



SOUNDING THE ALARM:

Nonprofits on the Frontlines of a Polarized Political Climate

October 2024

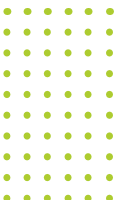


Building Movement Project



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About Building Movement Project

The Building Movement Project (BMP) provides insightful research, practical resources, and pathways for transformative relationships that support nonprofit organizations, networks, and movements in their work to create a just and equitable world. This report is part of BMP's Movement Infrastructure Series which offers ideas, approaches, and practices to strengthen individual organizations and broader social movement ecosystems.

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We are grateful to the nonprofit leaders who took the time to respond to our survey and interview requests in the midst of challenges and crises.





Introduction

BMP's Movement Infrastructure Series offers ideas, approaches, and practices to strengthen individual organizations and broader social movement ecosystems. As part of this series, BMP explored the impact of today's political climate on nonprofit and community organizations through case study interviews, focus groups, and a survey of the nonprofit sector. This report, *Sounding the Alarm: Nonprofits on the Frontlines of a Polarized Political Climate*, offers key insights from the survey and interviews, and provides recommendations for the nonprofit sector and philanthropic stakeholders.

Our previous reports in the series include *Reckoning With Sustainability: Black Leaders Reflect on 2020, the Funding Cliff, and Organizing Infrastructure*; *100 Days of Building Power and Solidarity: Observations and Recommendations about Immediate and Long-Term Infrastructure Needs for Palestinian, Muslim, and Arab Groups in the U.S.*; *Balancing Act: Asian American Organizations Respond to Community Crises and Build Collective Power*; *Funding Movement Infrastructure Brief*; and *Meeting the Need: Building the Capacity of Community-Based Organizations*. All of our reports are available at www.buildingmovement.org.

Executive Summary

Nonprofits are facing a range of unique threats and challenges in today's political climate. In particular, nonprofits working on issues often deemed as controversial, cutting-edge, or pressing in this moment—such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI); Education and Racial Equity; Reproductive Rights and Abortion Access; Immigrant Rights; LGBTQIA+ Rights; and Public Expressions of Support on Current Issues (including expressing solidarity with Palestinian rights)—are encountering a set of negative consequences. Their experiences should sound an alarm for the nonprofit sector and movement groups as a whole, and catalyze stakeholders including philanthropic entities to offer interventions in the way of increased investments, public support, and robust infrastructure.

Our analysis, based on a survey of 533 nonprofit leaders as well as focus groups and one-on-one interviews, finds that many organizations addressing issues that make the headlines today are contending with negative consequences such as reputational damage, threats to organizational safety, and funding reductions. As a result, groups are being forced to make or consider program changes and shifts in how they characterize their work. Additional funding losses are also widely anticipated, with groups pointing to state and federal legal rulings, expected policy changes and the upcoming elections as direct and indirect influences.





Key Findings

- Nonprofits working on what are perceived to be controversial issue areas—Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI); Education and Racial Equity; Reproductive Rights and Abortion Access; Immigrant Rights; LGBTQIA+ Rights; and Public Expressions of Support on Current Issues (including expressing solidarity with Palestinian rights)—are facing negative consequences for their work. According to a survey BMP conducted, **73% of organizations on the frontlines of these issues have faced or are anticipating one or more of a range of negative consequences:** threats to their reputation or to their office or personnel, or reductions in funding.

Of the 406 groups that experienced or anticipated negative consequences, 70% attributed that to their DEI efforts. A striking 44% of groups experienced or anticipated consequences for their expressions of support on current issues such as Palestinian rights (44%), followed closely by those working on LGBTQIA+ Rights (39%). About a third attributed consequences to their Immigrant Rights (30%) work, as did about a quarter of groups working on both Reproductive Rights (24%), and Education and Racial Equity (24%).
- **Respondent organizations are navigating a variety of threats** in response to their controversial work. Many nonprofits are **facing reputational threats**, including social media attacks (experienced or anticipated by between 16% to 32% of groups in each issue area), negative media (11% to 23% of groups

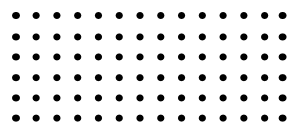
in each issue area), and doxxing (7% to 20% of groups in each issue area).

Additionally, organizations are **dealing with threats to their physical office or personnel**, including threatening calls (experienced or anticipated by between 4% to 24% of groups in each issue area), picketing/in-person threats (4% to 16% of groups in each issue area), and physical attacks (2% to 12% of groups in each issue area).

Though all of these threats are felt across each of the issue areas, groups working on Reproductive Rights or LGBTQIA+ Rights are particularly impacted by most of these kinds of threats, with more than 1 in 10 saying they experienced or anticipate experiencing physical attacks.

- **Organizations that faced or anticipated negative consequences for their work in polarizing issue areas are seeking to insulate themselves and their programs from threats by making adaptations to bolster the safety and legitimacy of their work.**

Legal and security interventions were most prominent among Reproductive Rights (28% adding legal assistance, 28% adding security), LGBTQIA+ Rights (25%, 27%), and Immigrant Rights (24%, 26%) groups. Nearly a fifth of groups that experienced or anticipate negative responses to their Expressions of Support with Current Issues also added legal assistance (18%) or security (19%).



- **In an attempt to reduce negative consequences for their work, organizations are making changes to program language.** The strategy of **shifting away from race-explicit language** was particularly pronounced among organizations working on DEI issues, with 18% of those that faced negative consequences changing or considering changes to their communications around race. These changes are jarring, in that many groups that adopted race-explicit language in 2020 after the uprisings may now feel the pressure to change their stances given the attacks on DEI that have occurred in the interim.

Across issue areas, 12–15% of organizations are **making other kinds of changes to their program language**. Interviewees noted that they are communicating about their work in ways that avoid attention in order to limit their public exposure. Some are making tough choices about the partners that they can align with, or the statements that they will endorse.

- **Respondents are changing aspects of their programming to deal with negative consequences and respond to policy and legal changes that impact their work, but most have not eliminated programs.**

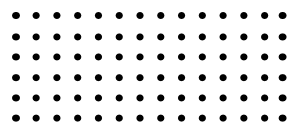
More than 1 in 10 groups in each issue area (with the exception of groups expressing public support on current issues) have **changed or anticipate changing programs**. So far, just 4–8% of respondents that experienced or anticipate experiencing negative consequences in each issue area have **reduced or eliminated programs** or anticipate doing so.

- **As a result of the current political climate, organizations have already lost funding, and more funding reductions are anticipated.** Respondents pointed to **the influence of state laws, state court rulings, and Supreme Court rulings** on the funding available for their work. Sizeable percentages of groups working on LGBTQIA+ Rights (31%), Immigrant Rights (28%), and DEI (27%), and those that expressed Public Support on Current Issues (27%) have **already experienced funding losses**. The most-frequently named sources of cuts were individual donors and foundations, which sets up an alarming trend for the future.

