The Black Queer Equity Index

2021 WHITE PAPER

Contents

Executive Summary

THOUGH THE MOVEMENT FOR LGBTQ+ liberation has made gains in civil rights, institutional power, and access to wealth over the last 50 years, those wins have disproportionately benefited white LGBTQ+ communities, leaving Black LGBTQ+ communities to face police brutality, economic disenfranchisement, and disparate HIV rates.

To support antiracism in Chicagoland's LGBTQ+ community, Lighthouse Foundation of Chicagoland created the Black Queer Equity Index (BQEI) in 2021.

The BQEI evaluates the organizational cultures of five of the area's largest LGBTQ+ nonprofits: AIDS Foundation Chicago, Center on Halsted, Chicago House, Equality Illinois, and Howard Brown Health. All of these organizations provide care and/or advocacy to those living with HIV. Because HIV disparately impacts Black LGBTQ+ people, Lighthouse Foundation believes it is key to our community's wellness and upward social mobility to engage these five nonprofits.

Using statistical analysis of the organizations' human resource data, surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups, we found that Black Queer employees and board members at these organizations commonly shared experiences of marginality, ambivalent experiences of optical diversity, and an overall lack of the "Real Work" of antiracism.

In response to the data analysis, Lighthouse Foundation's BQEI staff and Advisory Council developed the following categories for equity indicators for the organizations to implement and strengthen for Black Queer employees and board members:

- **Resource Allocation**

- **Giving Voice and Power**

- **Professional Development**

- **Systemic Action**

- **Data Collection**

In 2022, Lighthouse Foundation will invite additional organizations to join the second cohort of the BQEI project.

In 2023, we will evaluate both cohorts on the equity indicators. In subsequent years, we will continue to survey these organizations annually along with an additional cohort of new organizations. Once organizations agree, we will begin to collect data on each organization through our updated mixed-method surveys and new methods and opportunities for community input.

Each new organization will have a year to implement the racial equity indicators and in the second year of their BQEI participation will receive a letter grade that reflects their continued effort to improve Black Queer equity in their organization.

While we have launched this project locally, we aim to expand the BQEI to assess organizations across Chicagoland, Illinois, and the nation.

Problem Statement

THE IMPACT OF RACIAL INEQUITIES and structural violence in the LGBTQ+ community and beyond has led to significant health disparities. Just as it is long past time for racial reckoning in U.S. society as a whole, it is time for one in the LGBTQ+ community.

According to The Trevor Project's National Survey on LGBTQ+ Youth Mental Health 2020,

44% of Black LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered suicide in the past 12 months, including 59% of Black Transgender and nonbinary youth (compared to 39% of all LGBTQ+ youth).

According to a 2019 Williams Institute report, *LGBTQ+ Poverty in the United States,*

Black LGBTQ+ people are 245% more likely to live in poverty than their white LGBTQ+ counterparts. (Badget, Choi, Wilson, 2019)

The Chicago Department of Public Health contends that

"Although just over 30% of Chicago's population, Black Chicagoans represent 56% of people newly diagnosed with HIV and 57% of people diagnosed with AIDS." (AIDS Foundation Chicago, 2020)

In dreaming about what Black Queer liberation looks like, our team recognizes that a root cause of Black Queer marginalization is the lack of sustainable employment and leadership opportunities in our communities. This dearth of opportunity for upward social mobility contributes to the adverse social, economic, and health outcomes Black Queer people face.

Such is clearly laid out in the 2019 Morton Group's Chicago LGBTQ Community Needs Assessment and the Chicago Black Gay Men's Caucus' 2020 Prosperity Project (Morten Group). Black Queer people, especially on the South and West Sides of our city, need more leadership and employment opportunities within the institutions that serve our community.

We want to better support Black Queer staff and board members because we believe that their empowerment will aid their institutions in more competently serving Black Queer clients.

Just as it is long past time for racial reckoning in U.S. society as a whole, it is time for one in the LGBTQ+ community.

Background

Compounded Marginality → A Unique View → Trickle-Up Social Justice = The BQEI

Figure 1: Top-down, left-to-right — Kimberlee Crenshaw, coined the term "intersectionality;" Gloria Anzaldua, author of Borderlands/La Frontera; Patricia Hill Collins, author of Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment; bell hooks, feminist scholar and activist; Dean Spade, Trans legal scholar

SCHOLARS LIKE PATRICIA HILL
Collins (1990), Patricia Zavella (1991), and Marilyn Frye (1992) have long highlighted the role compounded marginality plays in the lives of people who hold multiple historically marginalized identities.Writing about experiences of women of color, Kimberlee Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" to describe the complex experiences of Black women.

Social scientists have noted that much of the research on the experiences of Queer people in the workplace does not disaggregate its data based on race. The few studies that have sought to document the experiences of Queer people of color in the workplace found that the intersection of race and sexual orientation creates elevated risks of discrimination beyond the already elevated levels of discrimination experienced by white LGBTQ+ people.

Though their compounded marginality does not often bode well for the experiences of Queer people of color in the workplace, critical scholars have repeatedly rejected the notion of the margins as a place of just desolation and despair.

In her 1990 book, *Yearnings: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, bell hooks argues that choosing a life on the margins as opposed to integration into white hegemony offers opportunities for power and resistance.

In her 1990 book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins similarly argues that the distinctive angle life on the margins provides Black women can be used as a strength.

Gloria Anzaldua also found a similar theme in her 1987 semi-autobiographical work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in which she details her fluidity and flexibility in navigating the different worlds with her intersecting marginalized identities. Anzaldua finds that the *new mestiza* offers unique opportunities to anticipate cultural expectations and resists them at will as a result of having to exist among and understand different worlds. Scholars often use the theoretical lens of intersectionality to argue for centering the voices and experiences of the most marginalized in all aspects of social life.

One of the most recent scholars to champion centering the voices and experiences of the most marginalized in theory and practice creation is critical Trans legal scholar Dean Spade. In his 2011 book, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, Spade argues for "trickle-up social justice" in which the most marginalized group is centered in the crafting of political and social objectives. Solutions that work for the most marginalized people in society will also work for the most privileged.

