



MNA BIPOC Focus Group Report

Prepared By

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Overview

This report summarizes insights from a focus group conducted with BIPOC members of the Montana Nonprofit Association (MNA) to gather recommendations for how the organization can more intentionally support BIPOC leaders through internal reform.

The session was facilitated by Turquoise Devereaux, LMSW, MSW, founder of Indigenous Skye, LLC, an Indigenous woman-owned consulting business that centers Indigenous identity, cultural safety, and equity in community and organizational settings. Prior to the focus group, Turquoise led a two-part training series on cultural safety with MNA members. The focus group served as a follow-up opportunity to deepen the conversation, reflect on key takeaways, and co-develop strategies to support BIPOC professionals across the organization.

This report captures the emerging themes, insights, and recommendations, offering a path forward for MNA to cultivate an inclusive and culturally safe environment.

Focus Group Details

The focus group consisted of six (6) participants who represented diverse identities and lived experiences as BIPOC individuals. Additionally, it is important to note that only one participant attended the Cultural Safety Trainings offered before this meeting. Therefore, the key takeaways from the training were not relevant topics discussed.

Key Themes

1. Lack of Representation and Cultural Understanding

- Participants expressed that while intentions may not be harmful, all-white leadership often lacks the lived understanding needed to support BIPOC staff and communities fully.
- Many participants feel pressured to prove themselves, even in positions of leadership, and mentioned they are not “taken seriously” when in primarily white, dominant spaces.
- There was a consensus that training for non-BIPOC individuals is essential and urged that trainings uplift BIPOC resilience and avoid “poverty porn” narratives.
 - Called for external professionals to lead cultural education, rather than relying on internal BIPOC staff.
 - Suggested BIPOC-centered support and mandatory cultural safety training for white staff.

2. Cultural Tax

- BIPOC individuals are often expected to educate others, serve as “diversity representatives,” and take on extra roles without additional support or compensation.
- All participants expressed the emotional and mental toll of constantly educating others and being “diversity checkboxes.”
- This emotional toll, called the “cultural tax”, is a significant stressor for participants.

3. Montana-Specific Challenges (“Montana Problems”)

- Participants widely referenced “Montana Problems,” which refers to the state’s low racial diversity, history, and values, frequently used to justify avoiding real DEI investment.
- Participants noted that efforts often feel like “check-the-box” exercises rather than sustained commitments.
- There’s a pressing need to acknowledge Montana’s unique context while not allowing it to justify inaction.

4. Lateral Aggression

- Several participants raised concerns about lateral aggression within BIPOC spaces and the need to address it.
- There is a desire for safe, educational spaces to address lateral aggression, explore its roots, and understand its continued impact on BIPOC collaboration and leadership while gaining the support to address internalized oppression and foster solidarity.

5. Need for BIPOC-Centered Spaces and Support

- A central theme from all participants was the need for intentional investment in BIPOC well-being, including:
 - Psychological safety.
 - Peer support.
 - Recognition and compensation for added labor.
 - Dedicated space for collective reflection and healing.
- Participants emphasized the importance of safe, supportive spaces where BIPOC leaders can connect, process experiences, and build strategies for resilience and mutual care.

6. Lack of Infrastructure, Accountability, and Resources

- BIPOC staff need clear, accessible support, such as designated personnel or tools, to redirect cultural education demands when they lack the time or capacity.
- Participants called for clear accountability structures, especially for white staff and leadership.
- Training programs must move beyond awareness to systems-level change and enforceable commitments.

Recommendations for MNA

Short Term	Long Term
<p>Create BIPOC-Only Support Spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue hosting regular affinity spaces for BIPOC members to connect, share challenges, and build community. ● Fully fund a retreat-type experience for BIPOC members to experience a safe space to feel supported and valued. ● These can serve as safe, healing-centered spaces outside of white-dominant environments. 	<p>Develop a Two-Tiered DEI Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Tier 1: Ongoing BIPOC-centered wellness, strategy, and leadership development spaces. ● Tier 2: Organization-wide training for white staff/leadership that becomes standard practice across programs and partnerships.
<p>Designate a Point Person or Resource System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assign a staff member or develop a small team to handle cultural education questions so BIPOC staff aren't burdened. ● Develop a resource kit or FAQ that can be shared when BIPOC staff are asked to educate others. 	<p>Hire External Experts to Build Curriculum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contract professionals experienced in cultural safety and anti-racism education to design a sustainable, scalable DEI framework in topics identified by BIPOC members, but not rely on internal BIPOC members or staff.
<p>Pilot Trainings Identified by BIPOC Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Launch a one-time or quarterly training session focused on topics identified by BIPOC members (e.g., terminology, cultural safety, allyship, accountability). ● Track interest and effectiveness to build toward a certification model. 	<p>Systemic Training Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure training on topics identified by BIPOC members are incorporated within all already established training/learning programs. ● Establish a certificate/learning program specifically on topics identified by BIPOC members. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Maintain a public-facing list of certified individuals to support partnership building and accountability. ● Consider making it mandatory for members and/or offering it for free as an organizational investment.
<p>Name and Challenge “Montana Problems”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Internally acknowledge and name the pattern of using Montana’s demographics as an excuse. ● Begin including this framing in discussions, communications, and internal accountability language. 	<p>Integrate DEI Accountability into Organizational Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Include equity goals in leadership evaluations, board engagement, and funding strategies. ● Address the systemic undervaluing of BIPOC leaders by aligning funding and support with equitable representation.

Incorporate Strength-Based Framing in All Communications

- Immediately shift away from “poverty porn” narratives by emphasizing the strengths, leadership, and resilience of BIPOC communities in storytelling and training materials.

Invest in Structural Changes to Support BIPOC Leadership

- Evaluate and shift hiring, compensation, promotion, and governance structures to elevate and retain BIPOC professionals.
- Ensure BIPOC leaders are not tokenized but are empowered to influence organizational direction.

Conclusion

The perspectives shared in this focus group underscore the persistent inequities BIPOC individuals face in nonprofit workplaces across Montana, including cultural taxation, underrepresentation, lateral aggression, and the need for dedicated support systems. At the same time, participants articulated a clear and hopeful vision for change that centers BIPOC wellbeing, builds structural accountability, and creates space for healing and leadership.

To become a reality, this vision requires more than dialogue. This process demands meaningful financial and organizational investment. MNA has an incredible opportunity to support BIPOC leaders, design culturally safe infrastructure, and hold white-dominant systems accountable.

These recommendations are not separate from MNA’s mission; they are essential to it. By investing in this work, MNA can lead by example, demonstrating its commitment to equity, inclusion, and the transformation needed to build a nonprofit sector where all communities can thrive.

Please don’t hesitate to reach out if you have any questions, feedback, or want to discuss these findings further. I welcome continued conversation and collaboration to support this critical work. Thank you so much for this opportunity to work with MNA!

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