Almost half of the organizations expressing Public Support for Current Issues such as Palestinian rights (48%), DEI (47%), Immigrant Rights (47%), and LGBTQIA+ Rights (41%) **anticipate a loss of funding**. Anticipated funding losses not only impact the organizations that lose money, but also send a message to other groups about what may happen if they are working with similar populations or on similar issues.

Additionally, given the heightened scrutiny on nonprofits addressing issues that are deemed controversial by congressional committees, it is likely that funders may step back from supporting certain types of groups to avoid attention themselves.





Our interviews and focus groups also revealed a general sense of worry and concern among nonprofit leaders about how the attacks on race equity, free speech and protest, LGBTQ+ rights, abortion access, and immigrant rights may play out. Nonprofit leaders at the state and local levels are concerned about dehumanizing narratives, copycat policies to dismantle race equity programs, LGBTQIA+ care and abortion access, and investigations and insinuations about their work by the media and state level authorities.



“We’ve had to significantly invest in physical security due to death threats and beef up our digital security due to cybersecurity threats. We need to raise more money to defend our victories in court, as racial justice is under attack. The attacks in the media and from far-right members of Congress are particularly challenging—we are facing outright lies and smear campaigns meant to undermine our good reputation, and we’ve had to defend ourselves in the press, to tell our own story in the halls of power.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

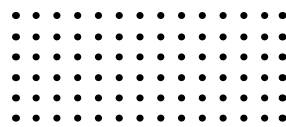
The nonprofit organizations that we surveyed and interviewed are sending an early warning signal and ringing the alarm about what others might encounter in the near future. Their experiences should not be treated as random or incidental, but considered with seriousness and urgency.

Given the current political climate in the United States and as the 2024 elections near, it is

vital to better understand the experiences of nonprofit groups on the frontlines and to heed their calls to action.

Philanthropic institutions and donors must double down on their funding of groups on the frontlines, rather than pulling back at this vital moment. Funders must frequently and consistently reassure organizations that their existing programs and activities do not need to shift in light of the political climate, and offer their trust, partnership, and multi-year general operating resources to build capacity in four arenas:

- » **Strengthening & Nurturing Organizations, Skills, Staff.** In order for organizations to adequately defend and protect communities, they first need to shore up their security, operations, and staff capacity. Key interventions include: physical and digital security; pro bono lawyers, accountants, and public relations professionals; fiscal compliance and governance and back-end operations support; and attention to the well-being of staff, board, volunteers, and members who may be experiencing threats.
- » **Defending & Protecting Our Communities.** As community needs multiply in the current polarized climate, organizations need support to engage in: community defense and safety planning; legal defense infrastructure (referral hotlines, Know Your Rights trainings, information, pro bono support, coordinating entity); a centralized online hub to share resources and information; and community care and healing.
- » **Shaping Public Policy & Narratives.** Nonprofit groups on the frontlines are often pushing back on narratives and policies that threaten the rights of people in their communities. They need partnerships



and capacity to: counteract disinformation and dehumanization; shape policies that center affected communities; produce data and research on issues their work addresses; influence media narratives; and build infrastructure to engage policy work at federal, state, and local levels. Nonprofits need infrastructure to engage in nimble and strategic communications, federal and local advocacy, documentation, research and storytelling, and grassroots base building. Such infrastructure often includes skilled staff, technological capacity, and community engagement strategies.

- » **Buttressing Our Ecosystem.** Organizations cannot do the hard work of addressing pressing issues in today’s climate without a strong ecosystem of support and solidarity. Funders need to support ecosystem development as an explicit and consistent priority so groups can build their capacity to: be part of coalitions and networks with similar values and goals; build solidarity strategies and partnerships to ensure that vulnerable groups are not doing work in isolation; share their experiences publicly without fear of reprisal; and coordinate and convene as needed.

Detailed recommendations are covered within the report, available also at:

www.buildingmovement.org

www.solidarityis.org



“Instead of assuming that the political climate will shift over time, it is important to prepare for how the 2024 elections and their aftermath may exacerbate the current dynamics. It is likely that nonprofits working on what are deemed to be polarizing issues will have even greater challenges in the wake of the elections, particularly in parts of the country that may be resisting progress on issues such as DEI, abortion access, immigrant rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and free speech.”



SETTING THE CONTEXT: The Current Political Climate

Nonprofits on the frontlines of addressing issues such as race equity, free speech and protest, LGBTQ+ rights, abortion access, and immigrant rights are facing a range of threats and challenges in the current climate. In recent years, these issues have become even more polarizing in the wake of rulings by the Supreme Court on abortion access and affirmative action, restrictions at the federal and local levels on diversity/equity/inclusion (DEI) programs, denials of access to benefits by queer and trans community members, federal immigration policies and state actions that criminalize immigrants, and the suppression of free speech related to advocacy around Palestinian rights. As a result, organizations serving and representing vulnerable communities are facing increasing challenges in rendering services, advocating for systemic policy change, and cultivating narratives of inclusion.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives and Race Equity in Education. The 2023 ruling by the US Supreme Court to gut race-based affirmative action in higher education has paved the way for restrictive state and local initiatives.¹ Over 100 bills have been introduced in state legislatures nationwide to dismantle diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.² Universities are following suit, such as the University of Texas system, where 21 DEI offices have been closed, with over 300 jobs and over 600 contracts terminated.³ Additionally, cases are being filed around the country to attack philanthropic efforts that center race equity, such as the Fearless Fund in Georgia that

supports Black female entrepreneurs and government programs like San Francisco's Abundant Birth Project that supports Black mothers.⁴ Nonprofit leaders who participated in BMP's focus groups expressed concern about the loss of funding from philanthropic entities who may themselves be targeted for providing resources to organizations that are focused on working with communities of color.

Reproductive Rights. The same pattern—a SCOTUS ruling followed by litigation and legislative efforts at the state level—has been occurring in the context of abortion access. In the two years since the 2022 *Dobbs* decision—holding that the Constitution does not provide a right to abortion and turning the issue of abortion regulation to the states—fourteen state legislatures have enacted total abortion bans.⁵ Nonprofit groups providing abortion funds, care and access, and hotline services have had to mobilize quickly. The National Abortion Fund notes that their staff are having to create additional infrastructure and spend increased time supporting individual abortion seekers.⁶

Immigrant Rights. Nonprofits working with immigrant communities and on issues such as legalization for undocumented people, asylum and refugee policy, and border enforcement are facing an uphill battle in the current political climate, particularly at the local level. For example, since April 2022, Governor Greg Abbott of Texas has transported over a hundred thousand migrants to New York, Chicago, Denver, Philadelphia, Los Angeles,



and Washington, D.C., spending over \$148 million in the process.⁷ Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida promised jobs, housing and services, and a free trip to Boston to lure newly-arrived migrants onto planes headed for Martha's Vineyard, where they were abandoned.⁸ More recently, in a response to the Biden Administration's policy to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants married to U.S. citizens, 16 states have filed litigation to stop the program.⁹ During the lead-up to the election, dehumanizing narratives about immigrants have increased, leading to bomb threats and harassment targeting the Haitian community in Ohio.¹⁰ In the survey and in interviews, leaders of immigrant rights groups noted that the divisive rhetoric against immigrants causes their groups to be singled out in the media and by elected officials.