Spade contends:

"

We have seen again and again that when those who are the least vulnerable of the targeted constituency are prioritized, the declared victories do not trickle down. Winning policy reform that allows a gay person with a high-level corporate job to share their health insurance plan and pass their inheritance to their partner does absolutely nothing to address the experience of trans women being denied adequate food and medicine as they face daily sexual violence in immigration and criminal punishment prisons.
In fact, slight alterations to include and recognize the least impacted of the impacted tend to legitimize and shore up existing conditions – a stamp of 'equality' is placed on harmful systems, even as those systems continue their murderous work. **On the other hand, if we solved the problems facing people who are experiencing the worst manifestations of violence, it would inevitably solve the problems of those at the top.**

"

Research on the experiences of Queer people in the workplace often overlooks the compounding influence of race (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2018; Catalyst, 2021; Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2008; Rhodes, 2021; Movement Advancement Project, Center for American Progress, Human Rights Campaign, Freedom to Work, & National Black Justice Coalition, 2013).

The vast majority of existing research on the experience(s) of Queer employees does not disaggregate by an employee's work industry, most existing research on Black Queer experiences in public health, healthcare, or health access emphasizes equity for patients who enter health spaces and not the employees who work within them.

Furthermore, studies that focus on Black Queer employment highlight structural forces that act as barriers to employment. Research on the experiences of actual Black Queer employees does exist, but these studies typically homogenize the LGBTQ+ umbrella and do not disaggregate by racial groups or where specific Queer identities (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2008; Rhodes, 2021).

The few studies that have sought to document the experiences of Queer people of color in the workplace find that the intersections of race and sexual orientation elevate risks of discrimination beyond the already elevated levels experienced by white LGBTQ+ people (Whitfield et al., 2014).

The BQEI is in a unique position to add further nuance to existing knowledge on the experiences of Black LGBTQ+ workers. While current literature explores some experiences of Queer workers, research has not sufficiently explored the specific experiences of Black Queer employees in nonprofit spaces.

The BQEI will address the issues mentioned above by relaying the experiences of Black Queer stakeholders in the Chicago LGBTQ+ nonprofit sector. The primary goals of this project are to identify institutional barriers to Black Queer people's professional success and to implement recommendations for achieving racial equity. By centering

the experiences of some of the most marginalized, we are helping ensure these workplace equity recommendations will trickle up, as Spade described, from our community to all others.
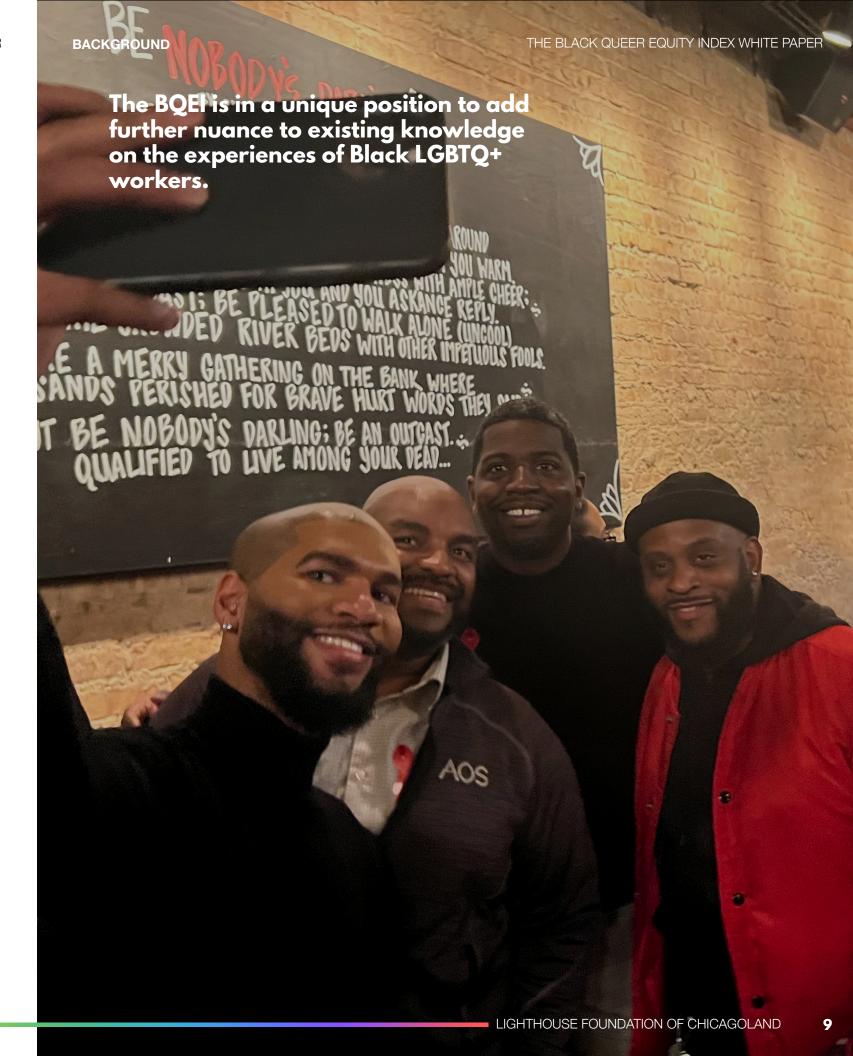
Additionally, we seek to address the barriers that prevent Black LGBTQ+ people who work and serve on executive boards from exercising the community expertise for which they were selected.

Our strategy to attain these two goals is engagement on three levels:

- **With the CEOs of the institutions**
- **With Black Queer employees and board members**
- **With Black LGBTQ+ community members at large**

One way Black LGBTQ+ people can claim power is by society creating inclusive workspaces in which they can lead and thrive.

By providing more opportunities for employment and retention of Black Queer leaders in Chicago, we create a system that will ultimately benefit all leaders.

The BQEI is in a unique position to add further nuance to existing knowledge on the experiences of Black LGBTQ+ workers.

Evaluation and Methods

1 Build the Cohort
AIDS Foundation Chicago.Center on Halsted, Chicago House, Howard Brown Health, and Equality Illinois

2 Create the Surveys
Demographic and Qualitative Data

3 Convene the Equity Taskforce
Data Interpretation

4 Share Racial Equity Indicators
BQEI Update and Report

Figure 2: The four phases of the BQEI.

THE BQEI WILL PROVIDE recommendations to the participating organizations on how they can integrate antiracist practices and diverse hiring initiatives to build an organizational structure where Black Queer employees thrive.

