also internationally referred to as non-governmental organizations or NGOs) working in the areas of human services, health, environment, education, and arts. As expertly explained by Fu and Shumate (2020) in their utilization of the tool to study its efficacy in a non-American culture, the methodology that creators of the instrument used to validate their instrument was two-fold:

> In Study 1, they created an instrument from a 149-item pool from 19 pre-existing capacity instruments and used orthogonal exploratory factor analysis to examine the emergent factor structure of NGO capacity. In Study 2, to further validate the 8-factor solution, the authors conducted confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a second sample of NGOs. Their findings revealed eight dimensions of NGO capacities. In addition, they found that NGO capacity is not a second-order concept composed of a higher-order singular factor; instead, NGO capacities are composed of eight interrelated dimensions. Finally, they established the discriminant validity of the instrument and concurrent validity through its relationship with established measures of nonprofit effectiveness. (p. 635)

By using this evidence-backed instrument, participants—and researchers—are able to receive reliable benchmark measures for each of the eight defined capacities. As Shumate et al. (2017) explain, the results received not only help individual nonprofits ascertain the areas in which they are either successful or in need; but they also provide researchers with a tool to “compare the capacities of nonprofit organizations using a standard metric” (p. 171). It is precisely for this purpose that we engaged in the extra step of carrying out the survey in order to support our research findings quantitatively.

As described in our procedures, demographics identifying the type of nonprofit and their primary executive leader were collected from all of the participants in the study (n = 29). Also as previously mentioned, we were afforded the opportunity to utilize the proven analytic measures and tools provided to us by the expert academic researchers who created the instrument. From the Qualtrics online survey tool, we were able to download both an Excel spreadsheet and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) file which contained the calculated individual benchmarks of our respondents for each of the eight capacities as well as demographically-related descriptive statistics. With that data, we were able to compile the capacity means for all the organizations in the sample, which are presented in our findings.

Limitations of Study

One common critique of qualitative research is that there is a degree of subjectivity involved when interpreting data (e.g., Atieno, 2009; Crescentini & Mainardi, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2011; Johnson et al., 2007; Queirós et al., 2017; Shenton, 2004). When considering non-experimental research in particular, another critique is that results are strongly reliant upon the self-reporting of respondents without any controls in place to account for “all possible extraneous factors” (deMarrais & Lapan, 2004, p. 299). While we have attempted to offset these occurrences in our study by using a mixed methods approach with quantitative data to triangulate and enrich the integrity and strength of our findings along with utilizing sound qualitative methodology, we acknowledge that our study has its limitations.

First, while our case study attempts to explore the grant funding experiences of small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit leaders of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area; because no established listing or directory exists that identifies this particular grouping, our findings and implications are limited to the lived experiences of only those who have participated, thus constituting a relatively small study. Second, we interviewed and surveyed the participants who volunteered for our study and although the demographics represent a good mix of gender and race representation, our study may not include the perspectives of all minority identities. Further, while we endeavored to elicit the voices of all minority identities and were able to garner a representative sample of the Black community, the makeup of participants in our study does not fully depict the region as demonstrated in Table 4. Furthermore, it is significant to note that as researchers who designed the interview protocols, we all identify as White, meaning that while we have taken significant steps to address bias in our methods and mindsets, our particular perspective is potentially overrepresented in our study and it is prudent to identify our status and the potential impact that it has on designing protocols for the interviews and interpreting the findings. Additionally, we have further divided other limitations of our study into qualitative and quantitative as each form of data collection had its own unique specific limitations.

Qualitative Data Collection Limitations

Within the qualitative data collection portion of our case study; we held focus groups, interviews, and an online questionnaire for participants who volunteered. We were transparent within our introduction and consent acknowledgement that all participant voices would be honored while specifically seeking verbal agreement from all in attendance, however, there may have been a feeling that certain participants dominated the conversations within focus groups. We also considered that focus groups did not provide as much time for individual perspectives, so we tried to balance this with the online questionnaire (Google Form) for those who wanted to speak more, and with autonomy, in a more private format. With regards to researcher bias within the interview one-on-one format, it was natural for researchers to feel empathy towards the words of the interviewee and connect with them due to our humanist nature and our epistemological approach utilizing SIPP, and therefore may have been swayed away from objectivity through our emotions. We consistently needed to membercheck ourselves against the practice of “White savioring” in order to keep our interpretations and reactions factual and representative of the input of our respondents.

Quantitative Data Collection Limitations

The quantitative data collected within this case study using the Nonprofit Capacities Instrument attempted to identify the capacity development needs of 143 minority-led nonprofits with 35 nonprofits participating, and 29 nonprofits completing the online survey. As previously noted, this online survey tool was voluntary and the response rate was 25%. The use of an online survey poses its own unique limitations of being able to garner enough participation and the possibility that data could either be disproportionate or underrepresented. Further, the data collected from the online survey was self-reported so we must acknowledge that what we received may not be completely reliable because of the potential for human input error or lack of truthfulness or candor for fear of who might be viewing the responses. Additionally, not all of the survey questions required answering, which allowed for some questions to be skipped by participants. To help overcome this limitation, we explained the purpose of the survey in our communications and conveyed the concept of reciprocity with the customized feedback report, all with the hopes that participants would understand the importance of their honest participation, yet this may not have proven completely successful.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness or rigor of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Polit & Beck, 2014). Throughout the literature that speaks to trustworthiness regarding qualitative research, experts, (e.g., Billups, 2021; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Hayes & Singh, 2011; Kornbluh, 2015; McSweeney, 2021; Shenton, 2004; Tracy, 2010) stress that there are numerous perspectives as to what constitutes generally-accepted quality methods for ensuring trustworthiness, especially when compared to the positivist practices found in quantitative research. Most, however, agree that establishing trustworthiness is an essential component for a quality qualitative research study. Billups (2021), for example, identifies trustworthiness as “the quintessential framework for evaluating qualitative research” (p. 27) and suggests its necessity to the verification of findings for the intended audience. Hayes and Singh (2011) corroborate this depiction of trustworthiness in qualitative research, noting its importance to the validity or believability of the study’s findings. We focused on the credibility and authenticity of this study as our overarching trustworthiness criteria.

Credibility and Authenticity

Credibility is defined by Billups (2021) as producing findings that are believable. They explain that “findings must appear truthful and capture a holistic representation of the phenomenon under exploration” (p. 29). As researchers, this was very important to our work, and we suspect it also is to our audience of readers. According to Amin et al. (2020), authenticity refers to actions taken by researchers to ensure that the voice and perspective of the study participants are genuine, valid, and credible. This process requires researchers to be mindful, self-aware, and fair with their practices throughout the research process. In an effort to ensure a quality study that is credible and authentic, quantitatively we prioritized the use of a validated instrument. Qualitatively, we utilized four key strategies (field notes, member checking, triangulation, and thick description) to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research that was completed.

Field Notes. Throughout the data collection period, field notes were compiled by each researcher to describe and analyze what occurred during the focus groups and interviews from each of our individual points of view. Each of us kept field notes and memos that were shared via a collective and closed Google document after each focus group or interview. In our notes, we commented on participants' body language, the private or public setting of the focus groups, key comments/phrases/themes shared by participants, and additional information gathered from casual conversations both pre and post the formalized focus group and interview questions.

Member Checking. The second strategy utilized within our data collection to ensure credibility and authenticity was member checking, as a form of data verification. We recorded each focus group and interview and at the completion of each, we transcribed the recordings. We then sent community conversation participants the de-identified transcripts to check for accuracy because we wanted to ensure the words transcribed were accurate with the responses that were shared during our time together.

Triangulation. Triangulation was the third strategy utilized to ensure credibility and authenticity. Our study incorporated multiple forms of data methods, multiple data sources, and three different researchers. We used a survey, focus groups, interviews, a Google Form, field notes, secondary data analysis, and a literature review to compile data.. Our participants came from distinct organizations whereby each had their own individual culture and unique practices, yet they all came from an organization that was small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led, or a combination of the four. Therefore, each data source had similar characteristics but experienced the phenomenon uniquely (Hayes & Singh, 2013). According to Shenton (2004), this way of triangulating data sources allows for “individual viewpoints and experiences [to be] verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behaviors under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions of a range of people” (p. 66). Additionally, this research study had three researchers with three different identities, three different master’s degree concentrations, and two different institutions of employment, all working together by leaning on each other's strengths.

Thick Description. The fourth strategy to ensure credibility and authenticity is that of thick description. All three researchers paid close attention to the contextual detail in observing and interpreting social meaning when leading focus groups and interviews. Throughout the focus groups, our group documented feedback (through recordings and field notes), and contextual surroundings of the focus groups in detail. Our findings tell the story of the current state of the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits regarding their grant funding needs and challenges in order to offer recommendations of what they need to be supported.

Summary of Chapter 3

In summary, we framed our work within our methodology chapter from a humanist viewpoint. Specifically, this chapter began with our positionality statement to acknowledge our authentic lens for research. It then included a detailed description of our epistemology, theoretical framework, research design, data collection methods, analysis procedures, and study trustworthiness. We originally proposed that in order to combat inequities in grant funding, it would be beneficial to hear from, and listen to, the communities who are in need of funding. Our methodology provided the pathway of how we went about this work, and within future sections, we describe and reflect upon what we heard. We further refer to “community conversations” interchangeably with focus groups, interviews, and online questionnaire (Google Form) submissions. Our methodology chapter described our path to engage in these community conversations, and within the upcoming section we sought to provide clarity for our problem of practice, and highlight the voices from the treasured conversations.

Chapter 4. Findings

Findings from the data collection of focus groups, interviews, and a Google Form indicated that small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits are doing work within their respective communities and filling a gap for a program or service for those in need. In this section, we primarily refer to these organizations as nonprofits. Our community conversations surfaced themes around challenges experienced in the grant funding process as well as what these organizations need to overcome these challenges, and what they need to develop their capacity. In our previous chapters, we stated that we are committed to identifying truths and uncovering opportunities for transformation of both the nonprofits served and those funding them. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Kern et al.'s (2020) SIPP model, which guided our work, states that its purpose is "to cultivate the wellbeing of human social systems, enable system co-evolution, and create positive unimagined futures" (p. 708). As we facilitated these conversations, we encouraged nonprofit leaders to address their funding desires and share with us their specific funding challenges. We (the researchers) asked ourselves, how are they doing so much for their communities with so little funding? We concluded that it is due to passion, persistence, and the strength of the communities they have built.

The nonprofits are facilitators of change amidst the overwhelming challenges they face and endless needs they have; these challenges and needs are illuminated within this section. In their terms, they are the *"disruptors,"* " *rabble rousers,"* and *"those who are closest to the pain."* One individual's words speak to the dedication and commitment of their work when they say *"You will see a change, it's just getting the ball rolling. You want to have a conversation, let's talk about what needs to be done."* Through the voices of our participants, we provide the findings of our community conversations as follows, broken down into themes that emerged through our data analysis. We are intentionally choosing to italicize the words of our nonprofit leaders in order to not only clearly differentiate their words from our own, but also to demonstrate the importance of amplifying and elevating their voices. As researchers, we feel that an emphasized visual representation of their words centers them in our text and intensifies the urgency to address the needs and challenges that the participants in our study face.

Our findings are organized around nine themes for each of our three research questions as viewed through a SIPP lens. As the experiences of our participants are multifaceted and located within systems of complex dynamics, we found that themes overlapped in some areas and all experiences could not fit into a singular category. However, in order to provide a clear presentation of the data, the findings are presented as:

- Funding Challenges
    - Theme 1: Structural and Systemic Racism
    - Theme 2: Bureaucratic Complexity and Lack of Access
    - Theme 3: Relational Gaps Between Funding Agencies and Nonprofits
- Funding Needs
    - Theme 1: Change in Historical System, Practices, and Processes of Funding
    - Theme 2: Transparent and Open Communication
    - Theme 3: Trust-Based Relationships
- Capacity Needs
    - Theme 1: Personnel
    - Theme 2: Resources and Tools
    - Theme 3: Humanist Commitment

For each theme, we provide an explanatory introduction as it relates to each research question and use participant quotations to provide evidence. Accordingly, we illustrate each theme through the voices of the participants sharing their lived experiences. We make note of participants' identifying characteristics where appropriate for the purpose of contextualization. We then follow with an analysis of how structures, practices, and attitudes are connected to their experiences.

Funding Challenges

Determining an equitable funding process is complex, because, as a focus group attendee put it, "*the question of equity is challenging to answer because who gets to define what is equitable*?" When describing their participation in grant funding opportunities, our nonprofit leaders recounted the obstacles they face when applying for and obtaining monetary awards. The challenges that they described fall into three categories—racial, bureaucratic, and relational.

Structural and Systemic Racism

According to Kendi (2019), racism is "a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities" (pp. 17–18). More specifically, Wolff et al. (2016) define structural racism as "the history and current reality of institutional racism across all institutions, combining to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color" (p. 3). Kendi (2019) points out, however, that when considering structural and systemic racism, these terms are more aptly defined as racist policy, which "is any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups [and that] racism itself is institutional, structural, and systemic" (p. 18). The word "racism" was used only twice by just one participant in our interviews. What was pervasive, however— throughout all of our conversations—were descriptions of specific instances that our respondents experienced within the current funding systems and structures that they ascribed to their minority race. In particular, they recounted situations where they faced blatant inequities, bias or racialized microaggressions, silencing, power differentials, tokenism, and exploitation.

Inequities. Respondents spoke in-depth about how they were unable to compete with larger, White-led organizations, especially in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area, due to an unequal playing field. One respondent who identifies as a Black woman shared,

> *I just think that there needs to be unrestricted funds. Setting it up so that people are not having to sell their kidney and their first born to fill an application out—just more unrestricted, more trust-based philanthropy. So like, trusting black and brown people because the reason that we exist is because we are resourceful. Black people are the number one givers in America but we are the least likely to receive funding. We give more than any other racial group. And I think until funders can admit that they're not trying to get at the root, I don't think anything is really going to change because it goes back to, like, I don't really trust you to know what to do with this money.*

This participant calls for trust-based philanthropy and a community-centered systems improvement strategy instead of the current processes that require excessive red tape and appear inherently distrustful of the motives of Black organizations. Other participants who shared their experiences needing unrestricted funding talked about how they often have to modify their minority-focused mission in order to fit into, as one respondent put it, the "*myopic*" standpoint and priorities of funding organizations. This individual who identifies as a Black man expressed the following point with which many in attendance also agreed:

> *You have this [Black and Brown-led] organization that is expected to, like, have the same output as this organization that has a $1 million, 2-3 million dollar budget. And it just*

doesn't measure out. Like, I can get funding for a particular program, but me trying to get funding for staff or to pay rent for my office or electrical. It's like, these [grant-funding] organizations are paying for these things. They're paying for staff. They're paying for their infrastructure needs. But it's like, OK, the small minority-led, small nonprofits are supposed to be run by all volunteers, which is just a wild proposition to put in front of folks. You as the granting organization, YOU have staff, but you expect the organizations that you're granting to not have staff.

This participant points out the stark disparity in the physical and human resources of funding agencies in contrast to the lack of such resources of fund seekers. Further, a majority of respondents spoke about how they eschew local funding because of its cumbersome constraints and incompatible priorities. Instead, they look to national funding sources or small-dollar donors, which they explain is much more unconditional and supportive. One respondent who identifies as a Black man illustrates this sentiment when he said:

I don't really rely on the philanthropic ecosystem here in Virginia or in Richmond in particular because I feel like we live in a city that is still dominated by this hierarchy of human value with White people at the top and Black people at the bottom. My experiences with philanthropic donors and funders have represented that.

The local racial hierarchy that our respondents attested to and the embedded inequitable practices that it maintains propagate racial bias to which our participants expressed that they also face on a continual basis.

Bias. According to Braswell (2022), racial bias “refers to the primarily unconscious thoughts, preconceptions, or experiences that cause people to think and act in prejudiced ways” (unpaged). Bias may be unconscious or conscious but the impact from the behavior it produces results in serious and significant obstacles that minorities are forced to navigate. Examples of racial bias that our participants experienced centered around a perception that small, emergent minority-led nonprofit leaders were “less than” their White peers. One respondent who identifies as a Black man shared:

> *A small organization, they can't afford to mess up nothing. They can't afford to mess up at all. Because once you mess up, you’re done. So I'm going to put this black cloud on your organization. They mismanaged money. No, they didn’t. They were trying to figure it out. Nobody gave them a hand.*

This individual articulates that while minority nonprofit leaders are willing and have the ability to learn the systems and processes of grant funders, grant funders lack an understanding of what is needed for organizational developmental learning by the nonprofits and limit their access to expertise and resources. Another respondent who identifies as a Black woman also attested to the different standards to which minority-led organizations are held. She explained:

> *There's racial bias with that across many sectors. So where White orgs, and White people in general, can have mishaps and make mistakes, but aren't held to this same level of scrutiny as Black and Brown people. Why do we have to be perfect? Can we normalize imperfection as humans? Just like, Hey, that's a small organization and they’re learning. The perfection piece is a tenet of White-dominant culture. Along with that, there's a lot of other tenets of White-dominant culture, but that perfection, everything has to be done this certain way, that is a tenet of White-dominant culture. And so, I do believe that the nonprofit sector and the funding sector is operating under tenets of White-dominant culture.*

This excerpt exemplifies the predominance of how White-centric views are prevalent throughout the region, which propagates a continued mistrust of minority-led organizations. Still another participant, who identifies as an Asian woman, spoke to what Dorsey et al. (2020) said about racial bias existing within historical processes and systems.

> *It seems like the structures and beliefs that are in place for making up for disparities in funding and historical disadvantages are just bypassed in the nonprofit realm. And even like if you try to look for contracts, I'm looking for contracts on the databases and all that. And like, I qualify as small women owned, minority owned, but only for my own personal business, but the nonprofit, it doesn't count. You just go into the general pool with every other business looking for a contract. You're at a big disadvantage as a nonprofit. It doesn't seem like there's any correction or attention to this continuing disparity.*

Her attestation that racial bias is an embedded, institutionalized, and unrecognized practice within the local philanthropic ecosystem that hinders leaders of color from accessing financial support was echoed by many throughout our community conversations. As a result of such bias, minority-led nonprofits shared that it does not just prevent them from obtaining funding, but it also often comes with strings attached should they eventually acquire monetary support, which limits their ability to operate and speak freely to their truths and missions.