"Two years ago, I had to evacuate my home and pull my young children out of school because of a credible death threat. The whole purpose is to silence, marginalize and inactivate us from the political apparatus. Only because of massive investment from my organization do I feel comfortable proceeding in my role, and it is not without risk."



LGBTQIA+ Rights. Many local LGBTQIA+ rights groups are playing the role of frontline responders in the current moment, given the growing number of restrictions on preserving bodily autonomy and providing gender-affirming care. The Human Rights Campaign reports that 39.4% of trans youth, roughly 118,300 people between the ages of 13 to 17, live in one of the 26 states with active bans on gender-affirming care.¹¹ In certain states, these bans go even further. In Arkansas, the state governor issued a policy requiring that a person's gender on their driver's license must match the gender set forth on the person's birth certificate.¹² Like Florida, Arkansas touts a "Don't Say Gay" law that prohibits discussions of LGBTQIA+ life or issues in schools and requires parental notification for violation of the censorship provision.¹³ The relentless efforts to gut LGBTQ+ rights at the local level mean that organizations have to be in a constant state of vigilance.

Public Expressions of Support on Current Issues, such as Palestinian Rights. There is an alarming trend of repression and backlash around engaging in public support for certain issues. In particular, advocating for an end to the genocide in Palestine and U.S. military funding to Israel has led to a range of consequences across sectors. For example, within the three months between October 7 and December 31, 2023, Palestine Legal reported receiving an unprecedented uptick of complaints by people targeted for Palestinian advocacy in numerous arenas, from college students to middle school teachers to law firm associates and entertainers.¹⁴

This climate has permeated the nonprofit sector, where groups speaking out about the genocide in Gaza and Palestinian liberation are facing steep consequences from losing funds to suffering reputational harm to receiving inquiries from congressional committees.¹⁵ One notable and alarming development is a proposed bill which authorizes the Secretary of Treasury to revoke tax-exempt status for any organization deemed to be “terrorist supporting,” with minimal safeguards for appeal—carrying broader and dangerous implications for all tax-exempt organizations.¹⁶

In the current context, **nonprofits serving vulnerable communities are facing tremendous challenges.** Many groups are working at the intersection of multiple issues named above, given the demographics of the communities that they serve and represent. As organizations continue to tackle the most challenging issues in our country, supporting them in this moment could ensure their long-term survival.



METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS

In 2024, BMP conducted a survey, a set of interviews with key informants, and several focus groups to learn how the political climate is impacting the work of nonprofits. We asked them about their experiences related to the six controversial and polarizing issue areas presented below:

- 1 | Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**
- 2 | Education and Racial Equity**
- 3 | Reproductive Rights and Abortion Access**
- 4 | Immigrant Rights**
- 5 | LGBTQIA+ Rights**
- 6 | Public Expressions of Support on Current Issues, such as Expressing Solidarity with Palestinian Rights**

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS SURVEYED AND INTERVIEWED

We received survey responses from 553 small and medium-sized organizations. Twenty-seven percent (27%) have annual budgets of \$1 million or less, 21% between \$1 and \$2 million, and 22% between \$2 and \$5 million. A preponderance of respondents are embedded in local communities. Over a third (37%) work locally, whereas a quarter (24%) work at the national level. A bit more than one-fifth (22%) work statewide and about a tenth (12%) operate regionally.

BMP conducted four focus group conversations with community and organizational leaders to better understand and discuss the threats to racial equity programs, funding, and benefits. Participants in the focus groups represented organizations from Black, Asian American, Latinx, and Indigenous movement spaces, as well as reproductive justice, faith organizing, and electoral organizing spaces. Additionally, BMP conducted ten interviews with leaders of grassroots groups in parts of the United States that are tackling issues such as the dismantlement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policies, anti-immigrant narratives, and attacks on reproductive rights through a combination of strategies including education, base building, community organizing, policy and electoral advocacy, and leadership development.



KEY TRENDS AND PATTERNS

Our analysis reveals that **nonprofits working on controversial issue areas are facing negative consequences for their work**. These consequences include **funding reductions** as well as **reputational damages and threats to organizational safety**. As a result, **many groups are being forced to make or consider program changes**, though many have been able to forestall ending programs by tapping legal assistance or bolstering their security. **Additional funding losses** are widely anticipated, with groups pointing to state and federal legal rulings and expected policy changes as direct and indirect influences.

Nonprofits are Experiencing Negative Consequences for Their Work on Certain Issues

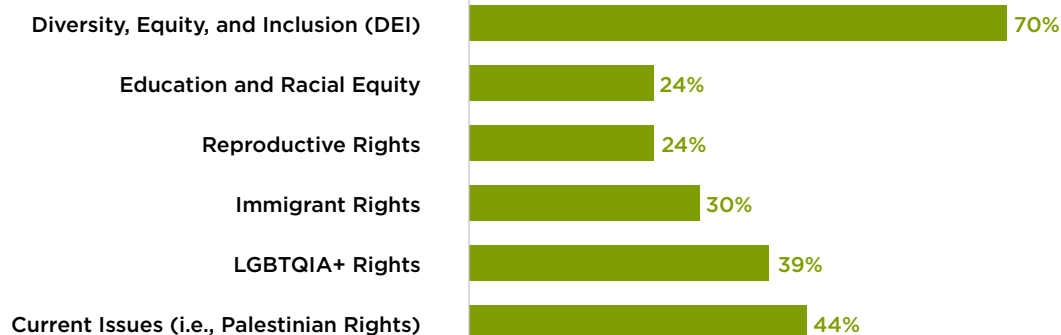
Of the 553 organizations that responded to the survey, 406 of them—almost three quarters (73%)—said they had experienced, or feared experiencing, negative consequences related to their work in one or more of the six issue

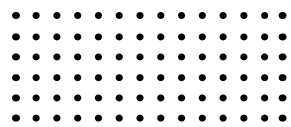
areas. The remaining 27% did not report any negative experiences.