We aim to grow this project to survey organizations across Chicagoland and beyond to create a comprehensive dashboard that provides a clear picture of how many Black Queer people are served by and work for LGBTQ+ serving nonprofits.

This project will also build data-driven practices that agencies across the nonprofit sector can look to for information on how better to serve their Black Queer employees and board members.

SURVEYS

OUR ORIGINAL INTENTION WAS TO create one demographic survey to be administered to each organization's human resources department and one open-ended survey for Black Queer employees and board members on their experiences in the organization. However, we concluded that to gather the most comprehensive data possible we needed to create four surveys that address the nuance of data collection and board member experience:

- One demographic survey to be administered to each organization's **HR departments**. All five organizations completed the survey.

- One employee self-identification survey for **organizations that do not keep demographic** data. Seventy employees across the two organizations that did not previously possess this data provided responses.

- One open-ended survey for **Black Queer employees**, completed by 43 Black Queer employees from across the four organizations that participated in the qualitative portion of the BQEI.

- One open-ended survey for **Black Queer board members**, which was completed by 11 Black Queer board members from across the four organizations that participated in the qualitative portion of the BQEI.

The Black Queer Equity Index occurred in four phases. In Phase #1, we invited five organizations to form the first BQEI Cohort:

- AIDS Foundation Chicago
- Center on Halsted
- Chicago House
- Equality Illinois
- Howard Brown Health

These five organizations are the most influential and well-funded LGBTQ+ serving institutions in Chicago. Together, they control a combined $186 million in funding, translating to more than one thousand jobs and tens of thousands served. Because of their dominance in Chicagoland, they also are charged with serving large swaths of the Black Queer community.

Additionally, all of these organizations provide care and/or advocacy to those living with HIV. Because HIV disparately impacts Black LGBTQ+ people, Lighthouse Foundation believes it is key to our community's wellness and upward social mobility to engage these five nonprofits.

We met with CEOs from all five surveyed organizations to determine which demographic data each organization collected. CEOs also shared their preferred method for survey administration and their strategies for communicating with employees and board members. Equality Illinois chose not to move forward in the process after supplying demographic information.

	Age			Race			Gender Identity			Sexual Orientation		
	Employees	Clients	Board	Employees	Clients	Board	Employees	Clients	Board	Employees	Clients	Board
AIDS Foundation Chicago	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No*	Yes	No	No*	Yes
Center on Halsted	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Chicago House	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No*	Yes	Yes
Equality Illinois	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes
Howard Brown Health	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

Figure 3: Assessing Employee, Client, and Board Member Demographics Kept By Participating Organizations. *These organizations keep some of this data. For the clarity of this project, we have chosen to mark any data segments that are incomplete as "No."

Figure 3 details the forms of demographic information each organization collects based on our conversations with the CEOs.

As indicated in *Figure 3*, Center on Halsted and Equality Illinois both have pre-existing methods to gather demographic data in the onboarding process.

We found that data was incomplete for Chicago House and AIDS Foundation Chicago, which do not have data on employees' gender identities and sexual orientations. This information solidified our prediction that we will need to create a supplemental employee self-identification survey.

Quantitative

We wanted to assess the interactions of Black Queer employees and board members with the organizations. The demographic survey administered to human resources departments collected data on the age, race, gender identities, and sexual orientations of clients, employees, board members, and senior staff.

As we assessed possible project risks and issues, we realized that we needed to gather information from the participating organizations to determine what kinds of

demographic data they keep.

Rather than ask about an employee's sexual orientation directly, some employers instead provide opportunities for employees to disclose that information willingly. Thus, we created a self-identification survey to gain demographic information for organizations that did not have ways to gather it.

Qualititative

Figure 4: The framed research priorities of the qualitative survey.

Based on research of major issues that impact Black Queer people in the workplace along with feedback from our Advisory Council, we developed the following research priorities for the qualitative survey that was administered to Black Queer employees and board members:

- **Microaggressions**
- **Antiracism training**
- **Tokenism of board members**
- **Fair pay**
- **Upward mobility for employees**
- **Internal and external communications**

For survey design, we kept the surveys short, with no more than 15 questions, to encourage participation. Additionally, we used a mixture of question types, including multiple-choice questions, Likert scale items which ask respondents to rate a statement from Strongly Agree – Strongly Disagree, Guttman scale questions which allow for multiple selections to measure the severity of an issue, and open-ended response questions. The mixture of question types enables us to use various types of data analysis to assess responses.

One of the other major elements of the qualitative survey was incorporating privacy measures. We wanted to ensure data integrity and put measures in place so that the survey is password-protected, only available through a specific link, and is only available to Black Queer people. However, due to the incomplete data collection from the participating organizations, narrowing down a list of Black Queer employees from each agency would be challenging.

Although we provided all employees and board members with the survey link, we created a solution requiring participants to answer two questions to access the survey. The first question is "Do you identify as Black?" and the next is "Do you identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community?" Respondents had to answer "Yes" to both questions to move forward with the survey. The method was imperfect, as non-Black Queer people could still access the survey, but we see this as the simplest way to provide a gatekeeping measure to narrow respondents to people who identify as Black and Queer.

We worked with the participating organizations to promote this project to their employees so that Black Queer respondents know that their responses are confidential, participation is voluntary, and we hold their privacy in the highest regard.

THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION ADOPTED the methodology of community-led participatory action research, which prioritizes community feedback. In Phase #2 of the BQEI, Lighthouse Foundation convened a 10-member Advisory Council comprised of majority Black Queer leaders in activism, antiracism, social justice, public health, and public policy and Black Queer representatives of each of the five BQEI Cohort organizations. We included an employee or board member from each of the surveyed organizations.

Additionally, we focused on building a diverse council in terms of gender identities and sexual orientation. Three trans women, including two Black trans women, brought invaluable perspectives on the needs of trans people in LGBTQ+ serving organizations.

The Advisory Council met twice for 90 minutes each to create the qualitative board survey and the qualitative employee survey used to gather data on the experiences of Black Queer employees and board members. During these meetings, council members were shown drafts of each survey and asked about specific feedback targets, including:

- **Are there any questions that need to be rephrased?**

- **What should we be asking that we're not asking?**

- **Are there questions specific to board members that we should be asking?**

- **Are we presenting these questions in the best format?**

- **Are there any additional research priorities that we should look into?**

- **Is there anything else we could add that would help employees feel comfortable taking the survey?**

After the surveys were co-created and approved by the Advisory Council, representatives from the Northwestern Evaluation, Data Integration and Technical Assistance (EDIT) Program reviewed the surveys to ensure the clarity of questions and alignment with appropriate research methods.