Silencing. The first reason, which was previously mentioned, our nonprofit leaders seek alternative funding sources is because they offer less restrictions and more trust in minority-led organizations. A second reason our respondents gave is that they are often not able to speak freely for fear of reprisal that results in diminished opportunities. One participant who identifies as a Black male shared:

> *As an organization, we just decided in order to be able to speak freely, in order to examine what we did with a level of integrity, we just don't even pursue money from Richmond just as a principle because we don't want to be silenced. . . So in order to have the great structural changes that we need, some things, they need to be addressed and we just want a relative amount of freedom to say that without having to worry what that would mean on the back end.*

This person's account, which was corroborated by others, demonstrates that many talented and impactful organizations do not even engage with local funders because of the biases that have been experienced in the local philanthropic space up to now. Another respondent who identifies as a Hispanic woman told her compelling story of racial bias and suppression.

> *I was invited to work with the CEO for [a large organization] and I just think she didn't treat me, she treated me as I was an idiot. She couldn't believe that I have a budget. She couldn't believe that I understood how a nonprofit works. I had to stop her in the middle of the conversation and I told her, 'Did you know that I have a master's degree in administration and a bachelor's in business'? Just so you know that. She had told me that—I sent the presentation about the services that we provide—and she told me that it was not possible that we were providing all of the services. And I was like, what are you reading? I even pulled her paper to see. Yeah, we are doing all of this. So, the next day I was uninvited to [the next meeting]. I can just feel that after I challenged the way that they were doing this stuff because it wasn't working for my community, I was uninvited. So, I just feel that I wasn't treated well. I was disrespected.*

These two, out of many instances underscoring the inability of our minority nonprofit leaders to speak freely without fear of repercussions, demonstrate just one aspect of inequity that they experienced. Another example stems from the difference in power that they have compared to others.

Power Differentials. Our respondents attested to how they experience a philanthropic system in which White males hold the majority of power, which puts them at a constant disadvantage and produces ongoing funding challenges. One participant in our study who identifies as a Hispanic woman lamented that:

> *[For] people that have projects or want to do something in their own community, Black and Brown communities, we have seen that I have to work twice as hard to just prove that I can do the same job, even better.*

She shared how much harder it is for her to be effective in her community while other organizations with White or non-immigrant leaders who claim to do similar work receive the bulk of the funding and prosper more easily. Another participant who identifies as a Black man shared a similar sentiment when he said:

> *White men are controlling the purse strings at philanthropic organizations across the city, whether it's corporate or family-run foundations. My story [has been] butting up against this racial hierarchy of human value, wealth disparities—the folks that've got the money being White and male, and it's sometimes female as well—and them trying to keep control of resources and decision-making power and not trusting or not believing in, I should say, that Black people have the capacity to make decisions and create solutions that speak to their cultural reality and need for self-determination. It's really not a question of whether the money is there. It's a question of whether or not the folks that have the money want to*

> *give it to communities of color so that they can be self-determining. It's like predominantly White-led foundations and philanthropic organizations don't have the will. They don't want to do it. You know what I mean? Because if they wanted to do it, they would be doing it.*

This individual brings to light a perceived lack of will within the Greater Richmond and Petersburg community to acknowledge and rectify a longstanding imbalance between the funding opportunities of White and minority-led nonprofits. The existing and embedded power differential that our respondents described propagates even more racist practices with which our interviewees must contend. Tokenism and exploitation were brought up repeatedly throughout our community conversations.

Tokenism. Manipulative practices such as tokenism often stem from inequities and power differentials. Nonprofit attorney and activist, Ho (2017), defines tokenism as:

> covert racism [whereby] racism requires those in power to maintain their privilege by exercising social, economic, and/or political muscle against people of color (POC); tokenism achieves the same while giving those in power the appearance of being non-racist and even champions of diversity because they recruit and use POC as racialized props. (unpaged)

Our respondents highlighted personal instances of tokenism that they experienced first-hand. More than one individual explicitly stated that they were a token or felt tokenized while several respondents used the term "check box" to illustrate their experience. For example, one participant who identifies as an Asian woman shared:

I would just add as an Asian woman that has sat at the table with a lot of White people, that a person also shouldn't be a token, like, I feel like I represent, and then it goes in one ear and out the other. But they had their little check box or whatever.

The experiences that she described relayed how she was not treated as an equal partner within groups and that her impression as to why she was included was based primarily on her race and a need to have her present yet not meaningfully involved in the work. Another respondent who identifies as a Black man gave his account.

So, the experience that I had is that we were totally, like our program was a token program. It was really the aspirations of the then leadership to, like, be inclusive and, like, try to be inclusive. So I was in there pushing for racial justice through our program. But the people in leadership were like, oh yeah, this is just great that we've got a Black person in the space, because the moment COVID hit and stuff started going back to normal, like, none of this stuff that we were doing has come back to life. You know what I mean? So, they killed the entire community engagement, even in their strategic planning, and we were able to get racial equity written into the strategic plan and all that type of stuff. All that stuff, dead since COVID. So it was really just, you know, it was their chance to kinda like tokenize us and tokenize our community or tokenize their perception of the program's relationship with the community. It wasn't about the impacts that we were having in the community. It was just about being able to check off a box and say that they were doing XYZ in Black and Brown communities.

This narrative illustrates what others also shared in that the successful work that the minority-led nonprofits were able to accomplish through their individual perseverance despite the arduous roadblocks they faced was frequently used as evidence by White-led organizations that they were themselves doing racial equity work, which was typically not the case. Moreover, tokenism was not the only nefarious practice by organizations in the Richmond area in connection with recent nationwide attention being paid to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and the increased funding opportunities that accompanied them. Not only did our respondents offer their accounts of being tokenized, but many also experienced outright exploitation.

Exploitation. Racial exploitation, put simply, is when the dominant race (e.g., White) disadvantages minority races in order to benefit themselves. Our respondents spoke of specific accounts where they, their organization, or another minority-led organization were exploited so that White-led organizations could prosper. These instances were not one-offs but instead were shared with an air of normalcy giving the impression that the practice was widely experienced and thought of as commonplace.

To illustrate, the role of a fiscal agent was a topic that arose in multiple conversations. And while none of our participants were directly affected by a recent local incident of a nonprofit fiscal agent who defrauded more than 80 small or emergent nonprofits including a significant number who are minority-led, many knew colleagues who were affected (Thompson, 2022, unpaged). They also gave their own personal accounts that demonstrated they could relate to this exploitive practice. One respondent who identifies as a Black man described how he worked for more than 10 years to get where he is with his nonprofit including three years with no form of compensation. Because he needed a fiscal agent in order to leverage funds to develop his nonprofit, his work is now the intellectual property of that fiscal agent and not his own. He also relayed his account of organizations in Richmond that would charge $50,000 to process eight checks for him.

If you put a fiscal agent in charge, they charge ten percent to receive the money. So you pay them $50,000, 10%, just to receive the money, and they only process eight checks for me. But that's the jig. That's how it works, right? Because our communities, they don't have the background or the skin in the game of receiving money. So you all need a fiscal agent to receive and then manage it for you. Okay. Alright. But then when you look at the fiscal agents like okay, you just hit me for 10% percent? Just to process the payments because they don't really do much more than that. That's a challenge. That is a challenge to have to pay that because that 10% could have went towards an accountant. That 10% could have went towards some software to track my spending.

Others gave similar testimonies about how larger, White-led organizations used the minority status of our respondents as their own in order to get funding for themselves. They took ownership of the work that the minority-led nonprofits accomplished in their communities while simply sub-contracting out to them for a fraction of the moneys awarded.

When considering how race affects funding for minority-led nonprofits, our respondents were rife with questions for funders. One participant brought up how race plays into bureaucratic policies and inclusive practice.

The problem is that the policies, procedures, processes, and systems in place, we're all operating under something that was created by White men, right? We're still operating under these things. But when we talk about inclusivity, that means bringing everyone else. And, so what does that look like? Who should get the funding?

And while racism was an overarching theme that presented significant barriers to our respondents in obtaining funding, we also learned in more detail about the bureaucratic and relational challenges that they faced.

Bureaucratic Complexity and Lack of Access

When focus group participants were asked about their experience obtaining funding they responded, both explicitly and implicitly, about the bureaucratic complexity—and red tape— that surrounded the funding and application processes. Within the context of our study, we define bureaucratic challenges as procedures or norms that make it difficult for people to get where they want to go. They are part of a system of controlling or managing that blocks someone so that movement, going forward, or action is prevented or made more difficult. The challenges we heard referenced frequently included lack of access to available grants, length of time to complete applications, confusion about who makes decisions regarding who receives grant awards, and other miscellaneous challenges such as not trusting the people nor the process. To highlight bureaucratic complexity, a focus group attendee stated:

> *Some of the larger organizations that have been getting grants over and over and over again that serve particularly minority populations, the individuals who are on the boards don't look like the individuals that are served. Then you have minority-led organizations that are doing the work and serving the same populations, that of course can relate better to the populations that they serve. But those that are on the other side get more funding, more attention, more whatever. And they're just, it's just a machine. That's just it, just what they do. And so I think if we're talking about being equitable and evening the playing field, then there truly needs to be an even playing field for minority-led organizations. And those that are the machines and have been doing the work for longer, doesn't always mean that they do it better.*

The sum of these challenges shared by focus group attendees aligns with the aforementioned research of Chan and Fisher (2016b), which emphasizes that a tangible process must be created.

The tangible process of Chan and Fisher (2016b), expanded below, highlights the request of small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the UWGRP catchment area. That request, identified by focus group attendees, is to create a "*streamlined and transparent*" process.

Step 1: Grant Application Identification. Many focus group attendees expressed that they feel as though even identifying grant funding opportunities poses a challenge because they do not have meaningful connections to funding organizations. Therefore, as opposed to these organizations seeking out the funders, they need the funders to come to them and invite them to apply, or even simply invite them to receive the funds because, as one attendee said, "*why do I need to tell you what I already know I do*?" As noted by Chan and Fisher (2016b), this initial step, and effort, can ensure a diverse application pool in the grant application process.

Step 2: Grant Application Process. The application process is *"onerous"* as described by one focus group attendee, adding *"Do you want us to run a program, or complete a grant application?"* Findings indicate that completing the application itself is overwhelming, and the time it takes to complete applications is not proportionate to the level of funding many organizations receive. Focus group attendees suggested, in line with the research of Chan and Fisher (2016b), that interviews, videos, or meetings be used in place of a traditional application. Or, if a traditional application is used, to consider creating a common application that is used for multiple grants and funding organizations—and provide organizations compensation for the time it takes to complete an application. Through the creation of a common application, some of the onus is put back onto the funding agencies to ensure they are communicating between each other in order to both keep nonprofits from having to duplicate their work and ensure that there is not an excessive overlap in who is, and who is not, being funded.

Step 3. Grant Decision Making. Focus group attendees repeatedly asked about who was at the table making decisions about who gets funded and at what level. Because in their mind, as indicated by research findings, it is perceived by nonprofits that funding agencies, "*fund the same orgs over and over again, because it's safe, because people aren't going to criticize them*", implying that it is easier for those funding agencies. The challenge of who should be at the table was articulated by one participate when they shared:

> *Be intentional about who gets to make the decisions. I think that the most powerful thing that I've seen is taking the communities that are served and putting them in a position to make the decision about who gets funded and what that would mean to the community.*

This need for a peer-reviewed process to determine who gets funded, and centers the community being served, is backed by the research as outlined by Chan and Fisher (2016b) in our literature review. Connected to this research, a question was asked by our participants as to why funding agencies require evidence-based reporting requirements yet do not require reporting from the community. If "*evidence-based research is required for reportin*g", but the community voice is not heard, is that the best way to decide about who is, or is not funded? And finally, if a grant is denied, the organization that submitted the grant needs to understand why they were not awarded the money, as we elaborate on in the next section of Transparent and Open Communication. According to focus group attendees, the challenge is that this feedback loop should be, but is not, initiated by the funding agency as opposed to the nonprofits.

Step 4: Miscellaneous Considerations. Focus group attendees repeatedly stated the procedural challenges of not having access to grants, the laborious process of applying for grants, not having a seat at the table for deciding who gets grants, and the lack of a trust-based relationship (elaborated upon in the future section of Trust-Based Relationships) with funders.

The challenges of the grant funding process, including gaps in relationships, were summed up by one attendee when they shared:

> *Funding is rooted in relationships, right? So we have been funded by one foundation repeatedly for the last four years and . . . that relationship has been developing and they were the first foundation that really, I guess you could say, believed in us and they gave us that early funding. That makes all the difference.*

The logistical challenges of the type and length of grants awarded, combined with not having relationships with the funders, creates challenges for our research study respondents.

Relational Gaps Between Funding Agencies and Nonprofits

As we identified themes from our findings, nonprofits reiterated that there are relational gaps between funding agencies and nonprofits. Focus group participants shared that funders did not understand their specific challenges, and the nonprofits feel that their needs are "*assumptions*" of the funders, rather than their truths. What follows focuses on the challenges faced by the nonprofit community regarding the funders not having a relational understanding of their work. Particular challenges that our leaders shared include funders underestimating their work, absence of respect and trust the nonprofits feel they deserve, and lack of understanding that exists regarding trauma informed care.

Funders underestimating their work. Findings indicated that smaller nonprofits are often underestimated. A focus group participant stated that *"bigger is not always better,"* and shared that there are many smaller nonprofits who are doing great work, and they just need to be given a chance. We heard from a collection of participant voices that the bigger nonprofits are not always relationally close to the communities served, and just because an organization is larger, does not mean that it has all the resources of smaller nonprofits. We, the researchers, are under the impression that these smaller nonprofits have impactful outcomes but may not necessarily have the matching capacity to compete for grant funding like the larger nonprofits, which could be seen as less equitable. It was stated by a focus group attendee that when considering an equitable process, compensation should be provided that is commensurate with their work. This specific focus group participant stated:

> *I think it's important to note that when you talk about an equitable process, and then when we talk about asking folks from marginalized communities to come and share their time, talent, treasure, and testimony, I think there should be compensation. And so I think if we're talking about being equitable and evening the playing field, then they truly need to even the playing field for minority-led organizations.*

As the researchers, we gathered that the minority-led nonprofits are providing impactful services and programming and therefore need to be given a chance without power differentials, as shared in the previous theme focusing on Structural and Systemic Racism. Compensation and funding for minority-led nonprofits needs to be evaluated for equity because their unique skill sets matter within their communities for the work they perform.

Absence of respect and trust. Another finding indicates nonprofits long for funders to show good intentions, create partnerships with the communities who are served by the funding, and build bridges for open and transparent communication. As stated in our literature review, one of the founding principles of the collective impact framework is continuous communication. As described in detail in the future findings section of "Trust-Based Relationships,", there is a need for trust-based relationships of both the funding organizations and those who are served, which comes from effective communication. There were specific statements from focus group participants that brought this concept to light. One participant questioned:

> *As a start-up nonprofit, I'm sitting here thinking, have I had opportunities to build trust? Who is it up to to build relationships, especially local ones? We know we can do it on a national level. But then I feel if they create the opportunity to do so, because we can invite them to things, but what can they do to build those relationships with us?*

Another focus group participant stated that " *If you don't care, and it's just about giving out money, then again, it is maintaining problems and we are not changing situations that need systemic changes."* These findings have specifically called attention to situations or examples where respect and trust between funders and nonprofits is threatened or diminished. Findings suggest that nonprofits thrive when they receive respect and trust, which should be rooted in a set of values that help advance equity, shift power, and build mutually accountable relationships.

Lack of understanding that exists regarding trauma informed care. Findings of the community conversations illuminated a need for healthy relationships in terms of harm reduction and a challenge to not cause additional hardships to those who have been marginalized. Specifically, social injustices referenced within our literature review and research from The University of Buffalo support this finding. Their Institute on Trauma and Trauma Informed Care (2023) defines trauma-informed care (TIC) as, "[recognizing] the presence of trauma symptoms and [acknowledging] the role trauma may play in an individual's life- including service staff" (unpaged). Our nonprofits conveyed that they face challenges that can trigger difficult feelings and reactions associated with an original trauma. It is important to recognize that this trauma can be an obstacle to building healthy relationships.

A focus group participant stated that "*Sometimes the partners that they want us to work with are the ones causing harm, right? So stop forcing, trying to force, that unnatural relationship.*" This excerpt demonstrates the challenge nonprofits face in terms of a gap in an authentic relationship with funders. We gained the impression that nonprofits want a healthy relationship, and they want a true partnership that includes valuing their work, mutual trust and respect, and healthy relationships that do not cause (additional) trauma. They shared with us in detail about their needs and how funders and nonprofits could align in order to mutually benefit one another in service of their community.

Funding Needs

After learning about the challenges faced by small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the UWGRP catchment area, we wanted to understand the needs of these organizations when it comes to grant funding. We looked at the funding sources of who is giving money, funding types and what kind of money they are giving, the relationships between the people giving the money, the type of money they are providing, and the nonprofits who are the recipients of the funds. After examining these specific needs, three larger needs, or themes, emerged; which include the need for a change in the historical system, practices, and process of funding, transparent and open communication, and culturally-informed community understanding through building trust-based relationships, These themes are further explained as follows.

Change in Historical System, Practices, and Processes of Funding

Focus group participants from the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg catchment area consistently reiterated the need to change the historical grant funding system of how things have always been done, and as one participant stated "*Don't tell us what you want, ask us what we need"*; which is exactly what we, as researchers, did. Research participants went on to describe one aspect of their grant funding needs as a change in historical systems, practices, and processes from the traditional way funding processes have worked locally. Specifically, the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the UWGRP catchment area's funding needs were clear—they need access to general operating/unrestricted funds (including seed money), they need multi-year grants, a simplified (possibly common) application, and they need fewer reporting requirements. Focus group attendees speculated that these changes would allow organizations "*to be unapologetic in [their] mission…not let the money [they] receive dictate how [they] operate*", so they can directly serve their communities, and their staff.

Over and over, researchers heard interview participants talk about the need for grants to be for general operating or unrestricted funds; essentially, they are longing for funds without strings attached to them. The reasons that they gave were that when funds are directed towards a specific program, they do not allow an organization to use that money towards payroll, capital projects, or other resources needed to run their program. They explained that restricted funds tend to cause, or give grantees the feeling of, mission drift as they are given money but told how to spend it, and that may not be aligned with the mission of their organization.

Another form of unrestricted funds that our respondents cited a need for seed or start-up money, which interview attendees shared is hard to come by but a primary necessity for an emergent organization. They conceded that giving money to startups may be risky, but with that risk comes (equitable) rewards. To reiterate the words of a focus group attendee:

> *Give money to people who are dreaming of something they maybe haven't even been started yet…trust Black and Brown people because the reason that we exist is because we are resourceful.*

There was some consensus around having seed money that would last for three years: year one to develop structure and years two and three to stabilize. But others looked at multi-year funding from a broader view with one person sharing:

> *Be honest around are you trying to impose programs or are you trying to support organizations that are doing the deep systemic work? And at what point do you say forget a two-year window or a one-year window or a three-year window. Instead, ask what are the needs of your community?*

Whatever the length of time, focus group attendees repeatedly stated that most, if not all, grants should be multi-year; which they thought would not be a challenge for grantors assuming the grantors priorities stay consistent from one year to the next.

