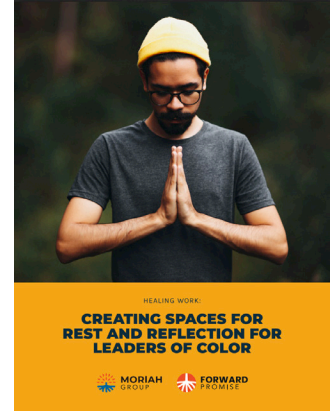


# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Healing Work: Creating Spaces for Rest and Reflection for Leaders of Color



*We are tough. We are exceptional. We are Americans. We value leaders that ascend to lofty positions of authority and power at any cost<sup>1</sup>. We glorify hustle, so we rest when we retire. This idea of grit—rooted in competitiveness, colonialism, and capitalism—is ingrained in the unhealthy ideologies of this nation’s narrative.*

Many leaders in racial equity movements struggle to heal themselves because of the high priority our society places on productivity over well-being. Black and Brown leaders find it particularly challenging to balance the societal demand for productivity with the human need for rest. Not only do they live in the same skin and experience the same dehumanization as the young people and communities they serve, they are constantly asked to itemize their credentials and to prove their value as movement and community leaders. They are pressured to develop programs to fit the Western models of thriving that philanthropy deems “worthy” of funding. And their culturally responsive healing practices are consistently questioned. While many grantmakers keep the status quo in their funding practices, racial healers are falling due to exhaustion, burnout, stress, and chronic illness.

In our new paper, [Healing Work: Creating Spaces for Rest and Reflection for Leaders of Color](#), we call on philanthropy to support the needs of leaders in communities of color—by funding their programs, by trusting their leadership, and by prioritizing their well-being.

<sup>1</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18642982/>

# PAPER HIGHLIGHTS

- **Grantmakers should trust that Brown and Black people know what is best for their communities.** Even if their training is informal or nontraditional, their lived experiences with culture, community, and systems make them the most knowledgeable and impactful leaders of anti-racism work.
- **As experts, leaders of color should be trusted to effectively manage general operating support and larger budgets.** Institutional philanthropy typically invests 8–9% of total giving in communities of color. Even less funding is allocated to POC-led organizations. Though it is remarkable that leaders in communities of color have been able to create and accomplish so much with so little, it is time for their programs to be funded equitably and for their expertise to be respected.
- **In addition, leaders of color should not have to translate the effectiveness of their work and programming into Eurocentric metrics in order to be considered for funding.** Healing practices that are rooted in the cultures and values of communities of color are legitimate models for social change.
- **Because leaders of color often place the needs of their communities before their own, they regularly push through and compartmentalize challenges and traumas in order to carry out the work.** They shoulder extensive and unyielding expectations that rely on a destructive and dehumanizing superhuman stereotype. Despite the “superpowers” they exhibit to meet these demands, sustaining the weight and the pace of social justice and racial equity movements carries an invisible cost.
- **The cost of these challenges, coupled with the long-term impacts of racism on leaders of color, are akin to the effects of PTSD on first responders.** Those who choose racial healing, organizing, and advocacy as their life’s work pay a hefty price because they are experiencing the same ongoing trauma that they are fighting against. Philanthropy must reject the notion that sacrificing one’s physical, mental, and emotional health are synonymous with great leadership.

For grantmakers to truly uplift a culture of health in communities of color, they must support Black and Brown leaders in prioritizing their health, while funding leadership programs and communities of practice that value:

### **1. HEALTH AND RESTORATION**

Support spaces for leaders of color to reclaim and nurture their humanity, with time for rest and recovery.

### **2. AUTHENTIC POWER-BUILDING**

Provide resources for leaders of color as they remain authentically and unapologetically true to their core values and missions.

### **3. BEST PRACTICES IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Facilitate opportunities for leaders of color to both share and be exposed to existing and emerging best practices rooted in research, healing-centered engagement, and culturally responsive healing practices.

### **4. INCREASED VISIBILITY**

Fund, leverage, and support partnerships in the field to increase the visibility of leaders of color as well as amplify their work.

While Forward Promise grantee organizations work tirelessly to reclaim the cultures and assets that have been stolen, extracted, or destroyed in their communities—and heal the wounds caused by these ongoing traumas—they also know they must hold space for self-care, joy, celebration, and rest in order to sustain their work. Philanthropy has an integral role in sustaining this life-saving work, too.

Unquestionably, health and wellness are not just luxuries for wealthy or better-resourced communities. Leaders of color are not superhuman and should not be expected to work without reprieve until their demise. And philanthropy is missing from the fight to disrupt the dehumanization that is driving them to exhaust themselves mentally, emotionally, and physically.

Now is the time for funders to step up—so leaders of color can step back, take off their capes, and heal.

Download the full paper at [forwardpromise.org/spaces-for-rest](https://forwardpromise.org/spaces-for-rest)



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