Advisory Council Members

Tracy Baim
Chicago Reader

Angela E. L. Barnes
Center on Halsted

Zahara Bassett
Chicago House

Consuella Brown
Brown Consulting

Derrick C. Dawson
C-ROAR

Coleman Goode
AIDS Foundation Chicago

Serette B. King
Howard Brown Health

Reyna Ortiz
Taskforce Prevention & Community Services

Morgan Sherm
Another Element Podcast

Joshua Travis
Chicago Black Gay Men's Caucus

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

TO ENSURE CONSISTENCY ACROSS all organizations, we sent to each organization's CEO a survey administration plan that included the timeline for survey responses and sample emails that each CEO would send to their staff and board members to remind them to fill out the survey. We created this plan for two main reasons. First, having a pre-written email to administer the survey reduces the burden on CEOs because all they have to do is copy and paste the email.

Second, we wanted to control the narrative so that the CEO's wording comes directly from us. We recognize that we are holding these CEOs accountable through the BQEI. Our administration process ensures that any possible anxiety from the CEOs is not relayed to the Black Queer employees and board members who will take the survey.

We also focused on engagement efforts to ensure our project reached Black Queer employees and Board members. Additionally, we assessed what Black Queer employees and board members were hearing about the BQEI in their meetings and workplaces so that we could tailor our messaging to help people feel safe and clarify any questions. We also provided email templates and documentation for the Cohort organizations to aid in their distribution and explanation of the surveys.

To help ease the anxiety of Black Queer employees or board members who may be hesitant to take the survey for fear of retaliation, we planned an event in early June inviting Black Queer employees and board members from each organization to get to know us in a relaxed environment. At this event, we provided a safe space for participants to meet Lighthouse Foundation and ask any questions about the BQEI.

Finally, we attended various events at surveyed organizations to increase awareness and build trust, like an all-staff meeting, an employee affinity group, and an all-staff retreat.

INTERVIEWS

IN LATE SUMMER 2021, LIGHTHOUSE Foundation contacted all Black Queer employees and board members who had expressed in the surveys that they would like to be interviewed.

In September 2021, the BQEI Analyst and Coordinator conducted six interviews: two with Black Queer board members and four with Black Queer employees. The interviews lasted one hour each on average. The transcripts of the interviews and open-ended responses from the surveys were inductively coded through an open coding process that resulted in 170 codes.

Through focused coding and comparing codes to one another, the original codes were distilled into 16 codes across four themes, with a fifth theme coming from the feedback of participants and researchers. The themes and codes are discussed in the next section.

THE TASKFORCE

IN SEPTEMBER 2021 WE BEGAN Phase #3, the launch of the Black Queer Equity Taskforce, to continue to have this work guided by key stakeholders required in community-led participatory action research. The Taskforce included leaders in philanthropy, Black equity, social justice, and social services. They were presented with the survey results and major themes resulting from six interviews with Black Queer board members and employees. The Taskforce met five times for two hours each. During these meetings, council members were shown findings from the surveys and major themes of the interviews. The Taskforce then reviewed each theme and created equity indicators based on their collective community expertise.

Adrienne Irmer
Illinois Institute of Technology

Jerome Montgomery
Project VIDA

Keith Green
Loyola University

Lora Branch
Gilead Pharmaceuticals

Óscar Iván Zambrano
Advocate Aurora Health and Medical Organization for Latino Advancement

Rachelle Ellis
YWCA Evanston/North Shore

Zahara Bassett
Life is Work

LISTENING SESSIONS

LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION HELD Listening Sessions with Black Queer employees, Black Queer board members, the CEOs of the four participating organizations, and Executive Directors from Black Queer led and serving nonprofit organizations, Chicago Black Gay Men's Caucus, and Project VIDA in Chicagoland to present them with the resulting themes and preliminary indicators.
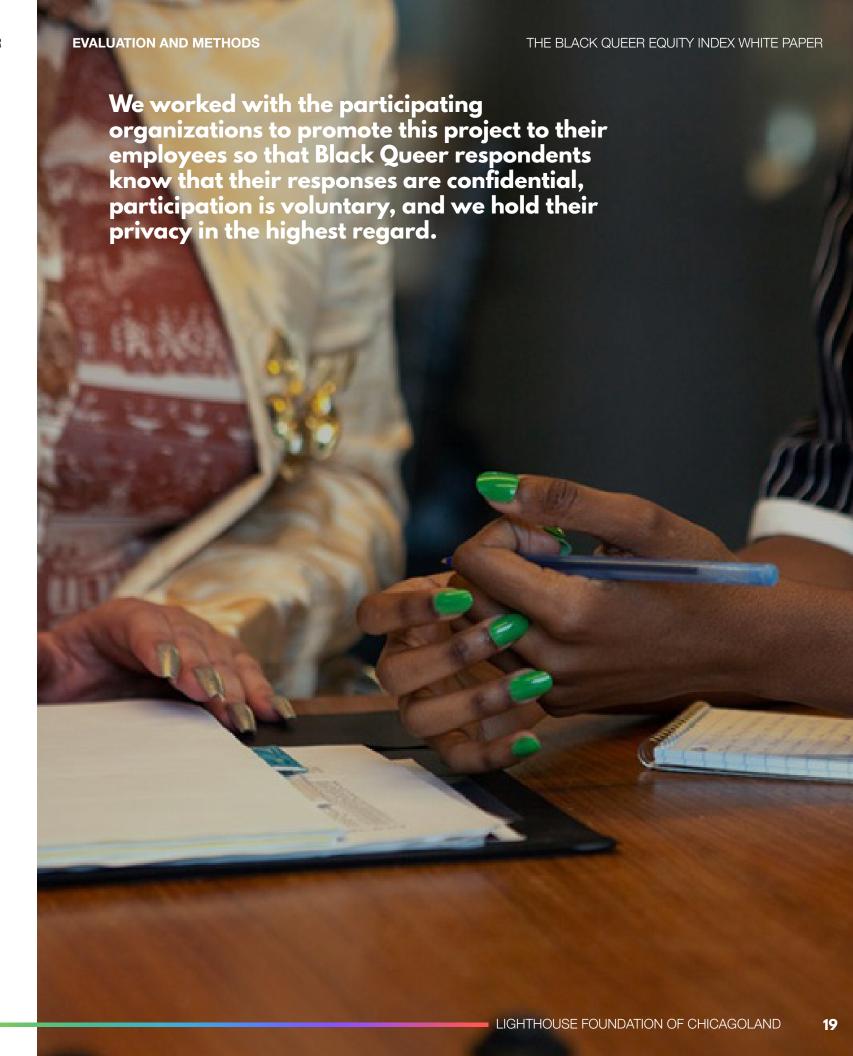
In each of these Listening Sessions,

participants weighed in on the emergent findings. Lighthouse Foundation brought this feedback to the Taskforce to inform the preliminary indicators.