In addition to the type of grant and length of grant that is awarded, participants stressed that there is a need for fewer reporting requirements both during the application process and once a grant is awarded. As one focus group participant concisely questioned:

> *What does the grant application look like? So why are we asking these elongated questions about a program? Why do I have to tell you what I already know that I do? Are the grant applications in a language that everyone understands? When we think about reporting, and the reporting process, you want people to do all this work with this much resource [gesture demonstrating small], this little bit amount of resources and then the reporting is so extensive. So, at what point are funders going to come together and say we're going to standardize some of the outcomes reporting. Is there a common grant application?*

What this focus group attendee shared raises many valid questions, with many possible answers. In sum, this focus group attendee illuminates the need to eliminate the gatekeepers, transactional processes, and traditional written reports, which in turn will create a more transparent, streamlined, and equitable process.

To change the historical systems, practices, and process and if United Way is able to be, as described by a focus group attendee, "*bold and innovative*" in the philanthropic world, our respondents implied that it requires funders to respond to the needs of the grantees they hope to serve. As a result, grantees will then be able to fulfill their mission and United Way will be able to make a collective impact. This sentiment was eloquently shared by a focus group attendee when they said:

> *I want to execute my mission as a person from the community with direct experience in the mission itself. I want the opportunity to create something that I did not have but desperately needed. I want to do this with guidance but without being stepped on or taken advantage of. I want to center, honor, and implement the perspectives of Black/BIPOC voices.*

Grantees have a need to be funded without having to prove their worthiness for the funding. They need the hierarchy removed through more egalitarian processes, and they need to be compensated, as they specifically stated, for their "*time, talent, treasure, and testimony*". Meeting these needs, they attest, can only be done if there is transparent and open communication.

Transparent and Open Communication

United Way expert, Ayeola Fortune, was previously quoted in our literature review for saying what they felt was necessary to advance positive and impactful community change. They highlighted the need for intentional and open communication, particularly with those who are not typically a part of the funding conversation. When it comes to the capital needs of our nonprofit interviewees, we found that they too identified open and transparent communication as one of their high priorities. Their responses around this theme coalesced into three main requests—to be heard, to have a true equal partnership with funders that is relational and ongoing, and for there to be increased transparency established so they could have a clear understanding of funding practices.

To be heard. When our interview participants repeatedly stated that they wanted to be asked what their needs are rather than funders making assumptions resulting in policies and requirements around suppositions, they were asking to be heard. This sentiment is best explained by one of our respondents who said that being heard means:

> *Bringing everybody to the table. The missing piece is always the people who are served, right? The missing pieces are always, who benefits. And I always have this thing that we talk about, and this is not necessarily with funding, but it is with programs. We never want to just build a program and say, 'Hey, we did this thing for you'. We always ask, 'What do you all need? What's missing? What's not being provided'? Because there's a ton of groups. There's a ton of programs. There's a ton of people who are coming with surveys and collecting data. And what's oftentimes missing is people get tunnel vision and say, oh, these poor communities need x, y, and z. These poor people need x, y, and z instead of asking the people what they need. So I think that translates to the funding process. Ask people what they need instead of saying, 'Hey, we created this grant and we want to focus on x, y, and z because this is our mission'. Ask the people what they need to be funded most because what they'll find is it's not always the big thing. Sometimes it's food, sometimes it's transportation, sometimes it's bus tickets, sometimes it's a person who is homeless that just needs support to get to where they're getting in a non-traditional manner. Sometimes there's not the ability to take a picture and say look at what we did. Sometimes you just got to trust the process. But, just being willing to be*

flexible [sigh]. That's a lot, you know? That is a whole mouthful, like, just being willing to be flexible and figuring out who's being served and bringing them to the table to say what needs to be done.

Being heard also means being included in the decision-making processes that were previously discussed. Respondents shared that the decision-makers they encounter do not typically represent them and the communities they serve, either racially or economically. One participant shared:

I would like to see more input from grantees at the decision level. Also, grantees on Advisory Boards. Inviting agencies because you believe in them and want to make it better.

In short, our respondents expressed that their need to be heard means being included and respected for the experience and expertise that they possess in meeting the needs of the communities that they serve.

To have a true equal partnership with funders that is relational and ongoing. Our participants also identified open communication with funding organizations that is relational and ongoing as a significant need. They elaborated on this need with what they believe a true, equal partnership looks like. First, our respondents suggested that from the organization side, the funders should be more open about their own needs and costs so that nonprofits can better understand the context and constraints from which they operate. They also recommended providing more transparency and information about those making the decisions so that they can provide better information from their side to help with the decision-making process. For example, one participant explained:

Very rarely do I know, unless I have a relationship directly with whoever's in charge of the foundation, how they get their funding or who sits on their board or how decisions

> *are made in the funding process. I don't know if a committee for some of our grants is who decides or if there's one individual. So, I think being really clear about who's in the room making those decisions so that we have that awareness and we can think about that as we write grant applications. Do I need to educate a group of mental health professionals that might be reviewing a grant application about the impacts of trauma and chronic PTSD? Probably not to the level that I would a board of people in a corporate entity that have not been exposed to that. I might approach the grant process differently but I don't know who's looking at it. I would say that for probably 95% of the instances that we're writing for grants.*

Therefore, in other words, this respondent is saying that if they had more direct knowledge and insight into the people and processes of the funding organizations to which they are applying, they would be better equipped to provide the funder with the information that they are wanting and save themselves and decision-makers a lot of unnecessary stress and wasted effort.

Second, our participants provided ways in which relationships between funders and grantees could be strengthened. One respondent shared how they were able to bridge a relationship with a large local funder by aligning equity practices and inviting them to events. They communicate regularly with each other about what they have got going on, which has increased funder involvement and fostered trust. Another suggestion was to establish a mentorship practice so that funders could meet potential grantees where they are and be able to openly communicate weaknesses so that a plan of action could be created to address what has been identified, which would help the nonprofit know what they needed to do to meet funding requirements. One additional recommendation was to establish regular check-ins between funder and grantee, which was explained in detail.

> *There's a balance that has to be taken into account so that it doesn't feel like you're doing all these jumping through hoops or all these things just to receive funding. But if the only time that there's an interaction is an email gets sent to invite you to apply for a grant and then you get the email to remind you that your reporting is due and that's all that it is, and maybe the grant award email in-between, I think that feels very transactional. So I think, having the ability to talk through priorities, both of our organization and of the funder's organization ahead of time, like as soon as that's known, not in the 2 weeks or months before the grant application is due 'cause that assumes that you have dedicated staff and even if you do, it assumes that the fund development manager, or director, knows everything about that foundation and what's necessary.*

Several respondents stressed that two-way communication grounded in an environment where it is safe to speak hard truths needs to be fostered for the good of both the funder and grantee. One person shared, "*I want to look forward to reporting the good and the not-so-good without unnecessary questioning or backlash.*" Another suggested that "*It would be helpful if [funders] would be more open to feedback because a lot of nonprofits don't offer it because they're afraid that [they're] not going to fund them again.*" Finally, several individuals shared that better and more open communication practices between funders themselves would be beneficial. For example, one participant elaborated:

> *I would say that there should be more communication between the local foundations to calibrate on who's funding what. There's a lot of duplication and overlap between funding. So if that's the case and we don't fit in to one of those duplicative groups or overlapping categories, then we could be blocked from a significant amount of funding in the area.*

In accordance, another participant suggested the need for larger funders in the area to create collaborative hubs in order to more "*intentionally and assertively pursue Collective Impact approaches*" for the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area.

To establish increased transparency. One of the five interconnected themes that The Collective Impact Forum (2018) pinpoints in their report as necessary to achieve open communication is transparency, which our participants also identified as a need. The nonprofit leaders provided reasons for its importance such as when funders open up their practices, they make them more equitable. For example, one person stressed:

> *There must be things that can be clearer or streamlined to give more access to smaller orgs that do not have overhead capital to wait for the process. Give detailed directions and always have a contact person to answer questions quickly. There have been times where we are left hanging because they haven't gone through a part of their process. We need a lot more communication.*

Others emphasized the need for clearly established goals with multiple avenues for communication and collaboration. One respondent indicated that they need:

> *Check ins that do not produce extra anxiety. Email blasts with updated information at regular intervals and a point person of contact who can respond quickly to questions or updates. Some people struggle with Zoom meetings but can execute the funding initiatives really well.*

Similarly, another participant shared that grantees need to know what tools are best for communication and data management according to the preferences of the funding organizations, which require time, effort, and resources to learn them that many small organizations do not have. To illustrate their point:

> *You'll see some organizations using SharePoint and Teams. And a lot of us are like, I don't know what the hell this is. Unfortunately, I know what it is [laughter]. But a lot of people don't. They don't know what's the best means of communication. They don't know that maybe we should use a cloud-based process to keep all of our assets and we should start building a place where we can always get our logo and headshots and put a media kit together.*

As previously discussed in the literature review, when open communication practices that take into consideration equitable practice are maintained on a regular basis, trusting relationships are able to be built between a funder and community organizations including those they serve, which is a further need that has been identified in our findings.

Trust-Based Relationships

Findings from our community conversations surfaced additional funding needs of nonprofits in the UWGRP catchment area around having trust-based relationships. The areas of focus within this section include discussions that took place around trust, relationship-building, funding opportunities, and mission alignment. As researchers, we consistently heard the phrase, *"So why aren't we enough?"* Opportunities exist to facilitate change and highlight how each community's pain, and journey, is different. There is a need to lean into the discomfort of being challenged, provide support, and facilitate change through the building of trust-based relationships.

Trust. Findings that emerged through our data collection process speak to the issue of funders needing to trust the nonprofits to know what is needed from the communities that they serve. The nonprofits who participated in our community conversations are engaged with their community, have authentically built trust, and know firsthand what will best benefit their populations. In short, they want and need the same efforts from funding organizations. To illustrate, one nonprofit leader shared:

> *A lot of times grant funders want imposed programming versus actually supporting an organization and trusting that the work they're doing is beneficial to their community, which is strange because a lot of times they will fund people who don't have a track record of actually having a great impact on a community. That's not a part of their review process. We actually wanted to invite community members into our evaluation process for them to be able to judge whether us having three years of funding meant something significant for their communities or not. And I hope that that's a practice that other funders will require and that part of that evaluation is something people will have to know, that that'll be on file for that organization and that will be taken into consideration the next time they apply for something.*

If funders listen to the needs of the community, their needs are spoken. Communities know what they need, and if such communities were asked to evaluate the work of the nonprofits who serve them, then the track record of the nonprofits could be elevated to show a greater positive impact. One of the focus group participants talked about the need for initiatives such as this one.

> *Our premier offering has been the community trust-building fellowship which takes different leaders from different parts of the city together and teaches them about the history of the city and how to really facilitate trust, and then we also do a lot of work around history and justice really helping people to make connections to some of the historical harms that have persisted in this city, this nation, and this world and really connecting that.*

Many in the communities with whom we spoke know how to build trust and have been doing so successfully. These trust-based relationships also bring awareness to historical injustices, so mistakes of the past can inform decisions made about the future.

Another individual explained how they see it.

> *So at the end of the day, when those people are constantly funded, nobody gets the chance to come up. So it's the same person funding the same thing, right? To trust you, is to give me a chance because if you have a conversation with me or you would come and really see what it is that grassroots do, then you would trust me and I will trust you to a certain extent. You can't just base stuff off of her social media posts and a picture because that's the people that come to stuff and take a picture with me and then back in the car and didn't add anything to that. But you can't go back and say, you've got to have a conversation with me. That's the only way you will build trust. And if you have people that have applied for funding over and over again—over and over again—it's something that you should say, 'Look, we got to turn this to the next person.'*

As this nonprofit leader stresses, trust is built through conversations and relationship building, which takes time and cannot be done in a day for a picture opportunity or a social media post. The nonprofits want to be given a chance to show the work they are doing in firsthand settings, with in-person interactions with funders.

When considering trust, one focus group participant shared this poignant message to funders, *"To build trust, just knowing that your motive is pure is important; it's one thing to give money, and another thing to care"*. Another suggested, " *I would encourage them to first look within. Sometimes before we are external facing, we should be internal facing. I would then tell them to look into trust-based philanthropy practices"*. Nonprofits are asking for funders to do more than show up at special events—they seek a sense of intentionality with compassion for the work they are doing.

Several participants explained what meaningful trust looks like. One participant shared an anecdote about a national funder with whom they work.

> *So they are a national funder and they only fund Black-girl organizations, that's their focus area. So their program officers were prior executive directors. They don't have all the stringent reporting procedures. I remember what happened on a call with one of them. And I asked her, I said where is the report? She was like, oh, there's no report. This is the report. She was like, I'm doing a report. Just like me being on the phone and on the Google Meet with you. You're giving me the feedback. You're telling me how things are going, I'm doing a report. And so I was like, 'Wow, that's amazing.' And she was like, well, you know, most of us are prior executive directors, prior leaders of grassroots organizations, so we understand that you don't need to really be bogged down and reporting about that which you already know that you do. Why you don't need to report on, you know, what you do. We trust you. I think that trust-based philanthropy is key.*

Nonprofit leaders want to focus on their communities, and not the administrative reporting that can take time away from the missions of their nonprofits. Multiple community conversation participants' emphasized that if mutual trust was in place, then funders would know their positive impact without structured reporting mechanisms. Another nonprofit leader proposed:

> *There needs to be a community performance report because you can think well of my community work and because you say she was there by the community, but the community is going to let me know that she was there in the community. The community can speak*

> *and say, Hey, you was over here and just what you did for my family and this is what I saw. Do you now think you should continue to give funding? That's how you build trust.*

Therefore, our findings from participants suggest that if trust is centered by both the nonprofits and the funders, as well as being mutually aligned, then the nonprofits' values and intentions can be a priority, which enhances their community work and ultimately benefits the funding organization.

Relationship-building. When considering relationship-building, our respondents stressed the importance of valuing mutually beneficial and healthy interactions as well as the need to consider a non-transactional process of funding distribution. While this process may take time, trust helps guide healthy relationship-building with grantees and their partners and fosters the building of trust-based organizational systems and structures. Our participants suggested that it is important they are asked what they need for their funding priorities because as previously mentioned by one of our interviewees, funders may find that it is not always the "*big things*" that have the most impact. When there is a relationship built between a funder and a nonprofit, there is an air of authenticity, which is necessary. For example, a community conversation raised the point that:

> *When they [funders] engage with us and our work about lifting up Black communities on our terms, it's like they don't really understand what that means. And I'm like, well, it's important because our communities have always been dependent upon White folks to come in and do XYZ services to address these social inequities, and as a result, we never really get to impress upon these issues like how we want to see them addressed.*

Several participants encouraged funders to intentionally seek out and go to those nonprofits who are "*closest to the pain*", which admittedly takes courage. This sentiment was best expressed by one focus group participant who said:

> *Go find the people that are rabble rousers, people that are thinking critically, that are attacking these problems at root causes. Connect with them, fund them, invest in those organizations because they are usually on the margins and not really getting any support from these philanthropic systems.*

From there, our nonprofit leaders said that relationships need to be cultivated in order to become strengthened. As we shared earlier when considering the challenges that our participants face, one focus group participant pensively mused out loud:

> *As a start-up nonprofit, I'm sitting here thinking, have I had opportunities to build trust? Who is it up to to build relationships, especially local ones? We know we can do it on a national level. But then I feel if they can create the opportunity to do so because we can invite them to things, but what can they do to build those relationships with us?*

What we did not share previously is what they said next which was, "*There is a need to have partnerships and make connections.*" To this statement, another individual added that "*They really need to be healthy relationships.*" Still another offered up a great example of what our respondents were suggesting is needed.

> *The one foundation that I feel like we have a really good relationship with, they gave us a chance. And we don't feel like we're held to this, like, perfection standard. They come to our events when we have something, they actually show up. I mean, it's just them getting to know us and we don't feel like we're under the gun. And they were willing to invest in capacity early on to give us a chance when other people wouldn't.*

The sentiment speaks to the relational balance of the funders and the nonprofits. This balanced relationship can provide a path for respect and trust to know that these nonprofits have the best intentions, rather than a focus on perfection. In accordance with this sentiment, another participant added:

> *I would say, to help build trusted relationships like the funders that do, instead of necessarily a full formal report, they're like, well, let's have a conversation. Let's talk about what you guys did. Or can you show us? I guess the first simple thing is more relationship, more conversation, and less of the strict numbers.*

What we as researchers interpreted from our conversations with the nonprofit leaders is that when funders clearly communicate their values, it assists organizations in making sound decisions through moments of uncertainty or change, which creates trust to then support the communities as they need to be supported.

Of particular significance when considering the funder-grantee relationship that emerged from our interviews is that our nonprofit leaders recognize that a successful relationship is a two-way street that is ongoing. This point is supported by one interviewee who said:

> *So I think that's something that is important, particularly executive director to executive director, not necessarily that titles are the most important thing, but I would also say it has to feel like a partnership. So there should be reciprocity, which I think is important, but not from a we're there to take from the foundation or that the foundation is there to take data from us, but [for both of us] to be able to raise more money. So I think making sure that you know they're aware of our programming, that there are conversations that are had before the grant application happens, so that we can think really strategically about where the foundation or the organization is headed and what their plan is so that it*

> *does feel like it's not mandated, you know? Conversation not in the 2 weeks that leads up to the grant proposal but a more regular engagement even if it's just once a quarter.*

Therefore, what is needed for a true trust-based relationship is mutual understanding of the wants and needs of each entity as well as a respect that honors the strengths that each brings to one another.

Mission alignment. In our discussions, nonprofits shared their struggles in communicating their needs with funders. They regrettably pointed out that there exists a misalignment. In other words, what they need to support their communities is not always what funders think they need. They articulated to us that they yearn for funders to ask them what they need to support their communities and provide resources accordingly. It was also suggested that funders need to eliminate giving funding that is tied to their own organizational missions and instead specifically align with the values and needs of the nonprofits who know their communities best. One participant said it straight out.*"Stop trying to change [nonprofits'] mission to fit what [funders] want; align with what's happening already."* This sentiment was repeatedly expressed by multiple participants throughout the interviews.