The most common area of concern, by far, was in the DEI context. As *Figure 1* shows, of the 406 groups that experienced or anticipated consequences given their work, 70% attributed it to their DEI efforts. A striking 44% of groups experienced or anticipated consequences for their work on Current Issues, such as Palestinian Rights, followed closely by those working on LGBTQIA+ Rights (39%). About a third attributed consequences to their Immigrant Rights (30%) work, as did about a quarter of groups working on both Reproductive Rights (24%) and Education and Racial Equity (24%).

Most organizations facing or anticipating consequences experienced pushback to their work in more than one issue area—30% indicated consequences connected to two issue areas, and 42% indicated consequences related to three or more of the six issue areas.

FIGURE 1 | PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT EXPERIENCED OR ANTICIPATE EXPERIENCING NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES IN RESPONSE TO THEIR WORK IN POLARIZING ISSUE AREAS, BY ISSUE AREA





“We regularly adjust our work to mitigate the harm of policies coming down at the state level and federal level as well as the changes in policies in neighboring or regional states (including Texas). Generally, these attacks bolster our volunteer programs. However, we have lost volunteers as we’ve committed to LGBTQIA+ inclusive programming. We have had people leave rather than share pronouns. But that does not deter us.”

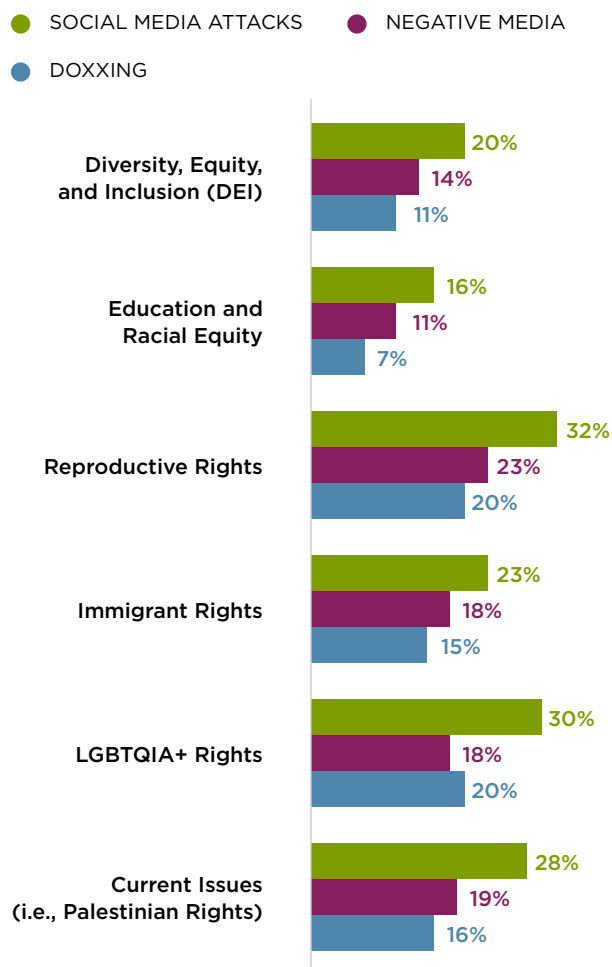
Organizations Face Real and Substantial Consequences for their Controversial Work

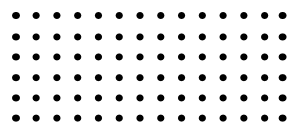
The survey and interviews revealed that respondent organizations had experienced or were anticipating reputational threats, as well as threats to their office or personnel.

Respondents experienced or anticipated three kinds of **reputational threats**: social media attacks, negative media, and doxxing (see *Figure 2*). **Social media attacks** were the most common across every area, experienced or anticipated by one-third of groups working in the areas of Reproductive Rights (32%) and LGBTQIA+ Rights (30%), about a quarter of those working on Immigrant Rights (23%) or speaking out on controversial Current Issues (28%), and one-fifth of organizations doing DEI work (20%).

Negative media attention was experienced or anticipated by between 11% and 23% of groups in each issue area, with the highest rate for groups working on Reproductive Rights. **Doxxing** is a concern for 20% of groups working on Reproductive Rights or LGBTQIA+ Rights, as well as 15% of those working on Immigrant Rights and 16% of those speaking publicly on controversial Current Issues.

FIGURE 2 | PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT EXPERIENCED OR ANTICIPATE REPUTATIONAL CONSEQUENCES, BY ISSUE AREA

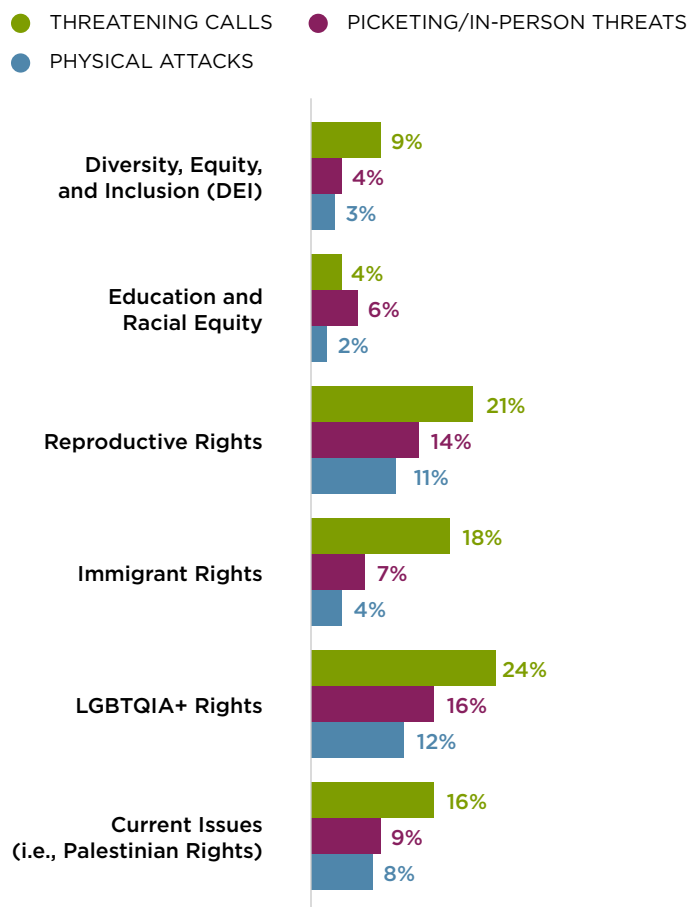




“We live in a deeply red state, a bleeding red state. And that proves difficult—when you have all your elected officials who are running for state office make disparaging remarks about the community that you serve.”