The Taskforce took the survey and interview findings, their preliminary indicators, and the feedback on the preliminary indicators from the Listening Sessions and distilled them into the Five Emerging Indicators of Racial Equity.

We worked with the participating organizations to promote this project to their employees so that Black Queer respondents know that their responses are confidential, participation is voluntary, and we hold their privacy in the highest regard.

Study participants shared the need to create policies and culture that systematizes positive experiences for Black Queer people.
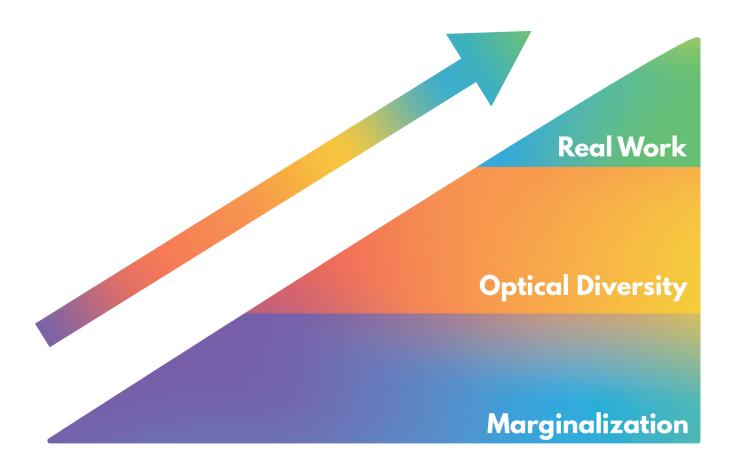
Results

Figure 5: The three themes that emerged from qualitative analysis

DATA FROM THE INTERVIEWS AND free response answers from the surveys resulted in five major themes that were further distilled into three main elements of the progression from marginalization to equity emergent from the experiences of Black, Queer employees and board members. The three main elements of the continuum are:

• **Marginalization**

• **Optical Diversity**

• **Real Work**

Marginalization is used here as a state of being and actions such as microaggressions that Black Queer employees and board members experience.

Everyone who completed the study reported either experiencing marginalizing acts or feeling marginalized at some point in their work lives, and these Black Queer employees passionately want to see this shift from marginalization through what we term optical diversity to the real work of creating equity for Black Queer people in these organizations.

MARGINALIZATION

"

I only worked around black people, so to come to a place where I am one of the only black people [...], it's just weird. It's different. Like, they don't speak to you in the hallway, things like this. **So now, I am super aware of these things happening in the workplace because they haven't happened to me in over a decade. Over a decade.**

"

BQEI Participant

MARGINALIZATION REALLY REFLECTS that Black Queer folks often feel on the fringes of the organization, unheard and trotted out only when a grant requires it.

Interestingly, this marginality is juxtaposed with both board members and Black Queer employees feeling very invested in the work they do and the organizations in which they serve. They have deep community ties that led to them either serving on the board or working in their roles. Many of the participants had personal connections to the services that the organizations they work for provide. At one point, they were clients or interacted with the organization well before they ever went to work or serve there. They are very passionate, both about the work they do on a day-to-day basis and about what these organizations can be and what they have been for Black Queer people in Chicagoland. Participants also shared that the work that they do either on the boards or in these organizations aligns with their

passions and their values.

Black Queer employees and board members experience marginalization in several ways. Sometimes they experience physical marginalization — their services are located in disparate wings of the building or outside of the main office, which leads to them not connecting with other employees. It can also be isolation — not getting a chance to work with or even meet other Queer people of color at their workplaces.Other times, it's political isolation. A lot of the Black Queer employees are front-facing in their organizations. They're either serving clients or other external populations of the organization like volunteers.

They feel that because they're on the front lines, they often are not heard in the boardroom. Yet, they think they know best what clients and other key constituents need because of their proximity.

Navigating Whiteness

Another critical aspect of this marginalization emerges when Black Queer employees and board members have to navigate whiteness, or the white politics of the organization. Often, they find themselves having to "manage up," telling their supervisors not only what they need but sometimes correcting their supervisor's behaviors. Board members felt the same way.

Participants shared that there is not always a systemic way to address bad behaviors (such as microaggressions and incivility) in the organization. They described an initial seduction in which other board members

used camaraderie to try to win them over, but attempted to derail their ability to create change after finding out that they intended to speak up for the most marginalized—and that this destructive behavior had no meaningful correction.

Black, Queer employees also shared that their interactions with each other exist under the sometimes harsh gaze of their white colleagues. As one Black, Queer employee shared, "We'll see each other in the hallways, and we'll say, 'Hey girl, nice hair. I love your shoes,' but we really couldn't congregate too much because we'd realize, and we'd see the expressions of some of our white employees."

Participants expressed feeling policed by their white peers, a reality that impacts Black Queer employees' ability to build community, thus leading to further marginalization. 87% of

survey respondents shared they experienced microaggressions in the workplace, including tone policing or comments on hair, clothing, and voice.

An additional interesting nuance of Black, Queer people navigating whiteness is proximity to whiteness, where Black Queer employees with the trappings of privilege — such as degrees or a high salary — were accepted more in these predominately white spaces and often experienced fewer acts of marginalization.

As one employee shared, "I'm a big, Black woman, trans woman, from the South Side, and that comes out, and that makes people uncomfortable." She and other participants shared that because they didn't fit into the parameters of whiteness or privilege, they were sidelined, treated as a threat, or further isolated and marginalized.