Respondents also shared that they want funders to better determine who is not being served and provide them, and those who provide them service, with an opportunity. This opportunity can be realized with a seat at the decision-making table to say what needs to be done. It was suggested that making this provision will promote the groundswell of the aforementioned disruptors and rabble rousers to do their work to serve their communities with programs and services. Our participants conveyed that knowing what opportunities are available is just as important as having an understanding of community needs. Additional data from our interview findings to support this assertion was*"the missing piece is always the person who is served."*

This statement suggests that the ultimate need is prioritizing the people who will benefit most when it comes to funding, which comes from an intimate knowledge of the communities with the most need.

To summarize, the nonprofits we spoke with are closest to the work being done in communities, and have the cultural context and expertise to know the specifics of how and what needs to be done. When funders come into a situation and listen to the nonprofits who serve the communities, voices have the opportunity to be elevated! As we listened, our participants also indicated that there are not always just programmatic funding needs that need to be addressed but rather capacity building needs as well, which they suggested are also not fully understood by funders. To become truly aligned in a mutually beneficial and trusting relationship, the issue of capacity development and resiliency of nonprofit organizations was also one that we ascertained must be addressed in more detail.

Capacity Needs

Capacity building needs are framed in the upcoming section as capacity development opportunities. The findings showcase the voices of community conversations to reveal their capacity development needs, which are further broken down into qualitative and quantitative data collection findings. When reframing capacity building into capacity development, the shift in language relates directly to our epistemology presented earlier within this study and according to the work of Kern et al. (2020). In the theoretical framework section of Chapter 2, we described Kern et al.'s (2020) Systems Informed Positive Psychology (SIPP) in detail and our alignment is within this humanist lens. This framework guided our work, our words, and our actions. Specifically within our findings, we aimed for opportunities to lift up the strengths and assets of the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area with care, compassion, and authenticity. Capacity development illuminates that nonprofits have existing capacity strengths, and they are in need of development to only make them stronger.

Qualitative

All organizations represented at the community conversations shared the feeling that they have a lesser capacity—as compared to majority-led, large, well-established organizations—to carry out actions. They also stated the need for increasing, and developing, their capacity in order to expand their reach and impact on their communities. The primary capacities that small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the UWGRP catchment area belabored were personnel needs (including training and development), resources and tools, and humanistic needs. These needs, and themes, to develop organizational resiliency are highlighted from our research findings and outlined as follows.

Personnel. When asked to identify their capacity needs, the participants from our study put personnel needs at the top of their list. Taking into consideration the context of resource-strapped nonprofits, their definition of personnel goes far beyond the typical understanding of internal staff to include board members, program volunteers, and external organizations who can supplement necessary roles. They highlighted three areas, in particular, where they needed the most support which entail an increase of fixed and financed positions, quality board members, and more training and development opportunities for all personnel affiliated with an organization.

Fixed and financed positions. The bulk of our nonprofit leaders described how they are at the mercy of volunteers to provide programming. Even many of our respondents have themselves been doing the work without pay for years and are still often not able to rely on stable, ongoing income let alone benefits. Quite a number recounted time after time of situations where they operated with the figurative "bubble gum and shoestrings" or just 'winged it" because they did not have the knowhow needed to accomplish a task nor did they have anyone else to call upon. As one respondent shared:

> *I just feel, like I said, we were forced because nobody else was doing it. Somebody has to do it and the people were calling us and we didn't have the capacity to do all the things and then you need to try to figure out how to do it.*

Respondents specified that, internally, they need "real" staff instead of having to depend on volunteers who are well-intentioned but not always reliable, especially for programs who provide service "24/7". They also insisted that they need skilled staff in specific roles such as those who can pull and analyze data as well as grant writers and grant managers. To illustrate this point, one participant elaborated:

> *I feel like small Black and Brown nonprofits often don't have the operating resources to hire fund development people, evaluation people, so when it comes time to apply for these different grant opportunities, larger nonprofits have staff that are dedicated to writing proposals and providing the impact that the data had met, that shows the impact of the organization. But a smaller organization has to make a decision on whether I'm going, they're going, to deliver the program or spend time writing the grant or spend time evaluating the program. And that split makes it so that you're not gonna do any one of them at the most efficient in a sufficient way, right? You can't deliver all of that and do any one of them well, right? If you only have like two or three staff people, right?*

Also crucial to obtain and maintain legal status as a legitimate nonprofit organization, our leaders expressed the need to not just have board members, but to have good ones.

Quality board members. Our respondents lamented their lack of diverse, well-positioned, and skilled community leaders who are fully engaged in their organization as board members. They shared that they not only need their dedicated assistance and support in obtaining grant funds, but they also need them for representation and advocacy in decision-making spaces. This need was explained in more detail by a participant:

> *All kinds of nonprofits really struggle with Boards of Directors, and getting Board of Director members to understand that they have a responsibility to fundraise and be part of fund development—not just attending board meetings—and making sure that everything is financially sound and there's no form of impropriety. I think board members understand those pieces, but getting board members engaged in fund development is one of the biggest challenges that we have and it really would be helpful if there was more work in the philanthropy community to help with the board. I'm not gonna say board development, but maybe that's the case, but board recruitment and those types of pieces. We spend a lot of time getting the Board to understand that that's a responsibility. And I've done board consulting with boards outside of the organization that I work for on this issue and sometimes people get it and sometimes they don't get it at all. And then it's left to staff to kind of figure it out and that goes back to that inequity that gets created. If you're having to fundraise your salary and you're the only one doing that, which is my struggle, and then you're also responsible for the rest of the staff and everybody having health insurance and benefits, it's a lot to fall on one or two people in an organization.*

The more quality board members an organization has, the more expertise and connection to resources they personally bring to an organization. Their involvement in an organization can help assuage a further need expressed by our participants which is for expanded efforts in training and development.

More training and development opportunities. Our nonprofit leaders called for more professional training and development in a multitude of areas for executives, staff, and volunteers as well as board members. One participant expressed this need and shared why they thought it was beneficial.

> *I think I would say more training and development at the moment. If you're offering to educate me or give me leverage in order to get your funding, that shows that you trust me on this thing. I want to help you just as much as you want to help the community. Let me help you help the community. . . it doesn't always have to be monetary.*

Several respondents brought up the need for access to experienced training professionals and resources such as the large corporate entities who contribute the monies being disbursed by funders. As an example, one person talked about their experience.

> *Basically, that's what one organization did for us. So if you do all this training and then we train you, they may fund you. So they offer a lot of training in some organizations, and they want to be able to donate so that they can trust me with the funds.*

As previously mentioned, the need for sharing of expertise through relationships and mentorships was discussed at length in some of our community conversations. This need, along with many of the others, requires—according to our respondents—proximity to those in power (e.g.,White) in order to close gaps in skills, expertise, and human resources.

Resources and Tools. In addition to personnel to do the work and support for them, there were very specific resources and tools mentioned by interviewees as capacity development needs to do the hard, and sometimes traumatic, work of the nonprofits. The organizations who participated in this research study voiced the overarching need for resources and tools in order to be able to compete with larger nonprofits for the same grant funding. In the next section, we share specific resources and tools needed for the nonprofits to do their work.

Specific Resources and Tools. While no two organizations are the same, there are some specific resources and tools needed by all nonprofits to do their work. One focus group attendee summarized many of the resources and tools they need to do the work of the grant application process when they shared:

> *I don't have money to pay you to do my books. I don't have money to pay you to do my reports. I don't have money for that, right? So like the money that you're offering, I could really make an impact. But I can't even comprehend what you are talking about…So therefore, you become intimidated about their process because, you know, I'm a grassroot organization…How do you think grassroots organizations can look?... How can any grassroot compare? What is in my heart can. But what you need is a computer and papers, I could never measure up to that because I don't have a system behind me. I can't do that. The stuff that they're asking for, it would take me months to get that in order because I would have to figure out how to do it and then connect to people that have affordable resources that I could do that.*

While the needs of each nonprofit vary, there are some collective needs voiced by our participants. Some of the specific resources and tools that were referenced multiple times include:

- A fiscal agent to handle administrative and financial duties for the organization, without taking a cut of the organizations profits and providing little service;

- A robust benefits package including pensions, retirement, and health care that is accessible to nonprofit employees through a multiemployer plan ;
- Grant writer/grant writing workshops to help organizations get grants, to help them better write grants, and to understand what to do differently when a grant is not awarded;
- An event planner to organize small things like “give back night” at restaurants, to larger galas, depending on what type of event is most important to the organization;
- Donor cultivation through both training on how to cultivate donors, and support in soliciting individual donors who support the organization;
- Volunteers to do, or support doing, the work and training for those volunteers on how to do the work, serve the community, and recruit more volunteers;
- A social media presence to reach those who engage on social media, and someone to post in an engaging way;
- Software, and hardware, to apply for grants, run programs, complete reports, and operate on a daily basis;
- Data Analysis through either a person or a software to provide hard data about the progress, and successes, of an organization;
- A Community Performance Report to hear from the community about what they need, and ask if the nonprofits who have been awarded money are fulfilling those needs;
- Transportation to eliminate barriers to attending, or participating in, programs and services provided by the nonprofits;
- Childcare to eliminate barriers to attending, or participating in, programs and services provided by the nonprofits; and

- A facility to serve as the hub of the important work that these small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led, nonprofits are doing.

Many of the resources and tools that these organizations need can only be purchased, or hired, at the detriment of not funding a program or paying a staff salary. One organization shared their story about hiring a funding consultant as opposed to hiring additional staff and when the fundraising consultant raised no money, they were still out what they paid them—and still down a staff member.

Resources from the funding agencies. Similar to the specific resources and tools that nonprofits need to do the work, there are also clear-cut resources and tools that these organizations need from the agencies that control the purse strings. These are things that the funding agencies can do, or provide, to the nonprofits they fund to support their work and in that, build a trust-based relationship. Through the collective voices of research participants, specific needed resources from funding agencies that were showcased include:

- A point person at the funding agency who can quickly respond to questions, or provide updates, to the nonprofits;
- Calibrations, at some set interval, between funding agencies to determine priorities for the nonprofits in the region to ensure no one particular nonprofit or community is being overlooked;
- Supporting, or organizing, a multi-employer health plan where multiple nonprofits can have access to better healthcare; and
- Offering services, in addition to money, to nonprofits based on the strengths of the funding agency (i.e., Human Resource Management).

According to focus group attendees— those who do the work in the world of nonprofits—the tools and resources that small, emergent, grass-roots, minority-led, nonprofits need are not so different from their larger competitors/counterparts for grants; but their capacity to solicit, hire, and utilize these tools and resources is inferior. A need exists to provide both tools and resources, and the personnel, staffing, training, and development to utilize them. Further, there must be a commitment made to the whole organization, and the whole person. This need to support the whole person leads us to the humanist commitment.

Humanist Commitment. In addition to personnel, and resources and tools needed for capacity development, we found humanist commitment was a prevailing theme. The participants stressed that it is important for nonprofit organizations to have their basic needs met; specifically around their wellbeing and mental health. As we addressed in the literature review, positive psychology is rooted in human development with the work of Maslow (1954) and the foundational theory that basic human needs must be met in order for humans to thrive. The nonprofits want funders to enter their communities demonstrating that they authentically value the basic human needs of those who are doing the work. It was found in our focus groups, interviews, and Google Form that respondents value holistic care in their partnerships with funding organizations. Within the context of this case study, valuing the whole person means both personally and professionally. Such a holistic approach entails specifically focusing on the wellbeing and mental health needs of the nonprofit organizations through capacity development supports in order to promote and enable both individual and organizational resiliency.

Wellbeing. The participants in our study indicated that the UWGRP catchment area nonprofits' wellbeing needs include salary, mental health support, food security, and health insurance. With such a lack in basic physiological and safety needs, we as researchers asked ourselves, how can nonprofits serve a community when they struggle with their own human needs? As a prime example of how these nonprofits work to persevere through the struggle, one interviewee stated that "*I've been doing this work for six years and I just started taking a salary in July; literally just started taking a salary in July, 2022.*" This testimony speaks to the commitment of those we interviewed who work within nonprofit organizations. They expressed that salary and additional monies are not always their primary drivers but are necessary to support their daily living and wellbeing needs so that they can continue doing the arduous work.

The nonprofit leaders dream of a new perspective where funders and decisionmakers willingly invest in "quality of life" improvements for those who are serving others. As an example from one community conversation, a participant stated:

> *I know my board is really tired of me saying, like when I do the budget, most of it goes towards increasing staff salaries, and I know my board gets tired of it but they're also not in the work.*

These words speak to the need of nonprofits to take care of their people and provide them with monetary remuneration commensurate with their work in order to support their wellbeing needs of food, shelter, and security. While wellbeing may not be seen as a tangible capacity building outcome by some, it drastically impacts the quality of life of those who work with nonprofits. A focus group participant stated that "*It is hypocritical to go out and serve community members, and then we have employees that qualify for public assistance.*" This sentiment speaks to what the nonprofit leaders are telling us—while they emphasize that they are resilient, they have basic needs that are not always met or appreciated. From our conversations, we infer that nonprofit staff show up because there is a gap in services and they fill this gap regardless of their own personal wellbeing, and this practice can not and should not be taken for granted or accepted as a norm in philanthropy.

Mental health. In connection to wellbeing, respondents also shared that it can be difficult to do the work of nonprofits, be entrenched in the concomitant trauma, and then have to worry about things like medical insurance, mental health copays, and putting food on the table. We heard multiple community conversation participants reiterate this sentiment. One particular interviewee made a statement regarding discussions with their nonprofit staff where they shared "*I sit and I do financial coaching with people as part of our financial opportunity center and I have people that will sit down and have panic attacks when we start to talk about bills."* This excerpt illuminates unintentional re-traumatization, and not even by a funder. It is the mere conversation from a supervisor with their employee that causes the trauma, and elicits anxiety, because the basic needs of this employee are not being met. Research from The University of Buffalo's Institute on Trauma and Trauma Informed Care (2023) states that, "re-traumatization is any situation or environment that resembles an individual's trauma literally or symbolically, which then triggers difficult feelings and reactions associated with the original trauma" (unpaged). As previously mentioned, one interviewee questioned whether decision-makers understand the trauma that frontline staff of nonprofits face when they shared:

> *Do I need to educate a group of mental health professionals that might be reviewing a grant application about the impacts of trauma and chronic PTSD. Probably not to the level that I would a board of people in a corporate entity that have not been exposed to that, but I might?*

Our community conversations showcased that the very base of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which focuses on safety and psychological inequities, are woefully unaddressed and omitted from funding priorities. As one nonprofit leader asserted,

> *It's important that we're not working our smaller organizations into a hole. Still supporting their well-being because we're hyper-focused on taking care, like, taking care of the people that we serve, but also being whole for the people we serve. Because this work is traumatic. Like being in proximity to justice work is traumatic . . . We're becoming part of the family like everybody else and it becomes, if you're operating with intention, it becomes very taxing to just be in the space. And we push well-being. I won't say self-care because I think that's being used a lot and not being used in the right sense because everybody says self-care, but nobody gives the space for self-care. They'll say, Oh, you know, take a vacation and take a break, but they'll call your damn phone every Sunday and I don't work on Sundays. But anyway, it's really urgent. It's really urgent that funders start looking at a better way to get resources. And I'm not just talking about fiscal. I'm talking about funding the cost for health care that is ridiculous for smaller organizations. Funding the cost for therapy. Funding the cost for vacation. And understanding that it makes the work easier when you have that option versus just saying, Oh, we see the potential in these larger organizations to have these things. What about these smaller organizations that we're pulling on for their data and their information and their input?*

These words speak to the need to take care of the mental health needs of minority-led nonprofit organizations who are taking care of their communities. In some cases, these nonprofits are working 24/7—and this is not a sustainable practice for the mind or body. Being entrenched in trauma does not support basic human needs and a fight-or-flight response becomes engaged to survive. As one of our participants so astutely asked of the funding establishment, "*Are you really thinking about holistic care of your partners*"? We have found through our community conversations that if the wellbeing and mental health needs of nonprofits were addressed, centering both the personal and professional experiences of the personnel, then a commitment to humanist needs can significantly assist the humans operating the nonprofits with the opportunity not just to survive, but to thrive.

Quantitative

The quantitative findings from the descriptive analytics of The Nonprofit Capacities Instrument (Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact, 2022) showcase lower averages, than the national averages, in five of the eight descriptors of capacity building measurements as defined in Table 1 of our Methodology chapter. These areas include: Financial Management, Strategic Planning, External Communication, Operational Capacity, and Staff Management. While some of these quantitative finds enhance the qualitative findings, others are an additional perspective not voiced, or considered, during focus groups. Table 8 compares the survey results of the nonprofits who participated from the UWGRP catchment area with the national averages of social services organizations who completed the survey. By focusing on the five areas where local nonprofits fall below the national average, we elaborate on the needs specific to the Richmond and Petersburg area.

Table 4

Group comparison between the capacity averages of UWGRP and nationwide organizations

	UWGRP Catchment Area Nonprofits	National Average of Social Services Organizations *	Difference
Financial Management	2.66	3.26	-0.60
Adaptive Capacity	3.24	3.13	+0.11
Strategic Planning	2.96	3.01	-0.05
External Communication	2.67	2.96	-0.29
Board Leadership	3.21	3.15	+0.06
Operational Capacity	2.58	3.02	-0.44
Mission Orientation	3.42	3.26	+0.16
Staff Management	2.79	3.22	-0.43

Note: National average scores based on 949 surveys.

As researchers, we found that the qualitative data collection aligned with the quantitative data collection. Specifically illustrated in Table 5 is a matrix that aligns the Nonprofit Capacities Instrument survey data to qualitative themes derived from participant statements. The research of Shumate, et al. (2017) assisted with the matrix outline and our survey data demonstrates the connection of quantitative and qualitative capacity development needs. The findings are listed specifically for capacities where researchers saw a gap or need for capacity development. The matrix focuses on the five capacities that have lower averages than the national average of social services organizations, and these are the specific capacities that we are dealing with to interpret the connection. The matrix then crosswalks the five developmental capacities; Financial

Management, Strategic Planning, External Communication, Operational Capacity, and Staff Management with our qualitative results.

It is important to address that specifically within the theme of capacity needs, both Personnel and Resources and Tools have direct alignment with both quantitative and qualitative data findings. In terms of Humanist Commitment, there is less alignment and less data to analyze. We found a need for capacity development of mental health and trauma informed care. It should also be noted that these two areas were not addressed in the quantitative survey. These areas are further discussed within the Implications for Future Practice section of this paper.