Respondents experienced or anticipated three kinds of **threats to their physical office or personnel**: threatening calls, picketing/in-person threats, and physical attacks (see *Figure 3*). One quarter of groups working in LGBTQIA+ Rights (24%) experienced or anticipated **threatening calls**, as did about one-fifth of those working in Reproductive Rights (21%) and Immigrant Rights (18%). Between 4% and 16% of groups in each issue area experienced or anticipated **picketing or other in-person threats**, while between 2% and 11% experienced or anticipated **physical attacks**. Of special concern are the high rates of physical attacks reported by groups working in Reproductive Rights and LGBTQIA+ Rights, with more than 1 in 10 saying they experienced or anticipate experiencing physical attacks.

FIGURE 3 | PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT EXPERIENCED OR ANTICIPATE THREATS TO THEIR PHYSICAL OFFICE OR PERSONNEL, BY ISSUE AREA



“It all blew up in the news. The governor went on Fox News and threw us under the bus, and then the Attorney General sent us a letter threatening to investigate us. It was all political grandstanding. There was no substance to it at all. But it was super scary and made us feel very vulnerable.”

“When we painted our Pride Flag mural it was vandalized with homophobic and racist graffiti and we received hateful and threatening messages.”



Negative Consequences Commonly Lead to Programmatic Changes

Sizeable percentages of organizations that faced negative consequences for their work in polarizing issue areas are making or considering some kind of program change in response—such as protecting program work by making legal and security interventions, shifting program language, changing program activities, or eliminating programs.

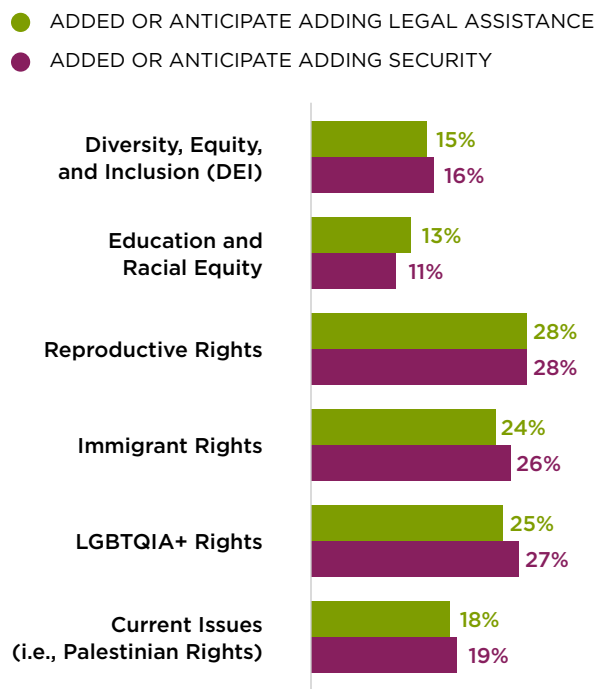
The most common programmatic changes for nonprofits in our sample are **adaptations to bolster the safety and legitimacy of their work** (see *Figure 4*). Legal and security interventions were most prominent among Reproductive Rights (28% adding legal assistance, 28% adding security), LGBTQIA+ Rights (25%, 27%), and Immigrant Rights (24%, 26%) groups, with a quarter or more adding both kinds of protections. Nearly a fifth of groups that experienced or anticipate negative responses to their public support for Current Issues also added legal assistance (18%) or security (19%).

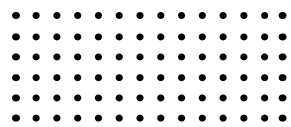
These strategies represent efforts to insulate organizations and their programs from threats, and are consistent with the need for legal infrastructure that has come up in BMP’s interviews and focus groups. Viewed in context of the much smaller percentages of groups that have eliminated programs or are considering doing so (presented below), these data suggest that legal and security interventions to protect organizations and their programming may be effective ways to preserve respondents’ mission-driven work.

Conversations in our focus groups suggested that the relatively high frequency legal and security interventions may be connected to the extent to which organizations have been able to maintain programming while enduring threats.

As one interviewee organization working in the area of LGBTQIA+ Rights shared, “Because of the climate toward LGBTQ persons around the country, we have upped our security measures. We have been victims of hateful vandalism in the past.” A group that spoke out on a controversial Current Issue reported that at first, they received sympathy and concern, and then afterwards received threats on Facebook and had to invest in securing their building.

FIGURE 4 | PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT ADDED LEGAL ASSISTANCE OR SECURITY, OR ANTICIPATE THOSE CHANGES, BY ISSUE AREA





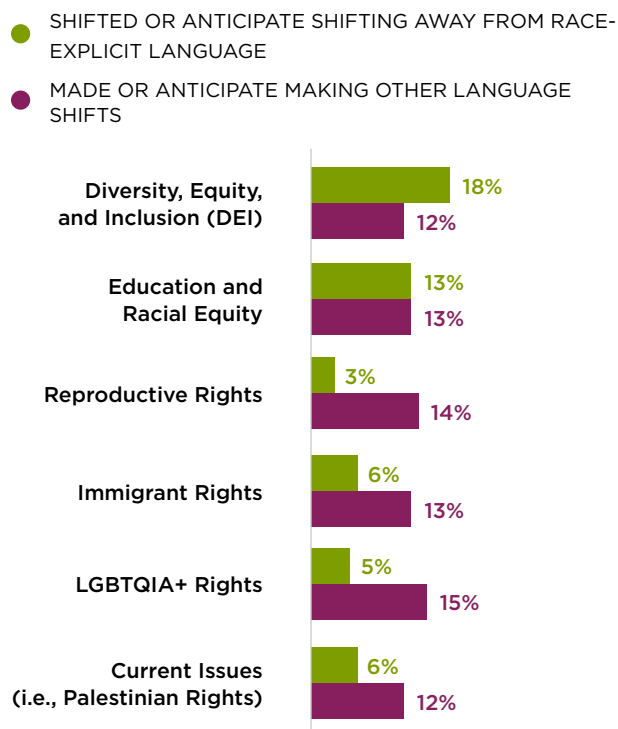
“We are lucky—our organization is supporting our explicit program focus on equity as well as our work to uplift and improve care for and training of BIPOC people. We have not changed our language around this work. But we have strengthened our digital security due to our involvement in supporting people throughout the U.S. involved in abortion care, research, and training.”

Some respondent groups are **shifting away from race-explicit language**. That change was particularly pronounced among organizations working on DEI issues, with 18% of those that faced negative consequences changing or considering changes to their communications around race (see *Figure 5*). Similarly, of groups working in Education and Racial Equity that faced negative consequences for their work, 13% have shifted or anticipate shifting away from race-explicit language. These changes are jarring, in that many groups went from using race-explicit language in 2020 after the uprisings to shifting away from talking about race in 2024 given the attacks on DEI programming.