OPTICAL DIVERSITY

"

The thing about inclusion, you got me here, but you're not including me in the spaces that will effectively help the organization, that will help the better flow of the operation because you feel I may not need to be in that space. **They love to see our Black faces on the posters. They love to see them on the internet. They love to see them when people are giving, but when you walk in the front door, they don't want you to see them.** And so every time we try to point these things out, and how we could elevate them, train them, it's always a polite no.

BQEI Participant

"

I mean, it's not out of the norm to be [a Black, Queer, employee] here, but to be heard and to be [a Black, Queer employee] is not always connected. So I think sometimes diversity is optical. When it comes to equity — in regards to ensuring that those [Black, Queer employee] voices are heard, that their ideas have been implemented and included in policy — **I guess I don't always feel like it's equity when it comes to our voice, but I think it's optical. A lot of optical diversity,** but when it comes to equity and the things that have weight, like pay and stuff like that, it's not always the same.

"

BQEI Participant

OPTICAL DIVERSITY REFERS TO THE visible presence of Black, Queer bodies in the organization. In the data, it shows up in two main ways.

On the one hand, it represents the belief of Black Queer employees and board members that these organizations trot out Black and Brown Queer bodies for advertising and grant applications without truly investing in their equity and thriving (both in employees and in clients).

On the other hand, the theme of Optical Diversity also represents the need Black Queer employees and board members voiced for organizations to continue focusing heavily on increasing the number of Black Queer

bodies in leadership, C-suites, and boards. Survey respondents particularly stressed the need for increased Black trans representation in these spaces. Thus, Optical Diversity in the form of representation is vital, and survey respondents continuously called for its increase.

Though it's easy to be ensnared by the wish to label Optical Diversity that leads to greater representation of Black Queer people in the leadership roles as positive, and Optical Diversity that leads to organizations trotting out Black Queer bodies for publicity purposes or to draw in additional funders as negative, this is a fallacy.

What is evident in the data from Black Queer

employees and board members is that Optical Diversity in all forms is not enough, and it certainly should not be the final destination in the journey for equity, albeit an important marker.

Another example of Optical Diversity is virtue signaling. In a somewhat tongue-in-cheek manner, several employees offered organizations making Juneteenth a holiday as an example. They shared that though it is admirable to recognize this day, they were hoping for deeper action to meet the challenge of racial equity in the organization. Participants shared that they had asked for more extensive reforms in workplace quality and culture, such as higher pay or more resources to do programming for marginalized communities, but recognizing Juneteenth as a holiday seemed to just be easier for the organization.

Virtue signaling is widespread on social media. The five surveyed organizations had public commitments to antiracism and equity, but Black Queer employees and board members often felt there wasn't enough real action to support those commitments. They shared that their organizations shied away from having tough conversations about racism and white supremacy, choosing instead the more comfortable, surface-level conversations about racism that did not force staff to confront their own individual racist actions nor truly invest in dismantling white supremacy.

Though survey respondents consistently called for increased representation of Black Queer people in leadership on the board and in the C-suite, and many respondents shared their beliefs that these spaces should match the demographics of clients, an interesting

caveat emerged from the data.

Both Black Queer board members and employees agreed that it is not enough just to have Black, Queer people on your board and in your C-suite. They argued that if those Black, Queer folx don't come from the same places (communities, SES statuses, etc.) that the most marginalized clients and employees that the organization serves come from, they still will not truly know the needs of the clients or the needs of those frontline Black Queer employees.

One interviewee summed it up as, "Not all skin folk are kinfolk."

Sometimes Black Queer people were supervised by other Black Queer people in the C-suite and still didn't feel heard, valued, or that their initiatives were championed. Yes, we need more Black Queer representation in those spaces, but it's not enough.

There needs to be some way to have a direct linkage to the most marginalized employees, who often come from those same spaces as clients, to be able to have voice to power and to share their lived experiences and what they need directly to the C-suite and the board so that they can be heard.

REAL WORK

"

Investment in prioritization of my voice and the contribution of my ideas. **I think there needs to be prioritization of Black people's ideas and their voices, centering their voices,** making sure that our suggestions are addressed, especially if nobody like me, who was a patient and a client and a volunteer, and are now an employee [...] I'm the best tool in the house, and you're not listening to what I have to say. So just that, centering the voices, the uplifting, the prioritization of ideas, things like that.

"

BQEI Participant

THE NEXT AND FINAL STAGE IN THIS progression is Real Work. Optical Diversity is needed, but Black, Queer employees and board members argued for some action to back up this virtue signaling and efforts that meaningfully invest in and give real voice and power to the Black Queer people at all levels in the organization.

The first tenet of real action is resource allocation. Black Queer employees and board members called for adequate funding of the programs for Black and Brown LGBTQ+ employees and clients. Often, employees felt that the organizations were getting grants for services to Black and Brown communities, but they did they did not see the increased funding actually impact the initiatives on the ground. Thus, participants called for an

investment of resources, both increased employment and increased dollars to these spaces of marginalization.

Another element of Real Work is giving voice and power to employees in an organization that exist primarily on the margins and whose lived experiences match most with the population of clients. This can be done by creating pipelines where Black Queer people speak directly to those with positional authority.

Also, it is essential to mention that the creation of affinity spaces, spaces both physical and metaphorical where groups that share identities can gather and build community, was also very important to the experiences of Black Queer employees and board members alike. So continuing to create affinity spaces for Black Queer board members and employees is extremely important, but it is not the end goal.

Real Work also requires professional development. Black Queer employees and board members stressed the need for an investment in training that offset the marginality often experienced by those in the organization who possessed compounded, historically marginalized identities. For Black Queer employees, these professional development sessions would include options such as skill-based management workshops, certificate programs and other educational opportunities, and mentorship and coaching . For Black, Queer board members, these professional development opportunities would cover topics such as how to read a profit and loss statement so that younger or less experienced board members don't feel

that there are areas in which they cannot contribute as a result of a lack of knowledge. Participants felt that these professional development offerings needed to center some of their experiences as Black Queer people in the workplace. These development opportunities would be most impactful if they spoke directly to them and their needs.

Another critical element of this subtheme of professional development is ensuring that everyone has access to professional development opportunities. Participants offered up a bevy of ideas, including mandating professional development, discussing relevant professional development opportunities in onboarding, and directly advertising these options to the staff so that all staff, no matter their work history or what they are accustomed to receiving, would know that these professional development opportunities exist for them to take advantage.