Table 5

Matrix aligning Nonprofit Capacities Instrument survey data to qualitative themes derived from participant statements

Quantitative Capacity Needs	**Qualitative Capacity Needs***		
	P	**RT**	**HC**
Financial Management			
● The organization has the ability & competence to manage accounts.		X	
● Financial plans & procedures are in place for the long-term sustainability of this organization's work.		X	
● The organization has enough cash available to pay its bills.		X	
● This organization obtains funds from a variety of sources (i.e., individual donors, grants, earned income).		X	
● There are qualified personnel that manage this organization's finances.		X	
● An annual budget is updated & reviewed regularly by management.		X	
● Financial reports are created & used for decision-making.		X	
Strategic Planning			
● Strategic planning practices are adopted.		X	
● Strategic plans are able to be implemented as intended.	X		
● The strategic plan is structured around the organization's mission.		X	
● The organization is able to be guided by a long-term strategy which is forward-oriented.		X	
● The board is actively involved in the strategic plan & revisits it on an annual basis.	X		

	P	RT	HC
External Communication			
● The ability of nonprofits to engage stakeholders	X		
● Public knowledge of services & donor awareness		X	
● Information technology is regularly used for communicating with external stakeholders (i.e., donors, media, & other organizations)		X	
● Cause-related fundraising activities are developed.		X	
● A public relations strategy is in place.		X	
● Regular dissemination about organizational activities to the public	X		
● Ability to develop key messages for potential supporters	X		
● Experience with developing communication campaigns	X		
Operational Capacity			
● Documented procedures for standardization of work with quantitative metrics are in existence and properly used.		X	
● The organization is able to set program goals with measurable objectives for performance & assess their outcomes.		X	
● The organization is able to carry out internal monitoring & evaluation.		X	
● Programs are routinely monitored through external evaluation.		X	
● Regular reports track each program on at least a quarterly basis.		X	
Staff Management			
● Employee needs for information, training, & mentoring are identified & met.	X		
● Management is able to and responds to employee needs.			X
● Management processes, structure, climate & culture, and quality of working life are addressed & cultivated.			X
Qualitative Capacity Needs not addressed by Quantitative instrument: ● Mental health & Trauma Informed Care (TIC)			

Note: Personnel (P), Resources & Tools (RT), Humanist Commitment (HC)

Summary of Chapter 4

A sentiment related to funding challenges, funding needs, and capacity needs was succinctly articulated when a participant shared, *"you need funding to get the capacity to get more funding."* We, too, found in our study that funding is a circular process. The themes that emerged from our findings reveal that when the voices of nonprofit leaders are elevated, they are unencumbered to express their grant funding needs; which include change in the historical system, practices, and processes of philanthropic funding, transparent and open communication between funders and grantees in conjunction with trust-based relationships. These particular funding-based needs are explicit because the leaders in our case study and their organizations are encountering structural and systemic racism, bureaucratic complexity, and lack of access to resources as well as relational gaps between themselves and funding agencies. To address these specific funding-based needs, there are further needs for aid in capacity development, which have been identified as personnel, resources and tools, and a humanist commitment. Nonprofits are encountering these challenges, therefore action towards equity in funding practices is a collective need which is discussed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In this section, we provide conclusions drawn from our research findings to offer recommendations for practice and implications for future research for our partners at the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg. As researchers, we have been given the opportunity to learn from the disruptors and trailblazing nonprofits of the UWGRP catchment area. Through a carefully considered process, we were able to establish a foundation of trust with these change-making nonprofits and be invited into their communities to learn from them, to amplify their voices, and ultimately to be able provide the UWGRP with an overarching recommendation—co-create an egalitarian and equitable grant funding model with the minority-led nonprofits within their region.

In response to the problem of practice identified by United Way, we conducted an intrinsic case study through our SIPP epistemology to hear from the nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area. Using a mixed methods approach, we collected, analyzed, and compared both qualitative and quantitative data. Our qualitative methods included focus groups, interviews, and an online questionnaire in a Google Form format. Our quantitative data was collected through a validated online survey instrument.

Discussion of Findings

Our findings are organized around nine themes which stem from our three research questions seeking to ascertain the funding challenges, funding needs, and capacity needs from the perspectives of small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofit organizations in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area. With respect to funding challenges, we learned that structural and systemic racism, bureaucratic complexity and lack of access, and relational gaps between funding agencies and nonprofits are prominent in the experiences of nonprofit organizational leaders. In the matter of funding needs, the voices from our community conversations raised an urgent call for change in the local area's historical systems of funding practices and processes along with the necessity for transparent and open communication between funders and those funded, in addition to the desire for trust-based relationships between both entities. When addressing capacity needs, nonprofits leaders require additional personnel, increased resources and tools, and a humanist commitment from their funders. As we take into consideration the SIPP theoretical framework, we are dedicated to elevating the voices of the participants with lived experiences supported by research. Therefore, through the lens of systems informed positive psychology and as we consider our literature review from Chapter 2, we draw the following conclusions and provide a discussion interpreting the findings from our community conversations, which will ultimately serve as tangible recommendations to the UWGRP for the capacity development of minority-led nonprofits within an equitable grant funding process.

Funding Challenges Theme 1: Structural and Systemic Racism

Recalling the previously-mentioned work of Dorsey et al. (2020) where they provide in-depth research on how structural racism produces inequities between minority-led and White-led nonprofits, the participants in our case study mirror their findings. For example, one of the most blatant inequities cited by the authors is the "stark disparity" regarding unrestricted funding whereby "the unrestricted net assets of [Black-led] organizations are 76 percent smaller than their [White-led] counterparts", which they say results from a lack of trust between funding and recipient organizations (p. 2). The participants in our study overwhelmingly attested to how their funding experiences were drastically different than those of White-led organizations within the region with more stringent restrictions placed on what meager funding they received. They described how these funds typically do not align to their core mission, which hinders their productivity and silences their voices with what they know is most needed in their respective communities as they are the ones closest to the pain. They long for unrestricted funding that they see their White peers receive, who then pull in the minority nonprofits as subcontractors so that the organization can appear to be serving a diverse population.

Very often, the nonprofit leaders that we interviewed seek alternative funding sources (e.g. national organizations or small-donor donations) because they offer less restrictions and more trust in minority-led organizations. Further, the respondents from our study align with what Dorsey et al. (2020) found in their research, which is where nonprofit leaders of color are often not able to speak freely for fear of reprisal resulting in diminished opportunities. In their data collection efforts, the researchers interpreted the fear to speak freely expressed by their interviewees as "a sign of how tenuous leaders of color feel their funding relationships are" (p. 5). The participants who shared their stories with us corroborated Dorsey et al.'s (2020) account conveying their own comparable fears.

Dorsey et al. (2020) also stress that racial bias in funding is ever-present and an instrumental factor in institutionalizing practices preventing leaders of color to secure funds. They point out that when there is big money on the table with high stakes, funders often "lean on 'tried and true' processes and systems that are plagued with bias" (p. 4). Again, the participants that we interviewed provided multiple instances where they experienced bias, mistrust, and structural roadblocks that they attributed to race. The business acumen and situational acuity with which they described their experiences are undervalued and the obstacles that they consistently face in securing funds correspond to the four primary barriers identified by Dorsey et al. (2020) as 1) inequitable access to decision-makers, 2) mistrust and microaggressions which inhibit relationship-building, 3) lack of cultural understanding which restricts ways of operating, and 4) White-centric views that foster mistrust (p. 6).

The respondents that we interviewed also relayed how the local philanthropic sector has long propagated and continues to sustain a system in which White males hold the majority of power in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area. This attestation confirms the previously-mentioned 2019 LISC Groundwork Initiative report which highlights that racial inequities directly exist in the Greater Richmond area. It also aligns with a report by Theis and Parks (2020) within *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* where the authors claim that nonprofit "leaders are predominantly [White] men" (unpaged) as well as Dorsey et al.'s (2020) assertion that minority nonprofit leaders typically operate with smaller budgets than Whites. Furthermore, aforementioned researchers (e.g., Klaus & Weaver, 2018; Rittenbach et al., 2019) caution that inequities and power differentials between funding organizations and their recipients can lead to manipulative practices such as tokenism, which multiple participants in our study experienced first-hand. Ho (2017) provides eight specific ways in which POC are tokenized in the nonprofit sector.

1. You recruit POC to formal leadership positions, but keep all the power.
2. Your paid staff in charge of messaging are White, and your volunteer storytellers are POC.
3. You only hire POC for POC "stuff."
4. You create and maintain an organizational culture that promotes White dominance.
5. You convene special "Diversity Councils" but don't build POC leadership on your main Board.
6. You use POC as your mouthpiece and shield against other POC.

7. You give more money to White-led nonprofits, even when the nonprofit is focused on POC.
8. You intuitively know the nonprofit space would benefit from more POC leaders, but you don't really know *why*. (unpaged)

The testimonies from participants in our study provide evidence to support that Ho's entire delineation of tokenism pervasively exists throughout Greater Richmond and Petersburg's nonprofit ecosystem.

Even more disturbing is the widespread practice of exploiting the work of minority-led nonprofits, which respondents explained has become even more pervasive as funding opportunities have increased due to the recent attention being paid to racial justice. Mills (2006) offers an in-depth and comprehensive account of what constitutes racial exploitation in which they assert that it is when "the [White] population benefits illicitly from its social location" (p. 31). They explain that exploitation can also occur when minorities receive differential and/or inferior treatment by the dominant race "(e.g., lower wages)" (p. 39) and are excluded when "they should legitimately have been included" (e.g., performing of work) because members of the dominant race "benefit from their exclusion" (p. 38). In a 2021 article by Breen at al. of The Bridgespan Group, the President and CEO of The Miami Foundation was quoted as saying, "Many [White]-led organizations are leaning on BIPOC leaders for context and access to communities—using them and not compensating them" (p. 2). The respondents in our study who identify as a racial minority gave multiple first-hand accounts detailing their experiences with nefarious practices.

Funding Challenges Theme 2: Bureaucratic Complexity and Lack of Access

The challenges of bureaucratic complexity and lack of access, shared by the participants in our study, aligns with the aforementioned research of Chan and Fisher (2016b) which emphasize that a tangible process must be created using a racial justice lens that identifies barriers, incorporates DEI principles, and centers the human experience. The four-step checklist of Chan and Fisher (2016b) echoes the sentiments shared by those interviewed as to how to address these funding challenges. Chan and Fisher (2016b) state that the first step is grant application identification. There is a need for funding agencies to identify nonprofits applying for grants, do an open call for applications, or simply identify needy, and deserving, organizations and offer them funds without applying. The second step from Chan and Fisher (2016b) is to look at the grant application process and reimagine the traditional application process with interviews, videos, or meetings. Or, consider a common application for multiple grants, which was called for by many of the nonprofit leaders in our conversations. Step three, from the checklist of Chan and Fisher (2016b) entails an evaluation of the grant decision-making process. The decision-making process should be transparent about who is at the table making those decisions, and why the decisions about which organizations to fund (or not) have been made. As both Chan and Fisher (2016) and focus group attendees recommend, the decision-making process should include a peer review and center the community for whom the grant will ultimately serve. And, step four from Chan and Fisher (2016b) contains all of the other miscellaneous considerations that must be taken into account when evaluating in order to address bureaucratic complexities. Things like a simple renewal process, an open-door policy, an advisory committee of grantees, board training, unrestricted grants, multi-year grants, and capacity building grants were all echoed by the nonprofits with whom we met and which are further expounded upon in the other sections of our findings.

Funding Challenges Theme 3: Relational Gaps Between Funding Agencies and Nonprofits

As stated within the literature review, Altschuld et al. (2014) found that needs, especially those of marginalized groups, are weighed down by social, cultural, and political influences of power. There were many community conversation comments about the necessity for requesting input from grantees at the decision level; specifically calling attention to the fact that funding should match the needs of the communities they (nonprofits) represent. The nonprofits with whom we spoke know the needs of the communities they serve, and there was a feeling that funders underestimate their work. Thus, an opportunity exists for funders to build a bridge to the nonprofits who are closest to the communities being served by providing support according to what they have expressed is warranted. This alignment is supported by research within our literature review that points to the work of Dubow et al. (2018), where "backbone support" illuminated the practice of empowering and supporting the members of a collective impact initiative by providing educational opportunities, fostering trust-building, and facilitating hard conversations. We have ascertained through our analysis that the nonprofits in our study know firsthand what is needed within the communities they serve and should be given the autonomy and support to address their specific issues as they see fit.

The community conversations also brought to light a request from grantees that they be asked to be part of the design model to re-invent an equitable funding system. In our literature review, we stated that to create true partnership with grantees, it is important to understand the communities that grantees serve and the issues they are working to solve, which "goes beyond site visits and often requires funders to get out of their comfort zone" (Dorsey et al., 2020, p. 11).

To bridge these relational gaps, it will be important to intentionally build trust and respect between the nonprofits and the funding agencies. The process of bridging these relationships is important because marginalized nonprofit communities may be functioning from a place of distrust due to historical inequities that were previously discussed within Chapter 1. It is our conclusion that bridging these relational gaps may take time, however authentic partnerships will prevail and long-term benefits for all involved can be realized.

Funding Needs Theme 1: Change in Historical System, Practices, and Processes of Funding

What we heard in the feedback from focus group participants is a need to change the historical system, practices, and process of the local funding ecosystem. The good news is that when looking at the research, we see that these changes are already successfully being implemented at other organizations, including other United Way chapters. In our literature review section, we highlighted the work of the United Way of Salt Lake. Specifically, Bill Crim raised the voice of a community partner by sharing their response to United Way of Salt Lake changing the historical funding model. This community partner eloquently summarized their trepidation when they said:

> We like you but we don’t trust you. Your grant process changes every couple of years. Your priorities change every couple of years or at least the way you frame RFPs and grant requirements. You evaluate our grant proposals in isolation from each other. You have volunteers with little or no experience evaluating those grant proposals and with little or no connection to the specific communities where you’re suggesting we do this work. You’re asking us to do this but you have to change first. We might come along with you but you’re going to have to change first. If you want us to make a long-term commitment, you’ve got to make that commitment. (Timmons-Gray, 2022, unpaged)

The participants in our conversations expressed equivalent frustrations and the same call for change when describing their funding experiences.

Related, three United Way organizations have championed collective impact. The specific United Way organizations that have adopted this equity minded approach are: United Way of Greater St. Louis, Missouri, United Way of Greater Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania, and United Way of Salt Lake, Utah (Fortune et al., 2022). They have already reimagined funding systems and are using a collaborative approach by moving away from traditional funding cycles and even in some cases are eliminating competitive grants altogether. In early 2022, roundtable discussions facilitated by Ayeola Fortune, Interim Senior Vice President for Impact at United Way Worldwide, created a space for these three United Way's to share how they have rebuilt their role in the nonprofits' communities to become a synergistic partner with the organizations they support through a collaborative model that shares a cooperative approach to resource distribution and drives systemic change. Thus, the United Way locations who have intentionally embedded collective impact are now recognized as partners of community impact rather than just funders and transactional process promoters. They have determined firsthand how to build a bridge to connect funding agencies with nonprofit organizations. We contend that these United Way chapters have blazed the trail for others to follow suit and the change practices and processes that they have instituted in their regions are what would be advantageous to implement in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area.

Funding Needs Theme 2: Transparent and Open Communication

In their 2018 report summarizing lessons learned from the Collective Impact Funder Action Learning Lab cited in our literature review, the Collective Impact Forum authors stressed the importance of establishing ongoing openness practices between funders, their grantees, and community members because of the existing power differential between funders and their beneficiaries—which was also voiced by the participants of our study. Three United Way organizations participated in this years-long initiative which generated five interconnected themes integral to advancing funder openness—building trust, listening before acting, increasing transparency, building capacity for community engagement, and sustaining openness practices. Like the results of their study, our themes are also closely interwoven albeit organized in a slightly different way, however, our respondents hit upon each of these five themes throughout our community conversations as being necessary for an equitable funding practice. When speaking specifically about open communication practices, the minority-led nonprofit leaders that we interviewed accentuated three areas in particular that were important to them—to be heard, to have a true equal partnership with funders that is relational and ongoing, and to establish increased transparency—which are very much in alignment to what the Collective Impact Forum (2018) put forth in their report.

One of the most repeated sentiments that we heard in our community conversations was, “Ask us what we need.” The minority-led nonprofits are asking to be heard, which requires active listening before taking action. From their perspective, there is a disconnect between what they see is necessary to serve their communities and what large funding organizations are asking for in their grant requirements. The Collective Impact Forum (2018) authors stress the importance of engaging communities with active listening in their report, which they say requires humility on the part of funders and a collaborative egalitarian approach with the communities they are seeking to serve. They recommend that funders provide incentives for community feedback in the form of compensation for time, transportation, and/or childcare. They emphasize that “if a funder genuinely values the insight of the community, they can make it known by incentivizing feedback" (p. 12). The participants in our study also called for recognition from funders that providing their valuable input, even in the form of a grant application, comes at a perilous cost to them and their programs as they do not have the luxury of time and resources that other leaders may have. And as also previously discussed, they are often exploited for their expertise and community insights so to offer up this valuable commodity without remuneration puts them in an increasingly vulnerable state.

In line with The Collective Impact Forum's (2018) themes of building capacity for community engagement and sustaining openness practice, the nonprofit leaders with whom we conversed stressed that they want to have a true equal partnership with funders that is relational and ongoing. In our discussions, we were directly questioned more than a few times as to why we were asking them about their needs and not the funders themselves. It is our perception that singular initiatives or isolated surveys that are not a part of a comprehensive and collaborative process coming directly from funding organizations may compound mistrust. As was recommended in the report regarding sustaining openness practices, "strengthening relationships between funders and grantees requires ongoing conversations where trust can build over time" (p. 23). It is our conclusion, based on our review of the literature and input from the minority-led nonprofit leaders, that for this study to be effective and impactful, it should be considered as the mere impetus for further meaningful and ongoing collaborative engagement with the community of trailblazers.

Another one of the five interconnected themes that The Collective Impact Forum (2018) pinpoints in their report as necessary to achieve open communication is transparency, which our participants also identified as a need. The nonprofit leaders provided reasons for its importance such as when funders open up their practices, they make them more equitable. In our findings is an account from one individual who described how being able to know more about who the decision-makers are and how they go about determining allocations helps grantees be able to tailor the information that they provide and make everyone's jobs easier and more efficient. As noted in their report, The Collective Impact Forum (2018) authors convey that the most important areas where funders should be more open are with their "grantmaking criteria, goals, and strategies [and] to provide more visibility, funders should be proactive in clearly communicating successes, challenges, and plans going forward to best meet the community's needs" (p. 15). From our conversations with the community leaders, we learned that they are sensitive to the position of funding organizations and the fact that there are certain obligations to meet. However, without explicit knowledge of what challenges the funders are up against, the nonprofits can only make assumptions, which may or may not be true. By developing real partnerships where collective challenges are shared while the talents and resources of all involved are optimized for the good of the communities being served, it is our contention that the relationship between funders and minority-led nonprofits in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area can be strengthened and trust cultivated—which is a further theme addressed by both The Collective Impact Forum (2018) and the participants from our study.