Besides removing race-related language, 12–15% of organizations across issue areas are **making other kinds of changes to their program language** in an attempt to reduce negative consequences for their controversial work (see *Figure 5*). In interviews and focus groups, organizations shared about efforts to reduce negative attention by changing program language. One reported, “We stopped advertising programming for houseless youth and LGBTQIA+ individuals. We still do the

programming, although we ensure there isn’t public advertising.” Another shared, “We have had to change what we call some of our programs due to a conservative lawmaker using our name on the House floor. We also have changed our program language after the arrival of our Black leader, due to previous attacks on our center’s staff in the media.” And another group explained, “We are a torture treatment center serving refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers. Our state is supportive of only refugees so we regularly and increasingly have to promise we won’t use restricted funds to serve folks that have arrived on other immigration tracks, even if they are here legally.”

FIGURE 5 | PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT SHIFTED OR ANTICIPATE SHIFTING AWAY FROM RACE-EXPLICIT LANGUAGE, OR MAKING OTHER CHANGES TO PROGRAM LANGUAGE, BY ISSUE AREA



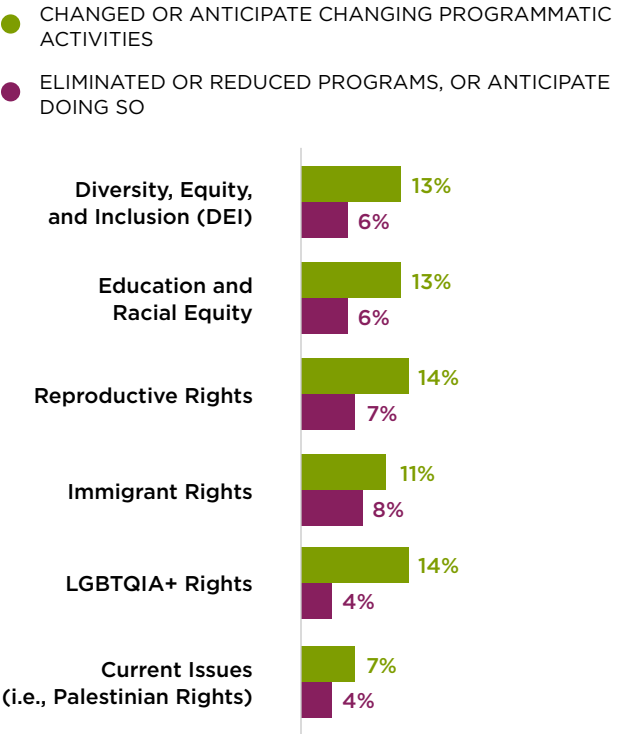
More than 1 in 10 groups in each issue area (with the exception of groups speaking out on Current Issues) have **changed or anticipate changing programs** (see *Figure 6*). Interviewees noted that they are communicating about their work in ways that avoid attention in order to limit their public exposure. Some are making tough choices about the partners that they can align with, or the statements that they will endorse. Groups are adapting and preserving, and need more support to continue their services and community work.



“As an abortion access organization, we are operating in a wholly changed landscape. We have made multiple program changes and additions. State abortion bans have significantly affected the states in which our programs can be active.”

So far, just 4–8% of respondents that experienced or anticipate experiencing negative consequences in each issue area have **reduced or eliminated programs** or anticipate doing so (see *Figure 6*). This commitment to programming, despite negative consequences, is a testament to the resolve of organizations to continue their work. With additional supports—from funding to partnerships—organizations may be able to weather the current moment.

FIGURE 6 | PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT CHANGED, ELIMINATED, OR REDUCED PROGRAMS, OR ANTICIPATE DOING SO, BY ISSUE AREA



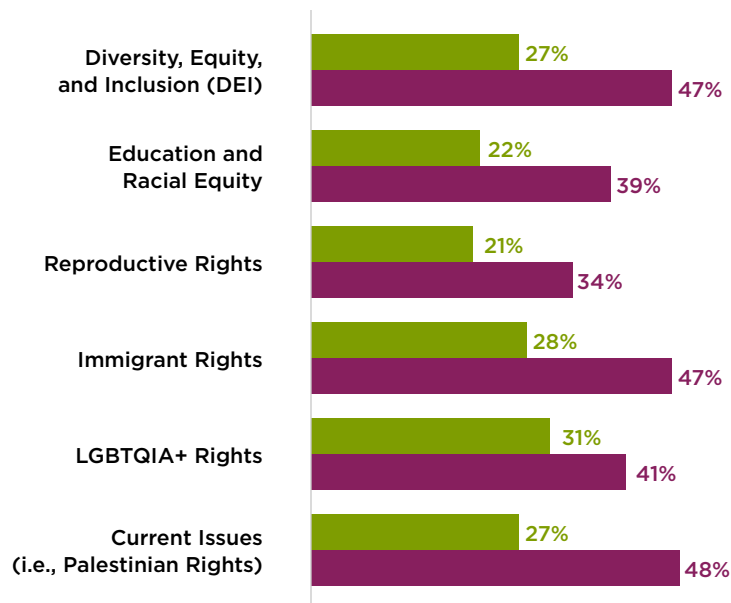
Groups are Experiencing Funding Losses Already, and Anticipating More Losses in the Future

Our analysis reveals that funding losses are commonplace, and that large percentages of groups in each issue area are worried about future funding losses (see *Figure 7*). Between a fifth and a third of respondent groups in each issue area have **already experienced funding losses**. Lost funding was most common for LGBTQIA+ Rights groups (31%), and also experienced by more than a quarter of the groups working on Immigrant Rights (28%), DEI (27%) and those that expressed public support on Current Issues (27%).

Almost half of the organizations addressing Current Issues (48%), DEI (47%), Immigrant Rights (47%), and LGBTQIA+ Rights (41%) **anticipate a loss of funding**. Groups anticipate these reductions due to the impact of the current political climate. As groups plan for the future, they are also preparing for deep cuts in financial support. Anticipated funding losses not only impact the organizations that lose money, but also send a message to other groups about what may happen if they are working with similar populations or on similar issues.

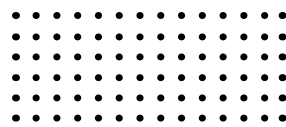
FIGURE 7 | PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT EXPERIENCED OR ANTICIPATE A LOSS OF FUNDING, BY ISSUE AREA

● EXPERIENCED A LOSS OF FUNDING ● ANTICIPATE A LOSS OF FUNDING



“

Community funding has nearly dried up because of our position on the unfolding genocide in Gaza.”



Funding Cuts Are From All Sources, But Especially Individual Donors and Foundations

In terms of the sources of both current and anticipated funding cuts, groups named individual donors, foundation grants, government contracts, and corporate gifts. The most-frequently named sources of cuts were individual donors and foundations, which sets up an alarming trend for the future.

For a closer look, we honed in on two of the issue areas: DEI and public support on Current Issues. *Figure 8* compares the sources of the financial cuts that organizations working in these two areas experienced and anticipate in the future.