Participants also shared that Real Work must transform from relying on individual action to creating systems that support Black Queer thriving.

Black Queer experiences, especially positive Black Queer experiences, were often tied to particular people and individual actions. Black Queer employees' experiences in an organization often depended on who their supervisors were and the units in which they worked.

Study participants shared the need to create policies and culture that systematizes positive experiences for Black Queer people. This notion of systematizing positive experiences for Black Queer people also emerged in the board members' experiences. Non-Black

Queer board members would misbehave (by raising their voices, and using other rude methods to silence Black, Queer board members) with little if any recourse taken because there was no systemic way to hold board members accountable for their behavior that was misaligned with the values of the organization.

Some boards have begun creating policies around this because it did not exist before. Another way this subtheme emerges in the data is in small organizations where the organization only has one HR person who is white. Black Queer employees often felt it tough to go to that one white HR person — particularly if that person is responsible for enforcing policies that police Black staff unfairly.

The final subtheme of Real Work is implementing intentionally flexible and socially just policies for employees with historically marginalized identities. Some examples of these policies include flexible work schedules and bereavement policies that reflect the broad swath of people included in Black Queer chosen family and allow employees to access services that the organization provides if they qualify.

Many survey respondents mentioned that they used to receive services from these organizations, but they were no longer eligible once they started working for the organization. They shared feeling like they were not making huge salaries and had just perhaps made it over the notch of poverty and suddenly lost a substantial source of support. Thus, participants challenge the organizations to create equitable and just practices and policies for those employees who are most on the margins.

Emerging Equity Indicators

THE INDICATORS WERE CREATED TO reflect Black Queer employees' and board members' desires to see Real Action — that is, organizations implementing antiracist policies and practices.

The items are areas where Black Queer employees and board members called for Real Action. Indicators of that Real Action follow them; in other words, what Real Action looks like in each of these areas.

These indicators were derived from an analysis of the survey and interview data, the expertise of the Black Queer Equity Taskforce, and the feedback from Black, Queer employees, board members, CEOs from participating Queer-serving nonprofits, and CEOs for Black Queer-led nonprofits in Chicagoland.

The categories of indicators are as follows:

- **Resource Allocation**
- **Giving Voice and Power**
- **Professional Development**
- **Systemic Action**
- **Data Collection**

RESOURCE ALLOCATION

Provide adequate funding to programs for Black and Brown Queer and Trans people (for employees and clients).

1. Can your organization present an analysis of programming (cost per participant) across organization programming that disaggregates cost per participant across racial, gender, sexuality groups, and zip codes and assess the reasons for the difference of cost per person— especially if the programs are similar?

GIVING VOICE AND POWER

Create mechanisms that give voice and power to those most marginalized in the organization, whose experiences match those of the clients.

2. Does your organization have an opportunity or medium where Black Queer employees can speak directly to those with positional authority, including the CEO?

3. Does your organization have affinity spaces (or groups) where Black, Queer employees can connect with each other to build community and create workplace solutions?

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Black Queer employees and board members called for trainings and professional development opportunities that offset the marginality they have experienced. Both groups want these opportunities for growth and advancement to be sensitive to the lived experiences of people with historically marginalized identities and how that marginality manifests itself in the workplace.

4. Does your organization offer professional development opportunities to employees? Does your organization provide professional development opportunities to board members in separate spaces?

   a. Are training / professional development opportunities led by Black LGBTQ+ people or organizations with rigorous analytical preparation, meaningful life experiences, and deep connections to the community?

   b. Does your organization recognize professional development for employees as a 70/20/10 model? The 70/20/10 Model is a formula used to describe the optimal sources of learning needed for professional development. It holds that employees obtain 70 percent of their knowledge from on-the-job experiences, 20 percent from interactions with others, and 10 percent from formal educational opportunities.

5. Is professional development a part of your employee performance review process? Does your employee performance review process include an individualized employee development plan?

6. How does the per person comparison of leadership development costs break down over race, gender identity, and sexuality?

7. Does your organization have coaching programs for Black Queer employees?

8. Does your organization have mentorship programs for Black Queer employees?

INDIVIDUAL ACTION TO SYSTEMIC ACTION

Black Queer board members and employees highlighted the tendency for organizations to rely on individual action to provide healthy workspaces for Black Queer employees and board members as well as to contend with racism, acts of marginalization, and downright bad behavior. Through their experiences, Black Queer employees and board members called for more systemic fixes to address these issues.

Moving Foward

9. Does your organization have a process for your Board of Directors to address other board members' behavior not aligned with the organization's values?

10. Does your organization have a designated representative to whom people can go with issues of racism and inequity?

   a. The DEI lead for organizations must have specific anti-racism/DEI training that qualifies them for the work.

   b. Are organizations documenting grievances, terminations, discipline along with the intersecting identities of the employees?

11. What does your organization do to meet the needs of Black LGBTQ+ employees in a culturally competent way?

   a. How equitable are your organization's policies?

DATA COLLECTION

Community-led participatory action research encourages researchers to reflect on the research process throughout the various stages of data collection and data analysis. BQEI researchers discovered the difficulty of ascertaining demographic data about employees and board members through such reflections. Organizations did not collect this information, and if they had some demographic data, it often did not reflect the intersections of marginalized identities.

Lighthouse Foundation created an independent tool for the BQEI to collect this data from employees and board members. To best support Black Queer and employees and board members with other historically marginalized identities, it is imperative to know what identities and cross-sections of identities exist in the organization.

12. Does your organization track intersecting demographic data of employees (either individually or using an outsourced tool), understanding that employee self-identification presents limitations in data analysis?

   a. What percentage of your Black Queer employees are: hourly, salaried, contractor?

NEXT YEAR, WE WILL CONTINUE refining our Black Queer Equity Indicators list in collaboration with Northwestern's EDIT Program and a multi-pronged Steering Committee, including separate feedback circles for Black Queer employees, Black Queer board members, CEOs, and external expert community members.

In 2022 we will invite other organizations to join the second cohort of the BQEI project. In 2023, we will evaluate both cohorts on the equity indicators. In subsequent years, or Phase #4, we will continue to survey these organizations annually along with an additional cohort of new organizations.