Funding Needs Theme 3: Trust-Based Relationships

Within our literature review, we cited the work of Jagosh et al. (2015); which illuminated that trust is a foundational element of partnership synergy building. Jagosh et al. (2015), described how involving the community in determining project focus improves design and delivery due to that community's knowledge of their particular local needs. The authors explained that a commitment to building and maintaining trusting relationships fosters relationships that are sustainable. An opportunity exists between funding agencies and nonprofit organizations to make a commitment to building and maintaining trusting relationships. If trust is centered, by both the nonprofits and the funders, then the nonprofits values and intentions can be a priority to enhance their work within the communities they serve.

Another one of the five interconnected themes that The Collective Impact Forum (2018) identifies in their report for building capacity for community engagement and sustaining openness practice is building trust. This was also a need identified within our community conversations. It was stated through the findings and confirmed within the literature that building these relationships will take time, but trust helps guide the process and fosters growth within existing organizational systems and structures. Being clear on values can also assist funders in making decisions through moments of uncertainty or change. As noted in their report, The Collective Impact Forum (2018) authors share that, "a relationship built on a history of trust facilitates shared knowledge and feedback loops, which equip the funder with practical expertise to effectively serve the community" (p. 7). It is our conclusion that the strength of a trusting relationship can produce valuable benefits for the Greater Richmond and Petersburg region to build and strengthen partnerships within communities. Therefore, the enactment of a trust-based relationship can have a strong impact in empowering nonprofits to authentically do their work because they feel both respected and valued by their funders.

Capacity Needs Theme 1: Personnel

Within our literature review, we referenced Walters (2020) who, when describing what capacity development entails, emphasized that the human element is paramount. They also go into more detail in their review of nonprofit organizational capacity literature and stress that the struggle to "[find] and [keep] qualified staff as well as volunteers who [have] the necessary education and skillsets to provide services and management [can be] major barriers to accomplishing goals, positive outcomes, and growing organizations" (pp. 21–22). Further, we considered the work of Chan and Fisher (2016a) who revealed that grant funders who operate more traditionally oftentimes give preference to nonprofit organizations who have dedicated staff. Thus, the minority-led nonprofits from our study desperately need properly compensated staff to do the crucially important work that they do and they require quality board leadership who have the time, connections, and expertise to dedicate to their organizations.

We learned from our conversations that it is a far too prevalent practice of the nonprofit leaders to forgo a salary—for years—for the sake of the communities they serve and their needs. The nonprofit leaders are in a constant battle as to where they should spend their time and efforts—raising money or providing direct service. As they explained, every hour spent trying to figure out the specific requirements of funders or learn yet another software tool to apply for or comply with a grant, is one less hour that they have to serve their community—not to mention their own self-care or that of their family. The dedication that the trailblazers exhibited through their spoken accounts should be evidence enough that they are prudent fiduciary stewards who can be trusted. If grant funders place value on the breadth and depth of an organization's staff in their funding decisions, then we can only conclude based on the feedback from our conversations that to be equitable, evaluation practices must be changed (e.g., a common application among funders) or resources allocated in a different way (e.g., tiered) so that small emergent grassroots minority-led organizations can adequately compete with the more longstanding organizations who have a stable staff that can fulfill all of the roles required to be successful in carrying out their mission.

Walters (2020) and Chan and Fisher (2016a) also stressed that keeping staff trained and up-to-date with the latest knowledge, methods, and tools is vital to a nonprofit's survival. The nonprofit leaders with whom we spoke wholeheartedly concurred with this sentiment. They shared that assistance from a funding organization does not always have to be monetary and that by helping them maintain a well-trained staff according to the needs of their funders, it becomes a win-win situation for both grantor and grantee. The grantee will be better able to meet the expectations of the grantor and the grantor will more easily and effectively have their requirements fulfilled. Thus, both will reap the rewards of sustainable growth of the small emergent grassroots minority-led organization and the community it serves.

Capacity Needs Theme 2: Resources and Tools

According to Walters (2020), capacity includes “everything an organization uses to achieve its mission, from desks and chairs to programs and people” (p. 11). So while no two organizations operate identically, there are similar resources and tools needed to develop capacity and do the laborious work of the nonprofits with whom we spoke. The capacity of an organization, or individual, is more than their ability. United Way (n.d.) provides online resources for equity and examples of capacity development initiatives that are similar to the capacity needs expressed by the participants in our study as delineated in our findings. Additionally, in the Collective Impact Forum’s (2018) *Advancing Funder’s Openness Practices: Lessons for the Field from the Collective Impact Funder Action Learning Lab*, the authors share a toolkit of generalized resources and tools that they recommend nonprofits need, and deserve, to do their work. Because of the uniqueness of each organization and the community they serve, it is difficult to summarize all of the resources and tools that study participants stated that they could use. However, we have compiled a list of valuable tools provided in Appendix H to serve as a starting point of reference for funding agencies when considering the needs of the nonprofits they fund.

Capacity Needs Theme 3: Humanist Commitment

As mentioned throughout the body of this study, we have used the theoretical framework of Kern et al.'s (2020) Systems Informed Positive Psychology (SIPP) to guide our work because of its valuable combination of positive psychology and concepts from systems sciences. Positive psychology is rooted in Maslow's (1954) human development work and the foundational theory that basic human needs must be met in order for people to thrive. The minority-led nonprofits from our study need a humanist commitment from their funders to successfully execute their work. In our literature review, we shared that within the SIPP model, there is a need for "collective wellbeing, and a need for intentional application of systems thinking principles, and approaches to positive psychology theories, research, interventions, and practices" (Kern et al., 2020, p. 707). We found through our community conversations that there is a need to commit to humanist infrastructure improvements for the capacity development needs of the nonprofits in our study. Maslow believed that human needs are hierarchical, meaning some needs take priority over others. According to his theory, people cannot achieve the needs higher up the pyramid, like self-actualization, until they have taken care of the ones below—specifically in this study, the baseline physiological needs of minority-led nonprofits. The community conversations showcased that fundamental inequities are in existence and in order to be successful, their basic needs (e.g., a stable living wage, healthcare, security, etc.) have to be met.

To highlight the humanist commitment to nonprofits, we conclude that it would be beneficial for funders to invest in quality-of-life improvements for those who are serving others. The work cited within our literature review of Randell and MacDavey (2020) recommends using a human-centered approach when creating a grant-funding process. They explain that a human-centered approach "expressly leverages the knowledge, experience, and input of the end user—the person benefiting from a product or service-in order to design potential solutions to social problems" (p. 19). Therefore, it is our contention that by fostering this need for humanist commitment, the wellbeing of nonprofits can be seen as a priority. Funders should enter into communities with specific intentions and tangible solutions that focus on the wellbeing and mental health services for those who are closest to the pain and doing the most difficult hands-on work.

Summary of Findings

Our findings echoed what was found in the literature review. The community conversations brought to light a request that grantees should be asked to be part of the design model to re-invent an equitable funding system. In our literature review, we stated that to create true partnerships with grantees, it is important to understand the communities that grantees serve and the issues they are working to solve, which "goes beyond site visits and often requires funders to get out of their comfort zone" (Dorsey et al., 2020, p. 11). As researchers, we assert that our findings have surfaced that there are minority-led organizations who are doing the work to solve systemic issues within their communities, yet lack a meaningful collaborative relationship with funders which has resulted in a stark disconnect. These nonprofit organizations have voiced the need and want for funders to be a true partner, with pure intentions, to collectively improve systemic issues. As researchers, we have been given an opportunity to showcase these findings and harken the urgency to take action through bold and innovative change initiatives. The door has been opened and the time is ripe to facilitate meaningful change and enhance the impactful work taking place within the Greater Richmond and Petersburg region by small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits by developing a trust-based relationship with them and together co-creating a new and innovative funding model.

In conclusion, the extensive path that we have traversed through our research has led us to one definitive and resolute recommendation to answer the problem of practice posed to us and that is for the co-creation of an equitable grant funding model between the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg and the minority-led nonprofits within their catchment area. The original problem of practice stated in its entirety within Chapter 1, and the specific actionable section of our problem of practice is as follows:

> …Therefore, attention to small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area is necessary to *identify* organizations within the catchment area who are not currently being supported by United Way, *connect* with them to understand their organizational needs, expand an equitable funding model to foster *growth*, and *empower* capacity building. Combined, these steps will create a significant *impact* throughout the region

Our all-encompassing recommendation is further described in more detail within this section and aligned with our initial theory of change that we have just reiterated. With this scaffold in mind, we wholeheartedly assert that the trailblazers with whom we engaged have the skills, talents, know-how, and answers for what can be done to meet the needs of both their communities and funding organizations. What they have not had up to now is the access, resources, support, and willingness by those in power to authentically listen to their needs.

Recommendations for Future Practice

To combat the current inequities in UWGRP's grant funding process, the co-creation of an egalitarian and equitable grant funding model between the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg and the nonprofits within their catchment area can be achieved by utilizing the evolved Collective Impact Framework described in Chapter 2 and following the Co-Creation

Wheel framework. It is important that nonprofits are meaningfully, and actively, engaged in the development of this model and we feel strongly that the desired outcome can be achieved through the adoption of humanist practices that we have demonstrated through our study. With the original problem of practice as a guide, then using our findings to develop a primary recommendation, we now offer additional, tangible, and actionable recommendations to begin implementing this new funding process. These functional recommendations are based on what we heard within our community conversations, and what we anticipate the UWGRP will also hear upon engaging with the community.

Identify

In order to identify organizations within the catchment area who are not currently being served by United Way, we recommend addressing the relational gaps between funding agencies and the nonprofits they serve. By building trust, and earning respect, with the nonprofit community, the UWGRP will be able to continue to grow the network of minority-led nonprofits they serve. One way that funders can begin to understand the community is to understand the trauma that exists within the community of responders and act in a way that does not create more trauma. To begin, the UWGRP may complete an Organizational Self-Assessment.

Once UWGRP has further engaged with the community, we recommend they look at their bureaucratic complexities and the lack of access nonprofits have to reach the funding organizations. One way to break down this barrier is to invite organizations to apply to grants that match their missions—this takes the onus off of the organizations in trying to identify available grants. While addressing access to grants, we encourage UWGRP to also reimagine their grant application and decision-making processes. A funding organization who has a model that appeals to many nonprofits we spoke with, and may provide insight and ideas for the

UWGRP, is the local minority-led philanthropic organization Collective 365.

Connect

In order to connect with nonprofits and understand their organizational needs, we recommend building trust-based relationships with the nonprofits through unquestionably trusting the organizations to do their work, trying to build a sincere and intentional relationship with them, and ensuring that their mission never has to be drifted from in order to obtain funds. The UWGRP can develop trust-based relationships through a trust-based philanthropy model similar to the Trust Based Philanthropy project and utilizing their guide.

Connecting with the nonprofits can also be accomplished through transparent and open communication. We recommend UWGRP listen to what the nonprofits say they need and not make assumptions about what they need, which also allows space for the nonprofits to better understand the UWGRP and why they do what they do. This two-way communication will increase transparency, and ultimately trust. To begin these transparent, open, and productive dialogues, we offer a Guide to Constructive and Inclusive Dialogue**.**

Support Growth

In order to expand an equitable funding model that supports the growth of nonprofits, we recommend a change in the historical system, practices, and processes of funding. Very specifically, nonprofits need access to general operating/unrestricted funds (including seed money). They also need multi-year grants, a simplified (possibly common) application, and fewer reporting requirements. To begin this work, UWGRP should consider the guidance provided by Grantmakers for Effective Organizations: Centering Equity through Flexible, Reliable Funding**.**

To continue to support the growth of minority-led nonprofits, it is recommended that the

UWGRP respond to some, if not most, if not all, of the specific capacity needs spelled out in our findings. Nonprofits need funding to hire, pay, train, and develop their people. They need very specific tools to do their work. They need funding agencies to support them in a specific way. And they need to be recognized, and supported, as whole people—not just hamsters on a wheel. Luckily, the United Way Equity Toolkit highlights many ways to meet these needs and support the growth of nonprofits.

Empower

In order to empower the capacity development of nonprofits, we recommend UWGRP focus on the five areas of the Nonprofit Capacities Instrument where the local nonprofits' scores were lower than the national average. Providing capacity development opportunities, education, and support around financial management, strategic planning, external communication, operational capacity, and staff management will empower the nonprofits. The Nonprofit Capacities Tool offers a resources package for funding organizations so that they can help their grantees with developing their capacities and strengthening their resiliency.

Additionally, in order to empower the nonprofits, the UWGRP needs to address the structural and systemic racism within the current funding ecosystem. This can only be done by addressing inequities, bias, silencing, power differentials, tokenism, and exploitation. One way to do this is by using the D5 Coalition: Analysis of Policies, Practices, and Programs for Advancing Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Philanthropy.

Impact

Using the evolved Collective Impact framework and engaging with the small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg's catchment area in the co-creation of an equitable grant funding process will make a significant impact throughout the region. To begin the work of co-creation, we recommend using the Co-Creation wheel as a framework and starting with the Racial Equity Toolkit: A Reflection and Resource Guide for Collective Impact Backbone Staff and Partners.

The final recommendation that we offer up is the opportunity for us to connect the UWGRP with the trailblazers with whom we have established relationships through this research process. We plan to provide the executive summary prepared for UWGRP to our new friends, and we are willing to include in that contact an invitation to them to continue the conversation by connecting with the United Way. We recommend that UWGRP take us up on this offer, consider offering an in-person event to connect with the community, maintain regular and meaningful communication with the community, and provide them with some form of reciprocity for their efforts.

We contend that the recommendations we have shared and the needs expressed in our findings are not excessive desires but rather core and instrumental elements that these organizations need to do their hard work. These requirements are not something they want and long for, but rather something that must be provided in order for these nonprofits to exist. We hope that the UWGRP continues to understand their needs, and is ultimately able to meet them. To help, we have provided additional tools culled from our research in Appendix H.

Implications for Future Research

Findings from our study raise empirical, practical, and theoretical implications that warrant future consideration while also addressing many of the limitations that we experienced and detailed in Chapter 3. Empirically, much more can be done with the data we collected and now that we have demonstrated how a SIPP model can be used to positively engage with small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits in a variety of ways; more data can be similarly obtained and added to ours in order to strengthen not only the results from our target region, but also explore more regions on a larger scale. Practically, we foresee multiple opportunities to take what we have learned about the minority-led nonprofit community in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area and not only further the conversation, but also take steps to enact meaningful and impactful change in specific areas of our particular region as well as across the country through the longstanding network of United Way organizations. And finally, from our unique perspective as educators viewing the philanthropic sector, we pinpoint several theoretical areas that follow in which further exploration from our epistemological stance is merited.

Empirical Implications

As demonstrated in Table 5 of our findings, the expressed capacity needs of participants from our focus groups and interviews aligned with five of the capacities categories defined by Shumate et al. (2017). With 35 nonprofits participating and 29 nonprofits completing the instrument, however, more significant findings could be realized by engaging in further iterations of data collection using the adapted survey instrument and methods that we have established, tested, and can make available to UWGRP by increasing the number of participating organizations and expanding the identities represented both in type and total. In addition, more in-depth inferential statistical data analysis could be conducted with the data we have collected, along with any additional data obtained, to investigate whether any of the demographic variables that we added relate in any way to Shumate et al.'s (2017) eight capacities. Further, there exists an opportunity to gather widespread data focusing on how small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits identify their capacities' needs and determine on a larger scale whether a particular demographic indicates a more prevalent need within a specific capacities' category.

Practical Implications

In practice, our findings indicate that within the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area, an urgency remains for those in power (e.g., funders, governmental institutions, philanthropists, community organizations, higher education, etc.) to actively engage in the work of seriously addressing and dismantling the historically White-dominant systems and structures that have, do, and continue to produce inequities and barriers to minority-led nonprofits while enacting impactful measures of reciprocity. Along with this work, one of our most significant findings indicates the critical need to address the trauma incurred by those serving communities and individuals who suffer trauma themselves and provide meaningful and comprehensive mental health and trauma informed care supports that can minimize their stress and prevent burnout or even withdrawal from the sector itself. Additionally, when considering minority groups, we have learned through our engagement with participants that more attention needs to be paid to the nuances and differences between and among the different minority groups as they, their needs, and those of the communities that they serve are not always the same and should not be lumped together in blanket solutions or policies. Specifically, our respondents called for a deeper investigation into the differences of Black and Brown-led and serving organizations in order to reach a better and more enlightened level of cultural understanding.

Of particular importance considering the intersection between higher education and philanthropy, our study has brought to light that especially in the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area, much more work is needed to align efforts and engage with minority-led organizations and the communities that they serve in a more egalitarian manner. We have already witnessed in several instances how our efforts of listening to the needs expressed to us in our conversations and reacting with small acts of reciprocity to which we have access have resulted in ripple effects that should not go unnoticed. For example, we received abundant interest from our nonprofits in being connected with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) School of Education's doctoral Capstone call for requests for assistance (RFA) and other opportunities to connect with university programs and people to assist with their needs. There is also opportunity for more formalized alliances to be developed between institutions of higher education and local nonprofits for ongoing education and capacity development like what takes place in other communities across the country (e.g., Unite Charlotte and Duke University). A potential partnership worth exploring in our area is with the University of Richmond. Within their School of Professional and Continuing Studies (SPCS), there is an Institute on Philanthropy which offers opportunities to enroll in programming, valuable educational and capacity development resources, and specific certifications that assist with fund development, grant writing, strategic communications, and other areas which nonprofits are seeking to have their needs met.

Theoretical Implications

Through our backgrounds and positions in education coupled with our epistemological lens being informed by the data we have collected through the voices of our participants, we have discerned correlations between the fields of education and philanthropy. We posit that educational theoretical frameworks with a systems focus that have been successfully developed and used to apply the tenets of humanism more extensively and universally throughout the spheres of learning could be studied and adapted to the context of the nonprofit ecosystem. Our findings indicate that there is a significant opportunity for the philanthropic sector to become more community- and human-centered in the structures, processes, and decisions that are made, which requires systemic change. Similar challenges have been identified and met by education and two tools, in particular, could be academically examined in more detail through the nonprofit context in order to apply them accordingly.