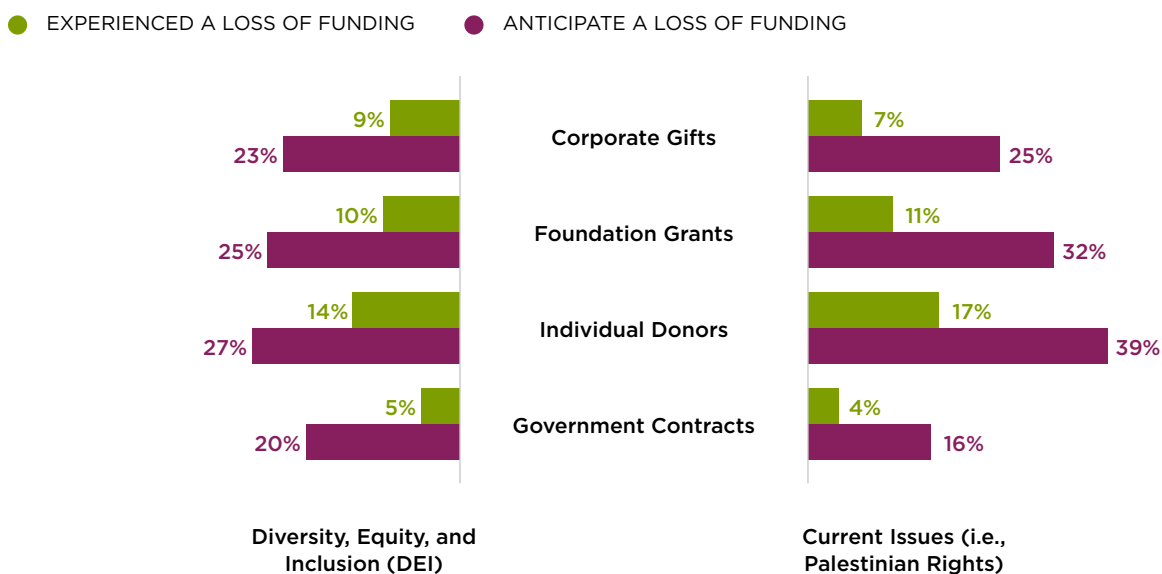
- » **Individual Donors:** 14% of the organizations addressing DEI issues experienced a funding loss from individual donors, while 27% expect cuts from donors in the future. Groups that expressed public support on Current Issues reported even more impact—17% have already lost support from individual donors and 39% anticipate future losses.
- » **Foundation Grants:** Foundations, much like individual donors, are showing a trend of increasing sensitivity toward support for groups working in polarizing issue areas. Ten percent (10%) of organizations focused on DEI lost foundation grant funding, while 25% anticipate less future grant funding. Eleven percent (11%) of organizations expressing public support on Current Issues reported a loss of foundation funding, with 32% anticipating future losses. Corporate gifts show a similar pattern.
- » **Government Contracts:** 5% of organizations addressing DEI reported a loss of government contract dollars, with 20% anticipating a loss in the future. Similarly, 4% of organizations expressing public support on Current Issues reported losing government contracts, while 16% see a potential future loss of this type of income.

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“We’ve faced public and private scrutiny for our support of particular issues—specifically Black Lives Matter and Palestine. The scrutiny has been from individual donors.”



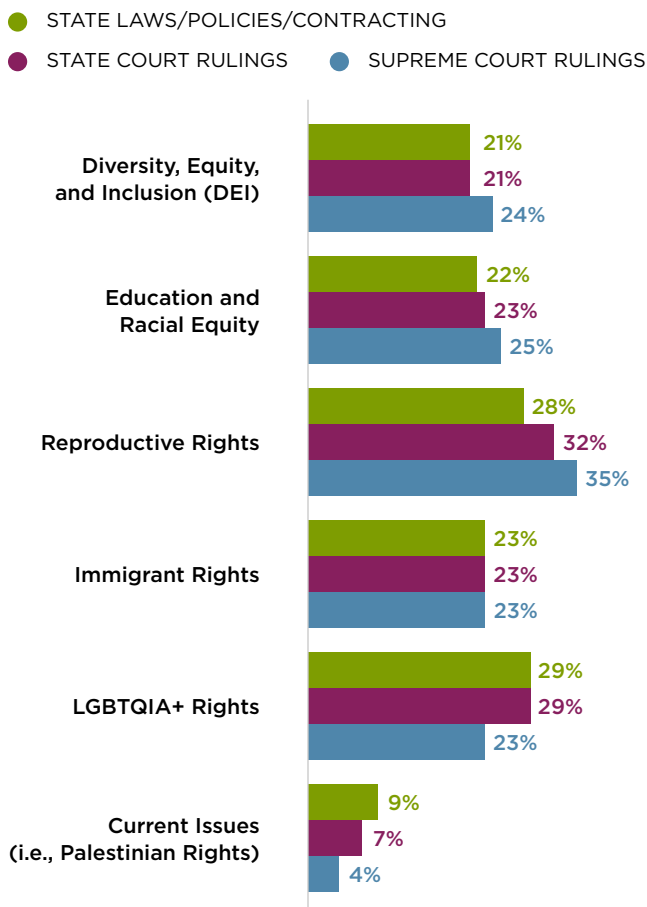
FIGURE 8 | PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS WORKING ON DEI ISSUES OR SPEAKING PUBLICLY ON CURRENT ISSUES THAT EXPERIENCED OR ANTICIPATE LOSSES OF FUNDING, BY FUNDING SOURCE



State and Judicial Decisions Impact Funding Reductions Across the Issue Areas

- To better understand the pressure groups are under, we asked organizational respondents what they believed was the cause of their recent and anticipated funding cuts. Respondents pointed to **the influence of state laws, state court rulings, and Supreme Court rulings** (see Figure 9).
- The data suggests that **groups working on Reproductive Rights are particularly vulnerable to shifts in the legal landscape**. These groups indicated that their funding shows the highest sensitivity to legal and policy changes, with 28% of funding reductions attributed to state laws, 32% to state court rulings, and 35% to Supreme Court rulings.
- For **organizations addressing DEI, legal and policy changes at multiple levels are contributing to funding challenges**. These groups felt that funding reductions are evenly influenced by state laws (21%) and state court rulings (21%), with a slightly higher impact from Supreme Court rulings (24%).
- State-level legal changes are the primary drivers of funding challenges for organizations working on LGBTQIA+ Rights**. The most significant causes of funding reductions for groups working in this issue area are state laws and court rulings (29% each), with slightly less impact from Supreme Court rulings (23%).

FIGURE 9 | PERCENTAGE OF ORGANIZATIONS ATTRIBUTING FUNDING REDUCTIONS TO STATE AND FEDERAL LEGAL RULINGS AND POLICY CHANGES, BY ISSUE AREA



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“As a long-standing nonprofit in Texas that has a social justice advocacy history, we are alarmed by the aggressive stance Texas is taking. We feel at risk of losing funding if our positions are not aligned with the state leadership.”



RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that nonprofit organizations on the frontlines of addressing pressing issues in the spotlight today are enduring negative reputational, in-person, and funding consequences that are challenging to navigate and have impact on programs. Philanthropic institutions must double down on their funding of groups on the frontlines, rather than pulling back at this vital moment, by providing multi-year general operating resources. Funders must frequently and consistently reassure organizations that their existing programs and activities do not need to shift in light of the political climate, and offer their trust and partnership.

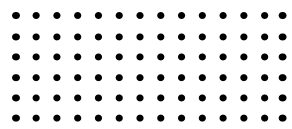
Key interventions are necessary now to support organizations on the frontlines in the following arenas.

STRENGTHENING AND NURTURING ORGANIZATIONS, SKILLS, STAFF

In order for organizations to adequately defend and protect communities, they first need to shore up their own security, operations, and staff capacity in order to:

- Maintain physical and digital safety and security
- Ensure overall organizational health, fiscal compliance, and governance
- Access pro and low bono lawyers, accountants, and public relations professionals
- Access back-end support for organizational infrastructure to keep offices running smoothly and efficiently
- Access financial planning, budgeting, and staff management resources in culturally and linguistically accessible ways
- Consistently recruit, nurture, and maintain highly skilled and trained staff, board and volunteers
- Implement responsive, nimble, and proactive programs and activities
- Sustain base building, direct action, and grassroots organizing
- Ensure well-being of staff, board members, volunteers, and members, with an emphasis on understanding how staff are experiencing actual or anticipated threats to safety and security and accommodating their unique needs
- Preserve institutional and historical knowledge





A Note for Funding Partners:

Many philanthropic institutions including the Proteus Fund, Solidaire, and Urgent Action Fund provide safety and security funds for nonprofits and movement groups. More entities should consider supporting or following these models, while also reassuring their grantee-partners of their commitment to them. Additionally, providing back-end infrastructure to ensure organizational health of grantee-partners can mean that they spend less time vetting and interviewing lawyers, accountants, and public relations professionals. Funding allies should also collaborate with groups on the frontlines who have the capacity to do political education for donors, foundation staff and philanthropic leaders on the impacts of threats to organizing in this time. Finally, funders should consistently resource rapid response funding at the same time that they ensure a decades-long commitment to resourcing infrastructure for groups.

DEFENDING AND PROTECTING OUR COMMUNITIES

As community needs multiply in the current polarized climate, organizations need support to engage in:

- Community Defense and Safety Planning
- Legal defense infrastructure, including referral hotlines, Know Your Rights trainings, information, pro bono support, and coordinating entity
- Resource pro and low bono legal response network trained in movement lawyering

- A centralized online hub to share resources and information safely, quickly, in language and via trusted community sources
- Create community care and healing plans for how to respond in times of crisis

SHAPING PUBLIC POLICY AND NARRATIVES

Nonprofit groups on the frontlines are often pushing back on narratives and policies that threaten the rights of people in their communities. They need infrastructure to engage in nimble and strategic communications, federal and local advocacy, documentation, research and storytelling, and grassroots base building. Such infrastructure often includes skilled staff, technological capacity, and community engagement strategies in order to:

- Counteract disinformation and dehumanization
- Shape policies that center affected communities
- Produce data and research on issues
- Influence media narratives
- Build infrastructure to engage at the federal and state/local levels

BUTTRESSING OUR ECOSYSTEM

Organizations cannot do the hard work of addressing pressing issues in today's climate without a strong ecosystem of support and solidarity. They need support to build their capacity to:

- Be part of coalitions and networks with similar values and goals. *Funders need*



to support this ecosystem development as an explicit and consistent priority.

- Build solidarity strategies and partnerships to ensure that vulnerable groups are not doing work in isolation
- Share their experiences publicly without fear of reprisal
- Coordinate and convene as needed
- Issue joint statements about cross-cutting issues
- Support movement infrastructure that can expand the ability of organizations to engage in mobilization and direct action, base-building, community defense, leadership development, and robust rapid response





ENDNOTES

1 [Students for Fair Admissions v. University of North Carolina](#) (U.S. Supreme Court, June 29, 2023).

2 [Map: See which states have introduced or passed anti-DEI bills](#) (Char Adams and Nigel Chiwaya, *NBC News*, March 2, 2024).

3 [UT System shuts down 21 DEI offices and cuts hundreds of positions to comply with law](#) (Jala Washington, *KXAN NBC News*, May 14, 2024).

4 [AAFER v. Fearless Fund](#) (11th Circuit Court of Appeals, June 3, 2024). The parties settled the litigation in September 2024; [Backlash to affirmative action hits pioneering maternal health program for Black women](#) (Ronnie Cohen, *The 19th*, November 21, 2023).

5 [State Abortion Bans Threaten Nearly 7 Million Black Women](#) (*In Our Own Voice: The National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda*, May 15, 2024).

6 [Reproductive Health Equity: Evolving Funding Needs Post-Dobbs](#) (Lauren Brathwaite, Kyoko Uchida, *Philanthropy News Digest*, October 31, 2023).

7 [Texas has spent more than \\$148 million busing migrants to other parts of the country](#) (Sergio Martínez-Beltrán, *The Texas Tribune*, February 21, 2024).

8 [Long the subject of rhetoric, migrants have now become props in political theater](#) (James Barragán, *The Texas Tribune*, September 22, 2022).

9 [Texas, other GOP-led states sue over program to give immigrant spouses of US citizens legal status](#) (Gisela Salomon and Valerie Gonzalez, Associated Press, August 23, 2024).

10 [Bomb threats followed Trump's false claims about Springfield. Some Haitians may leave](#) (Obed Manuel, *National Public Radio*, September 19, 2024).

11 [Map: Attacks on Gender Affirming Care by State](#) (Human Rights Campaign, August 2024).

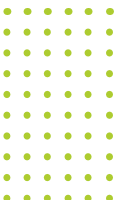
12 [Arkansas ACLU files suit against the state's change to driver's license gender rule](#) (Alex Kienlen, *Kark NBC News*, April 30, 2024).

13 [LGBTQ+ Curricular Laws](#) (Movement Advancement Project, August 2024).

14 [New Report Analyzes the Crackdown on Palestine Solidarity in the U.S.](#) (Palestine Legal, May 24, 2024).

15 [Nonprofits are taking a stance on Gaza - and Paying the Price](#) (Sara Herschander, *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, June 18, 2024).

16 [Social Justice Nonprofits Facing Multiple Threats Need Solidarity and Support](#) (Deepa Iyer, Building Movement Project, May 22, 2024).





Building Movement Project

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