Once organizations agree, we will begin to collect data on each organization through our updated mixed-method surveys and new methods and opportunities for community input. Each new organization will have a year to implement the racial equity indicators and will receive a letter grade in the second year of their BQEI participation that reflects their continued effort to improve Black Queer equity in their organization.

While we have launched this project locally, we aim to expand the BQEI to assess organizations across Chicagoland, Illinois, and the nation

— including The Trevor Project, The Human Rights Campaign, and GLAAD.

LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION

Lighthouse Foundation is a Black Queer-led, multiracial social justice organization that advances justice for Black LGBTQ+ people across Chicagoland through empowerment education and entertainment.

References

AIDS Foundation Chicago. (2020, December 2). *New HIV cases in Chicago declined in 2019, but racial health disparities must continue to be addressed.* https://www.aidschicago.org/page/news/all-news/new-hiv-cases-in-chicago-declined-in-2019-but-racial-health-disparities-must-continue-to-be-addressed

Anzaldúa, Gloria. (1987). *Borderlands/la frontera: The new mestiza.* Aunt Lute Books.

Badgett, M.V.L., Choi, S.K., Wilson, B.D.M. (2019). **LGBT poverty in the United States**. The Williams Institute. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-poverty-us/

Catalyst. (2021). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Workplace Issues (Quick Take). https://www.catalyst.org/research/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-workplace-issues/

Crenshaw, K. (1989) Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, Vol. 1989 Article 8.

Frye, M. (1992). Oppression. In M.A. Andersen and P.H. Collins (Eds.), *Race, class, and gender: An anthology.* Wadsworth.

Gettinger, A. (2020, February 24). 'Black LGBT business-owners discuss experiences, call for mutual support at Hyde Park forum.' *Hyde Park Herald.* https://www.hpherald.com/news/business/black-lgbt-business-owners-discuss-experiences-call-for-mutual-support-at-hyde-park-forum/article_465949e6-574c-11ea-8ca0-a3136c924e20.html

Hill Collins, P. (1990). *Black feminist thought.* Hyman.

hooks, b. (1990). *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics.* Taylor & Francis.

Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2008). *Degrees of equality: A national study examining workplace climate for LGBT employees*. chrome-extension://oemmndcbldboiebfnladdacbdfmadadm/https://assets2.hrc.org/files/assets/resources/DegreesOfEquality_2009.pdf

Human Rights Campaign Foundation. (2018). *A workplace divided: Understanding the climate for LGBTQ workers nationwide.* https://www.hrc.org/resources/a-workplace-divided-understanding-the-climate-for-lgbtq-workers-nationwide

Morten, M.F., Farmer-Smith, K., Kadish-Hernández, J., León, V., Posey, S., Tadross, Y. (2019). *2019 Chicago LGBTQ community needs assessment.* https://www.mortengroup.com/2019-lgbtq-community-needs-assessment/

Morten Group. (2020). *Prosperity Project: Report on community needs assessment and planning process.* Chicago Black Gay Men's Caucus.

Movement Advancement Project, Center for American Progress, Human Rights Campaign, Freedom to Work, & National Black Justice Coalition. (2013). *A broken bargain for LGBT workers of color.* https://www.lgbtmap.org/workers-of-color

Rhodes, A.M. (2021, Apr 19). 'The National LGBTQ Workers Center aims to end harassment on the job.' *Chicago Reader.* https://chicagoreader.com/news-politics/the-national-lgbtq-workers-center-aims-to-end-harassment-on-the-job/

Spade, D. (2011). *Normal life: Administrative violence, critical Trans politics and the limits of law.* South End Press.

The Trevor Project. (2020). *National survey on LGBTQ youth mental health 2020*. https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2020/?section=Introduction

Whitfield, D.L., Walls, N.E., Langenderfer-Magruder L., & Clark, B. (2014). Queer is the new Black? Not so much: Racial disparities in anti-LGBTQ discrimination. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 26(4), 426-440. https://doi.org/10.1080/10538720.2014.955556

Zavella, P. (1991) Reflections on diversity among Chicanas. *Frontiers*,12(2): 73–85. https://doi.org/10.2307/3346849

Acknowledgments

WE THANK THE AUTHORS OF THIS WHITE PAPER:
Allen A. Womble, Ph.D
Mags Bouffard
Jamie Frazier
Christopher Eyo

WE THANK THE SPECIAL CONTRIBUTORS OF THIS WHITE PAPER:
Jonathan Neidorf
Karlyn Meyer
Hannah Pewee

WE THANK THE ADVISORY COUNCIL:
Angela Barnes
Coleman Goode
Consuella Brown
Derrick Dawson
Joshua Travis
Morgan Sherm
Reyna Ortiz
Serette B. King
Tracy Baim
Zahara Bassett

WE THANK THE BLACK QUEER EQUITY TASKFORCE
Adrienne Irmer
Jerome Montgomery
Keith Green
Lora Branch
Oscar Zambrano
Rachelle Ellis
Zahara Bassett

WE THANK THE EVALUATION, DATA INTEGRATION, AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (EDIT) PROGRAM AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY
Dylan Felt
Erik Glenn
Gregory Phillips II, Ph.D
Rayna Brown

WE THANK LEADERS FROM THE FOLLOWING BLACK QUEER LED AND SERVING ORGANIZATIONS FOR THEIR INPUT AND COUNSEL THROUGHOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BQEI:
Chicago Black Gay Men's Caucus
Life is Work
Pride Southside
Project Vida
Taskforce Prevention & Community Services

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING FUNDERS FOR THEIR HELP IN MAKING THE BQEI POSSIBLE:
African American Legacy Fund, an initiative of the Chicago Community Trust
Alliance for Research in Chicagoland Communities (ARCC) of Northwestern University
Amazon
AMPT: Advancing Nonprofits
Center for Health Equity Research Chicago (CHER) of The University of Illinois Chicago
Chicago Racial Justice Pooled Fund
Conant Family Foundation
Crossroads Fund
Emergent Fund
Getting to Zero Illinois, an initiative led by AIDS Foundation Chicago
Grand Victoria Foundation
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Endowment Fund
The Chicago Temple Fund
The Field Foundation of Illinois

CONTACT US

✉ info@lightfoundchi.org

🌐 lightfoundchi.org

FOLLOW US

⬜🅾️▶🐦in @lightfoundchi

✉ bit.ly/lighthouseemail