The first framework that could be further developed as a method for instituting structural change is the Systems Informed Positive Psychology framework itself. In Kern and Wehnmeyer's (2021) book *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Education*, they offer an extensive range of both theoretical and applied evidence demonstrating how myriad scholars and practitioners in the field of education have recognized the importance of positive psychology and are dedicating considerable efforts to institute and develop its application in practice. Two scholars in particular, Kern and Taylor (2021) have adapted the SIPP framework to create Systems Informed Positive Education or SIPE. In their educational context, they acknowledge that "creating positive change is challenging [because] too often school change initiatives view change through the lens of individual parts—[e.g..], students, teachers, parents, curriculum, legislation, policy, funding, and buildings—rather than seeing the whole living system" (p. 131). Their SIPE model "incorporates aspects of the systems sciences into positive education practice and pedagogy to cultivate optimal learning environments that bring out the best in each individual—and of the school community as a whole" (p. 111). As the educational and philanthropic sectors are facing comparable issues and challenges (e.g., complexity, multiple perspectives, inclusive practices, power differentials, pluralism, trauma-aware practice, self-determination, well-being, resilience, belonging, etc.), we contend that there is opportunity for the nonprofit sector to apply a similar strategy and approach as Kern and Taylor (2021) to formulate SIPPh—Systems Informed Positive Philanthropy.

Second, when considering the context of systemic equity and the need for culture change, we likewise envision the adaption of another framework created for the educational context to provide a mechanism for enacting meaningful and impactful systemic change. The Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) Coherence Framework was designed by researchers at Harvard University to “help district leaders identify the key elements that support a district-wide improvement strategy, bring those elements into a coherent relationship with the strategy and each other, and guide the actions of people throughout the district in the pursuit of high levels of achievement for all students", all while centering the instructional core which includes not only the students but also the educators supporting the students and the practices involved in their education (Childress et al., 2011, p. 1). Moreover, in their *Note on Racial Equity in School Systems*, Cheatham et al. (2020), demonstrate how the PELP Coherence Framework can be used to develop “a theory of change rooted in racial equity” (p. 3) by identifying problems along with their root causes and “[enacting] an explicit theory of change focused on racial equity, one that centers the voices and experiences of [people] of color” (p. 8) and “[analyzes] formal and informal power structures in order to disrupt the dominant culture” (p. 9). We posit that there is opportunity for researchers to examine frameworks such as PELP and SIPE and to apply what has been learned in the educational sector regarding equitable and human-centered praxes to the nonprofit ecosystem. Our research study is evidence in and of itself as to how an educational and research-based vantage point can be instrumental in effecting real change and collective impact for the organizations and communities who need it most.

Conclusion

As educators being asked for assistance in the nonprofit sector with which we had not been directly involved and where the problem of practice we were given was centered on racial minorities which we are not, getting to our final recommendations was a multipronged process. The problem of practice that we received from the Community Impact Council (CIC) of the

United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg (UWGRP) was our starting point. Because the CIC understood United Way's strategic framework and astutely recognized the ever-changing needs of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg region, they brought forth the desire for a different way of structurally operating and communicating in order to break down the barriers that have prevented minority-led nonprofits from engaging with them up to now. Specifically, the CIC stated that they wanted to step back and learn from others. They asked us to find and connect with local minority-led nonprofits, discover their needs, and ultimately provide recommendations for equitable funding practices. To focus our efforts, we identified a cadre of 143 organizations, invited them to engage with us, connected with those who participated in a meaningful way to establish a level of trust, asked them about their challenges and needs regarding their funding and capacity development, and we listened. Ultimately, we have endeavored to make the most appropriate recommendation to the UWGRP as to the best path for the allocation of funds to support the work of the minority-led nonprofits. We have great hope that the work we have started through this research study is just the beginning of what can become transformational change and racial unity not only within the local philanthropic community, but also throughout the Greater Richmond and Petersburg region and beyond.

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Appendix A

Consent for Participation in Research

Title: United We Stand: Focus Group

Introduction: The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Please read the information that follows and ask any questions that you have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

Purpose of the Study: You have been asked to participate in a focus group as part of a case study that is looking at equitable funding practices for small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area.

What will you be asked to do?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in a focus group discussion for approximately 90 minutes. Your participation will be recorded. The study will include approximately 60 study participants in approximately four to six separate focus group discussions.

What are the risks involved in this study?
There are risks associated with any focus group. Those risk(s) is/are minimal and pertain to issues connected with the loss of confidentiality. Measures intended to limit potential risks have been addressed appropriately. There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions. Those there are no foreseeable risks, there may be unforeseen risks.

What are the possible benefits of this study?
The possible benefit of this study includes the discovery of new information relating to the outcomes of equitable grant funding and the recommendations to move towards a co-creative process for grant funding from minority-led nonprofits and funding organizations.

Do you have to participate?
Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. If you would like to participate in this study, please provide verbal consent or sign this consent form.

Will there be any compensation?
You will not receive any type of payment for participating in this study.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you participate in this research study?
All data will be stored on a password protected cloud server. Recordings and transcripts will be de-identified. All data will be destroyed after two years.

If it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review the study records, information that can be linked to you will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate it with you or with your participation in any study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be recorded. Any recordings will be stored securely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for two years and then erased.

Whom to contact with questions about the study?
Prior, during, or after your participation you can contact the primary researchers Katherine Hansen at (248) 635-9131 (kghansen@vcu.edu), Heather Sadowski at (480) 250-3940 (sadowskih@vcu.edu), or Marti Tomlin at (804) 836-4131 (tomlinm@vcu.edu) about any questions or if you feel that you have been harmed. You may also contact the faculty supervisor, Beth Bukoski, at (512) 232-4419 or send an email to bukoskibe@vcu.edu.

Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?
For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board by phone at (804) 827-2157 or email at msmarkow@vcu.edu.

Participation
If you agree to participate, please provide verbal consent to the focus group moderator.

By verbally consenting, you agree that you have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you consent, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By verbally consenting, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Appendix B

Focus Group Moderator's Guide

Date: ___________________ Time & Place: ____

Participants: ____

Moderator: __________________________ Group:_______________________________________

Other: ____

Introduction and Consent Acknowledgement

Introduction (study purpose and applications; consent forms, approvals; treatment of data; other questions or concerns):

Good (morning, afternoon). Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today, (   ). My name is (   ) and I am a doctoral student with Virginia Commonwealth University as part of our capstone project. My partners (   ) and (   ) and I are facilitating focus group discussions as part of a case study that is looking at equitable funding practices for small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area. This is a team project that will fulfill our requirements for graduation.

The focus group will last no more than 90 minutes. All communications and information shared with us will be de-identified and stored in a VCU approved encrypted system that is only accessible to individuals working on this study. All data will be destroyed at the conclusion of our program. In reporting findings, participant identities and organizations will be masked to protect your privacy unless you request to be identified. We ask you to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing any content discussed during the study. However, *since this is a focus group, we cannot guarantee privacy. We will also offer an opportunity for you to review the verbatim transcripts and offer any corrections or clarifications.*

We would like to record the conversation so we can accurately represent what you say. Again, all data will be kept confidential and will be de-identified in any reports. Do we have your permission to record?

Protocols

Research script:

You have been asked to participate in a focus group as part of a case study that is looking at equitable funding practices for small, emergent, grassroots, minority-led nonprofits of the Greater Richmond and Petersburg area.

It will be important to set some ground rules before we begin:

- *All group members have a right to their viewpoints and opinions.*
- *All group members have a right to speak without being interrupted or disrespected by other group members.*
- *Group members will avoid dominating the conversations and will allow time for others to speak.*
- *The moderator has the right to guide the timing and flow of the session topics but will allow the group to determine the importance and focus on the conversations as appropriate.*
- *Identities of group members will remain confidential; first names only will be used for name tags and in reference to one another during the session.*

Are there any questions or concerns that you have before we get started?

Question Sequence

Q1. Could you tell us about your experience with obtaining funding? (Intro)

Probe: Specifically, could you describe how you have been impacted by grant funding agencies?

Q2. If you were to speak to grant funding agencies about their processes, what would you say to them? (Intro)

Probe: How equitable do you think grant funding is within Richmond?

Probe: Is there a need to address inequity grant funding?

Q3. How urgent of a need is it for nonprofit funding organizations to change their processes to be equitable? (Urgency)

Probe: Is this important at this present time?

Probe: When do you feel it is best to act and why?

Q4. What does co-creating an equitable grant funding model with funding organizations look like to you? (Construction)

Probe: How can co-creation work?

Probe: To what extent do you want to be involved in creating a solution?

Probe: What does support look like in order to foster co-creation?

Probe: What resources would be needed in order for you to participate in the co-creation process?

Q5. What would it take for you to trust and build a relationship with funding organizations? (Relation and Emotion)

Probe: What do funding organizations need to learn about your organizational culture? (e.g., the values of your organization; what you do, how you do it, why you do it, etc.)

Q6.What does open communication and collaboration between stakeholders look like to you within the funding process? (Action)

Probe: What collaborative methods are needed in order to balance stakeholder relationships?

Probe: What communication practices and tools do you value?

Probe: What communication practices and tools work well within your organization to strengthen trust?

Q7. What would you do if you had support to develop your capacity and organizational resiliency? (Expertise)

Probe: What would that look like to you?

Probe: Would you be willing to participate in a capacity survey in order to share your capacity development needs with funding organizations?

Q8. Is there anything that we have not asked you, that you feel we should know? (Conclusion)

Thank you for your time and your insights about equitable grant funding. We may follow-up with you within the next few weeks to check for clarification or ask some follow-up questions as we compile our data. Would that be OK? We greatly appreciate your insights on this topic.

Appendix C

Nonprofit Capacity Instrument

NONPROFIT CAPACITY INSTRUMENT

FOR MORE ABOUT THE DIMENSIONS OF NONPROFIT CAPACITY, VISIT OUR WEBSITE: NNSI.NORTHWESTERN.EDU

ON THE WEBSITE, WE INCLUDE RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR BUILDING NONPROFIT CAPACITY, A FULL DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY THIS INSTRUMENT IS DERIVED FROM, AND AN ONLINE TOOL DESIGNED THAT AUTOMATICALLY SCORES THE INSTRUMENT AND BENCHMARKS THE SCORE AGAINST OTHER NONPROFITS.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
FINANCIAL CAPACITY				
Financial plans are in place for the long-term sustainability of this organization's work.				
This organization has enough cash available to pay its bills.				
An annual budget is updated and reviewed regularly by management.				
There are qualified personnel that manage this organization's finances.				
Financial reports are used for decision-making.				
Financial reports are created on a quarterly basis.				
This organization obtains funds from a variety of sources (i.e., individual donors, grants, earned income).				
The budget takes into account the long-term financial resources of this organization.				

There are documented procedures for handling the organization's finances (e.g., petty cash, signatory procedures, expenditure approval, and accounting).				

Enter the number of each response into the appropriate line. Then, multiple that number by the number indicated on the line. Sum the four numbers together and write it on the total line. Divide the sum by the number of items. The result represents your capacity score.

Strongly Disagree: ____________ X 1 = ___________

Disagree: ____________ X 2 = ___________

Agree: ____________ X 3 = ___________

Strongly Agree: ____________ X 4 = + __________

TOTAL ________________ /9 =

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
ADAPTIVE CAPACITY				
Many staff members are involved in making decisions for this organization's activities.				
There is a sense of shared values among the entire staff.				

In general, the staff is committed to this organization.				
Conflicts among staff are resolved productively.				
People at this organization work together to solve problems.				
Employees at this organization are supportive of one other.				

Enter the number of each response into the appropriate line. Then, multiple that number by the number indicated on the line. Sum the four numbers together and write it on the total line. Divide the sum by the number of items. The result represents your capacity score.

Strongly Disagree: ____________ X 1 = ___________

Disagree: ____________ X 2 = ___________

Agree: ____________ X 3 = ___________

Strongly Agree: ____________ X 4 = + ___________

TOTAL ________________ /6 =

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
STRATEGIC PLANNING				
Implementation of activities reflects the strategic plan.				
Strategic plans are actually followed.				
This organization is guided by a long-term strategic plan.				
This organization's strategic plan is forward-oriented.				
The board revisits the strategic plan on an annual basis.				
The strategic plan is structured around this organization's mission.				

Enter the number of each response into the appropriate line. Then, multiple that number by the number indicated on the line. Sum the four numbers together and write it on the total line. Divide the sum by the number of items. The result represents your capacity score.

Strongly Disagree: ____________ X 1 = __________

Disagree: ____________ X 2 = __________

Agree: ____________ X 3 = __________

Strongly Agree: ____________ X 4 = + __________

TOTAL ________________ /6 =

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION				
Information technology is regularly used for communicating with external stakeholders (i.e., donors, media, and other organizations).				
This organization has developed cause-related fundraising activities.				
A public relations strategy is in place.				
Information about organizational activities is regularly disseminated to the public.				
This organization has the ability to develop key messages for potential supporters.				
This organization has experience with developing communication campaigns.				

Enter the number of each response into the appropriate line. Then, multiple that number by the number indicated on the line. Sum the four numbers together and write it on the total line. Divide the sum by the number of items. The result represents your capacity score.

Strongly Disagree: ____________ X 1 = __________

Disagree: ____________ X 2 = __________

Agree: ____________ X 3 = __________

Strongly Agree: ____________ X 4 = + __________

TOTAL ________________ /6 =

	Strongly Disagree	Disagre e	Agree	Strongly Agree
BOARD LEADERSHIP				
Board members are committed to the vision of this organization.				
The board members are accessible to employees.				
This organization's board has a good working relationship with staff.				
The board takes regular steps to stay informed about the important trends in the larger environment that might affect the organization.				

The board explicitly examines the "downside" or possible pitfalls of any important decision it is about to make.				
The board learns from its mistakes.				

Enter the number of each response into the appropriate line. Then, multiple that number by the number indicated on the line. Sum the four numbers together and write it on the total line. Divide the sum by the number of items. The result represents your capacity score.

Strongly Disagree: ____________ X 1 = __________

Disagree: ____________ X 2 = __________

Agree: ____________ X 3 = __________

Strongly Agree: ____________ X 4 = + __________

TOTAL ________________ /6 =

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
OPERATIONAL CAPACITY				
Performance indicators have been identified for each program objective.				
Regular reports track each program on at least a quarterly basis.				

Programs are routinely monitored through external evaluation.				
Before a program begins, measurable objectives are set out.				

Enter the number of each response into the appropriate line. Then, multiple that number by the number indicated on the line. Sum the four numbers together and write it on the total line. Divide the sum by the number of items. The result represents your capacity score.

Strongly Disagree: ____________ X 1 = ____________

Disagree: ____________ X 2 = ____________

Agree: ____________ X 3 = ____________

Strongly Agree: ____________ X 4 = + ____________

TOTAL ________________ /4 =

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
MISSION ORIENTATION				
Donors are committed to the mission of this organization.				

Other stakeholders, such as community members, clients or beneficiaries of the organization, share a common vision for this organization.				
The mission or vision statement provides this organization with direction.				
The community would identify this organization by its mission statement.				

Enter the number of each response into the appropriate line. Then, multiple that number by the number indicated on the line. Sum the four numbers together and write it on the total line. Divide the sum by the number of items. The result represents your capacity score.

Strongly Disagree: ____________ X 1 = ____________

Disagree: ____________ X 2 = ____________

Agree: ____________ X 3 = ____________

Strongly Agree: ____________ X 4 = + ____________

TOTAL ________________ /4 =

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
STAFF MANAGEMENT				

Employees have all the information they need to do their jobs effectively.				
Management provides opportunities for regular job training activities.				
Managers have the necessary skills to run this organization.				
Staff receive adequate mentoring.				

Enter the number of each response into the appropriate line. Then, multiple that number by the number indicated on the line. Sum the four numbers together and write it on the total line. Divide the sum by the number of items. The result represents your capacity score.

Strongly Disagree: ____________ X 1 = ___________

Disagree: ____________ X 2 = ___________

Agree: ____________ X 3 = ___________

Strongly Agree: ____________ X 4 = + __________

TOTAL ________________ /9 =

Appendix D

Code Book

Code	**Code Definition**	**Examples within Qualitative Research**
Codes Related To Research Question #1		
Funding Sources	Money allotted for programs, services, projects, and operations that do not need to be paid back to the funder. This money can come from national or local organizations, individual donors, or other funding avenues.	National Funding: Providing budgetary and monetary resources to communities across the country. Local Funding: Providing budgetary and monetary resources to local municipalities or the state in which they serve. Individual Donor Funding: Families or individuals providing budgetary or monetary resources to communities across the country, state, or specific municipality that have a mission they support.
Funding Types	Money that supports an organization's mission. Examples of types of funding include: restricted, unrestricted, start-up/seed, general operating, etc. Some funding is for a singular year and other for multi-year.	Unrestricted Funding: Funding that can be utilized for purposes that are determined to be appropriate by the organization. Restricted Funding: Reserved funding designated by donors to be utilized only for specific purposes.

		General Operating: Used to support the general organizational mission, and pay for overhead expenses, such as rent, salaries, furniture, and other day-to-day costs of running a business. Start-Up and Seed Funding: Funding utilized to start-up and begin an organization, program, initiative, etc. Multi-year - Funding that will continue year after year. Multi-year: Funding that will continue year after year.
Funding Relationships	Mutual connection, and commonalities that foster trust and respect. Can positively or negatively impact connections between and among constituents.	Funders → Nonprofits → Community: Reciprocal trust and respect between all three entities to foster initiatives. Between Nonprofits: Development of networks to support, share ideas, learn, and grow. Mission Drift: Being steered away from the original organizational mission or purpose to seek or obtain funding.
Funding Practices	What budgetary and monetary resources are or are not available to emergent and grassroots minority-led nonprofit organizations. Funding practices can be equitable, or inequitable.	Equitable: Support and grow Same people get the money: A "Good Ole Boy System" and the disbursement of funding to the same people, same demographics, over and

		over again.
Codes Related To Research Question #2		
Relationship Challenges	Situations or examples where trust between funder and nonprofit is threatened or diminished. Trust-based philanthropy is rooted in a set of values that help advance equity, shift power, and build mutually accountable relationships.	Trust/Lack Thereof: Not having a mutual trust of nonprofits or funders. Power Imbalances: Feeling of unequal power between nonprofits and funders. New/Established Relationships: New or unknown organizations competing with longstanding, established organizations. Sub-Grantees: Not given the opportunity to receive a standalone grant, but awarded sub-grant from a larger/more established organization that takes credit for their work. Understanding of Community Needs: Lacking a true understanding of the real needs of the communities being served.
Racial Challenges	Differential treatment of the members of different ethnic, religious, national, or other groups, which manifests in prejudice and involves negative, hostile, and injurious treatment of	Tokenism: Making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to be inclusive to members of minority groups, especially by recruiting people from

	members of rejected groups. Assumptions are made that the members of racial categories have distinctive characteristics and that these differences result in some racial groups being inferior to others. Racism generally includes negative emotional reactions to members of the group, acceptance of negative stereotypes, and racial discrimination against individuals.	underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of racial or gender equality within an organizational context. Bias (Access/Structural racism, proximity to Whiteness): Personal, institutional, or professional attitudes or beliefs in favor of, or opposed to, in a conscious or unconscious manner. White Savior/White Privilege: White people in power who think they know what is best to "save" poor Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples. Problems and solutions are defined and determined by those with a limited understanding of the community in question.
Bureaucratic Challenges	Procedures or norms that make it difficult for people to get where they want to go. A system of controlling or managing that blocks you so that movement, going forward, or action is prevented or made more difficult.	Reporting requirements: Reporting data structures too intensive for nonprofits to meet reporting requirement needs. Application review: Who is reviewing the applications for funding, and what are they specifically looking for from the application text. Non-transparent

		communication: Need for two-way communication for why grants are funded and/or not funded. Uncompensated work: Work that is performed with pay.
Temporal Challenges	Time and across time, and not having enough time.	Funding proportionate to application process/time: Amount of time and energy of nonprofits' staff, and application length, is not always balanced for funds distributed. Sustainability: Programs and services need to continue without grant funding. Urgency: Need to act now.
Knowledge Challenges	Not having the knowledge that other individuals and/or organizations do.	Knowledge Deficit: Due to lack of exposure, access, & experience.
Codes Related To Research Question #3		
Capacity Building	A way to tell if an organization has a larger, or lesser, ability to carry out actions related to certain capacities. Opportunities provided to agencies to increase social capacity, expand reach, and expand impact within their community.	Financial Management: The ability to accurately and completely report the financial aspects of the organization. Adaptive Capacity: The way organizations adapt to changes in their environment, and consists of organizational learning,

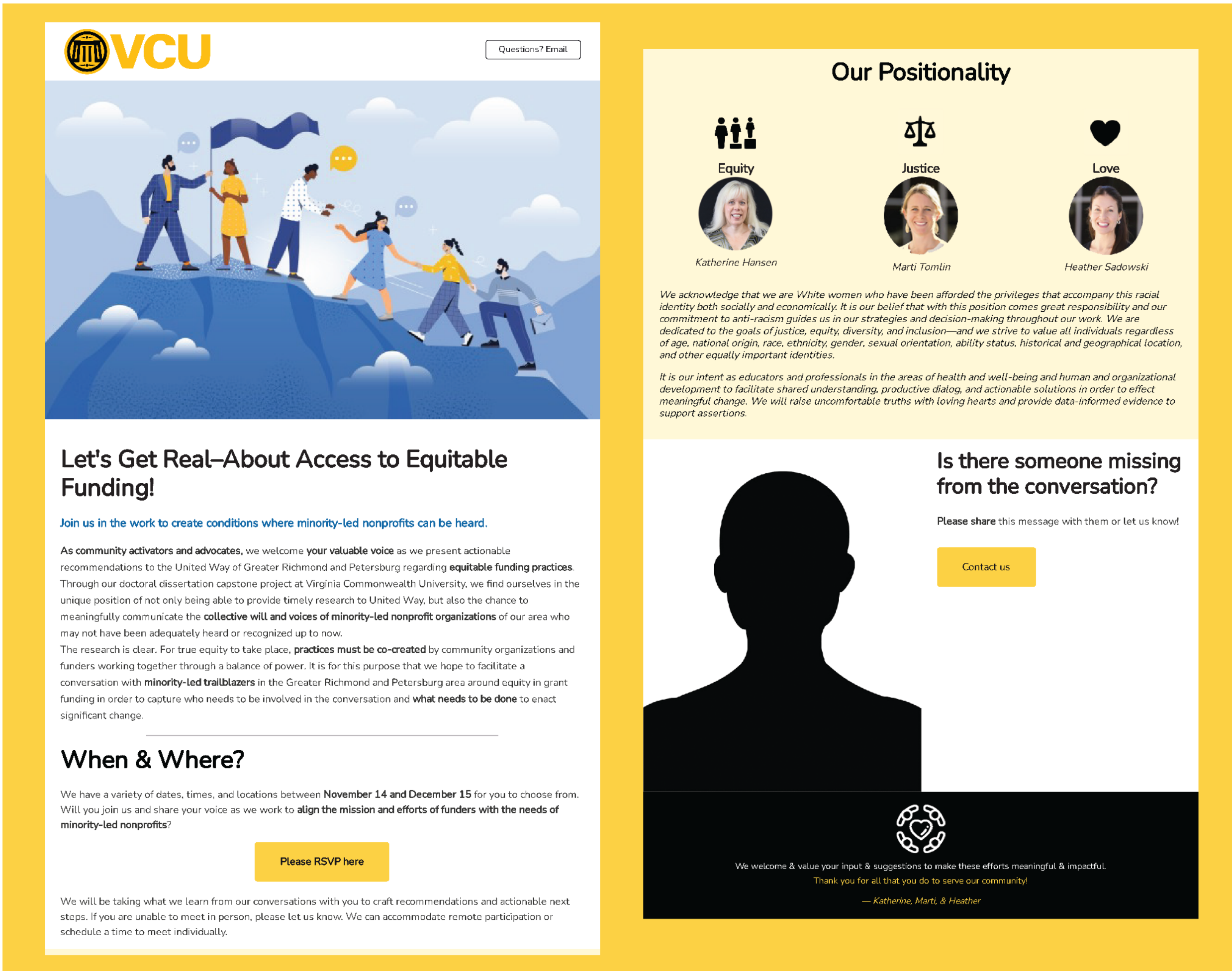
		responsiveness, innovativeness, and motivation. Strategic Planning: Creating, following, and evaluating plans for the nonprofit's future activities; "a deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why". External Communication: The ability of nonprofits to engage stakeholders. Board Leadership: The board of directors' commitment to and involvement with the organization's vision and plan, its relationship with the staff, and its ability to make sound decisions about its future. Operational Capacity: The existence and use of documented procedures and the organization’s ability to set goals for programs and activities, and assess their outcomes. Mission Orientation: Stakeholders’ common

		orientation towards the mission of a nonprofit organization and includes areas generally related to an organization's mission, like mission attachment. Staff Management: The capability to train and manage staff and maintain staff skills across an organization.
Reciprocity	An equal give and take/exchange between two entities for mutual benefit to both entities. Something provided to one person group, in return for something taken from that person/group.	Particular Ways To Give Back: Nonprofit Capacities Building Instrument, volunteer opportunities, etc.
Board Development	Providing opportunities to board members to grow their skills and knowledge by providing them tools and resources to best serve the communities which their organization represents.	Resources and Tools: Training and development opportunities, etc.
Staff	The people who keep the nonprofits afloat and serve as the go between with the funders and community. Many times these individuals are members of the community they represent, and often the inequities in the communities are perpetuated in the staff. To avoid this, staff must be paid a good salary that at least meets the minimum wage, provide adequate health-care, and be	Salary/Living Wage: Paid for work performing, not having to seek government assistance, food security, etc. Health Care: Medical benefits, health insurance, mental health support, etc. Wellbeing:

	supported to take care of their own well-being.	Meeting basic physiological and safety needs.
Additional Codes		
Good Quotes to Keep	Powerful quotes the researchers deemed valuable for sharing the voices of the nonprofits.	
Questions Posed to Funders	Questions that nonprofits mention they would like answered by the funding organizations.	

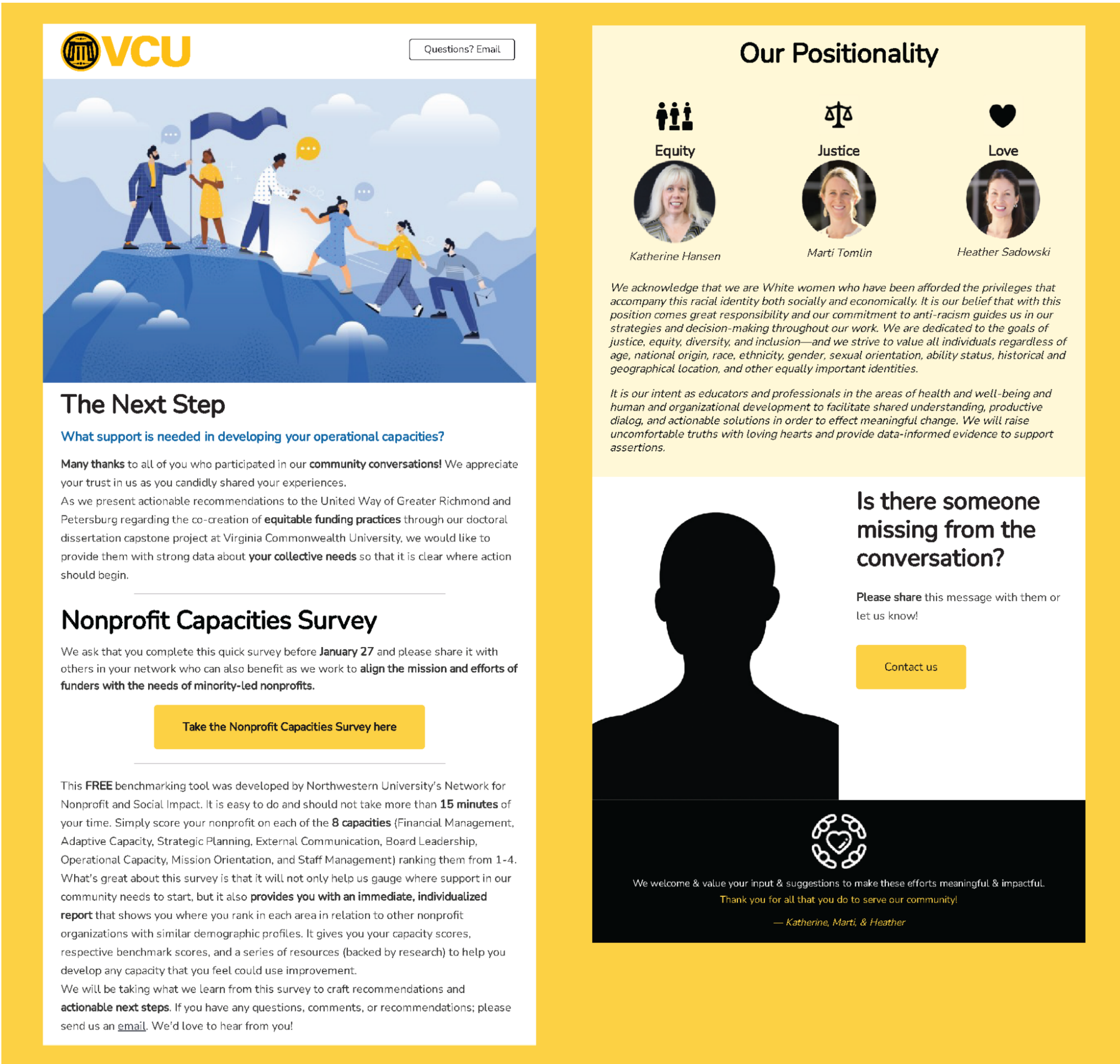
Appendix E

Flyer to Solicit Focus Group Participation



Appendix F

Flyer to Solicit Survey Participation



VCU

Questions? Email

The Next Step

What support is needed in developing your operational capacities?

Many thanks to all of you who participated in our **community conversations!** We appreciate your trust in us as you candidly shared your experiences.

As we present actionable recommendations to the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg regarding the co-creation of **equitable funding practices** through our doctoral dissertation capstone project at Virginia Commonwealth University, we would like to provide them with strong data about **your collective needs** so that it is clear where action should begin.

Nonprofit Capacities Survey

We ask that you complete this quick survey before **January 27** and please share it with others in your network who can also benefit as we work to **align the mission and efforts of funders with the needs of minority-led nonprofits.**

Take the Nonprofit Capacities Survey here

This **FREE** benchmarking tool was developed by Northwestern University's Network for Nonprofit and Social Impact. It is easy to do and should not take more than **15 minutes** of your time. Simply score your nonprofit on each of the **8 capacities** (Financial Management, Adaptive Capacity, Strategic Planning, External Communication, Board Leadership, Operational Capacity, Mission Orientation, and Staff Management) ranking them from 1-4. What's great about this survey is that it will not only help us gauge where support in our community needs to start, but it also **provides you with an immediate, individualized report** that shows you where you rank in each area in relation to other nonprofit organizations with similar demographic profiles. It gives you your capacity scores, respective benchmark scores, and a series of resources (backed by research) to help you develop any capacity that you feel could use improvement.

We will be taking what we learn from this survey to craft recommendations and **actionable next steps**. If you have any questions, comments, or recommendations; please send us an email. We'd love to hear from you!

Our Positionality

Equity | Justice | Love

Katherine Hansen | *Marti Tomlin* | *Heather Sadowski*

We acknowledge that we are White women who have been afforded the privileges that accompany this racial identity both socially and economically. It is our belief that with this position comes great responsibility and our commitment to anti-racism guides us in our strategies and decision-making throughout our work. We are dedicated to the goals of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion—and we strive to value all individuals regardless of age, national origin, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, historical and geographical location, and other equally important identities.

It is our intent as educators and professionals in the areas of health and well-being and human and organizational development to facilitate shared understanding, productive dialog, and actionable solutions in order to effect meaningful change. We will raise uncomfortable truths with loving hearts and provide data-informed evidence to support assertions.

Is there someone missing from the conversation?

Please share this message with them or let us know!

Contact us

We welcome & value your input & suggestions to make these efforts meaningful & impactful.

Thank you for all that you do to serve our community!

— Katherine, Marti, & Heather

Appendix G

Participant Demographics

Qualitative participant demographics by race and gender

Focus Groups, Interviews, Online Questionnaire (Google Form) Participant Demographics By Race and Gender *Data is alphabetical by race			
Data Collection Method	**Participants**	**Race**	**Gender**
Focus Group #1			
	Participant #1	Black	Woman
	Participant #2	Black	Woman
	Participant #3	Black	Man
	Participant #4	Black	Man
	Participant #5	Hispanic	Woman
Focus Group #2			
	Participant #1	Black	Woman
	Participant #2	Black	Woman
	Participant #3	Black	Woman
	Participant #4	Black	Man
Focus Group #3			
	Participant #1	Asian	Woman
	Participant #2	Black	Woman
	Participant #3	Black	Woman
	Participant #4	Black	Woman
	Participant #5	Black	Woman

	Participant #6	Black	Woman
	Participant #7	Black	Man
	Participant #8	Hispanic	Woman
Interview #1	Participant #1	Black	Woman
Interview #2	Participant #1	White	Woman
Interview #3	Participant #1	White	Woman
Online Questionnaire (Google Form) An online form was provided for individuals who either could not, or preferred not, to attend in person.		Race and gender identities were not identified by the respondents and not a question asked by the researchers.	

Minority race respondent comparison to Greater Richmond demographics

Race	**Greater Richmond Regional makeup***	**Focus Group & Interview participants**	**Executive Leader of survey respondents**
Black or African American	325,650 **(78%)**	15 **(83%)**	22 **(76%)**
American Indian or Alaskan Native	4,432 (.01)	0	0
Asian	38,026 (9%)	1 (5.6%)	0
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	591 (.01%)	0	0
Other race (non-White)	26,671 (6.4%)	2 (1.1%)	5 (17.2%)
Two or more races	24,481 (5.8%)	0	2 (1%)
Total	419,851	18 (out of 20)	29

Note. From United States® Census Bureau 2020: DEC Redistricting Data (PL94-171) per State, 5-digit ZIP code https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table

Nonprofit Capacities Instrument: Identities of primary executive leader

Nonprofit Capacities Instrument: Identities of Primary Executive Leader ***Identity could fall in one or more self-identified categories** ****Data is displayed by largest numeral count to smallest**	
Primary Executive Leader Identity	**Numerical Count**
Black or African American	22
Woman	11
White	11
Man	6
Hispanic or Latinx	5
Individual w/ Disability	2
LGBTQIA+	2
Two or More Races	2
Did Not Disclose	1

Nonprofit Capacities Instrument: Nonprofit identities

Nonprofit Capacities Instrument: Nonprofit Identities ***Data is displayed by largest numeral count to smallest**	
Nonprofit Identity	**Numerical Count**
Minority-led	10
Both Emergent and Grassroots	7
Grassroots	5
Did Not Disclose	5
Emergent	3
Both Emergent and Minority-led	3
Both Grassroots and Minority-led	1
Both Minority-led and Small	1
Small	0

Appendix H

Tools for United Way

Organizational Equity Assessment

- National Equity Project: Equity Frameworks
- Dismantling Racism: Equity Analysis Tools
- D5 Coalition: Analysis of Policies, Practices, and Programs for Advancing Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in Philanthropy
- National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy: Power Moves Executive Summary: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice
- National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy: Power Moves Full Guide: Your Essential Philanthropy Assessment Guide for Equity and Justice
- Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity: Lessons Learned from the Racial Justice Grantmaking Assessment
- United Way Equity Toolkit: A Guide for Becoming a More Equitable Organization
- United Way Equity Framework

Community Engagement & Communications

- Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE) Communications Guide
- Living Cities: Facilitators Guide for Continuous Improvement Conversations with a Racial Equity Lens
- Guide to Constructive and Inclusive Dialogue (Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities)
- OXFAM Inclusive Language Guide

- Advancing Funders' Openness Practices: Lessons for the Field from the Collective Impact Funder Action Learning Lab

Co-Creation

- National Equity Project: Developing Community Agreements
- National Equity Project: Community Agreements: Implementing, Monitoring, & Repairing
- Tamarack Institute: A Guide for Building a Sustainable and Resilient Collaboration
- Collective Impact Forum: Racial Equity Toolkit: A Reflection and Resource Guide for Collective Impact Backbone Staff and Partners

Trauma Informed Care

- Healing-Centered/Trauma-Informed/Resilience-Building Self-Assessment Tools
- Organization Self Assessment

Grantmaking

- Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity: Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens Guide
- Arabella Advisors: Incorporating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in your Grantmaking Process: A Checklist of Potential Actions
- Justice Funders: Grantmaking Processes Self-Assessment
- ABFE & The Bridgespan Group: Guiding a Giving Response to Anti-Black Injustice
- Grantmakers for Effective Organizations: Centering Equity through Flexible, Reliable Funding
- Grantcraft: Grantmaking with a Racial Equity Lens

Equitable Funding

- Power Moves Assessment Guide for Equity & Justice

- Brookings/LISC: Community-Centered Economic Inclusion: A Strategic Action Playbook

Trust-Based Philanthropy

- Trust-Based Philanthropy Project: Guides & How-To's

Local Organizations Doing Things Right

- Legal Aid Justice Center
- Third Wave Fund
- Collective 365

Capacity Development

- Nonprofit Capacities Tool, Resource Package