

Strengthening the National Grassroots Action Infrastructure for Public Health and Social Justice



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Most of all, we would like to thank the grassroots leaders and staff of intermediary organizations that took the time during this period of great crisis to share their thoughts and information on their organizations.



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The Problem

At the time of this report our nation was amid the COVID-19 pandemic with another surge in front of us. There was also a heightened awareness and an increase in actions to address systemic racism in law enforcement and other systems. In times of crisis, volunteer grassroots organizations (e.g., neighborhood, block, tenant, and mutual aid associations) are often overlooked “first responders.” These resident-led organizations are already located in impacted communities and provide a range of assistance and advocacy for people in the US, not only addressing resident needs but their aspirations. Research has shown their effectiveness in dealing with crime, food security, social isolation and many other critical issues as well as being effective advocates for improving local conditions. Formal systems, such as public health, need to better engage and be responsive to these groups, especially in lower-income communities of color where such organizations are an important part of the “social safety net.”

Project Overview

Community Science identified local grassroots and intermediary organizations across the country to research their successes, challenges, and needs so that funders and other investors can support them in the most effective way possible. We focused on ways to support organizations in responding to the future challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, preparing for engaging this untapped force for future public health crises, and addressing institutional injustice.

Definitions

Volunteer-led grassroots organizations (VGOs) are local, volunteer-led groups such as block and neighborhood associations, tenant and homeowners’ associations, civic and cultural associations, and mutual aid groups.

Intermediary organizations are local, state, regional or sometimes national institutions who provide funding, networking and peer learning opportunities, educational/skills-based resources such as publications, workshop and webinars, as well as other supports to VGOs in their area. They can be independent nonprofits, part of a larger nonprofit such as a United Way, a unit of city government, or a university.

Lower-income refers to VGOs who reported working in communities where residents were primarily “low-income” or “working class.” **Higher-income** refers to VGOs who reported working in communities where residents were primarily “middle-class” or “upper middle-class.” Participants self-identified using these categories, which were based on their perceptions of economic status and not actual income.

Key Insights From the Study of Volunteer-led Grassroots Organizations (VGOs)

About VGOs

- VGOs were semi-formally run organizations with elected officials that often used more casual decision-making and communication procedures.
- VGOs rarely had paid staff and relied on more informal fundraising methods.
- VGOs used the internet and social media to communicate but found word of mouth the most effective for engaging residents.
- VGOs had very limited involvement by younger adults.
- VGOs provided the opportunity for people to come together and discuss in an accessible, democratic way.

What VGOs Are Working on

- Crime/safety and housing/community beautification and other concerns remained more pressing concerns than the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice issues.
- Social justice issues and economic development were of lesser importance. VGOs' may have perceived these as beyond their reach without collaboration with other organizations; however, research shows that VGOs can be effective in this space and can be part of the solution to poverty.
- Race and class interacted to affect what issues groups were working on, with upper-income White and lower-income Black VGOs more likely to address both COVID-19 and social justice issues.

Analysis of VGOs Serving Black and White Communities

- VGOs in primarily Black communities were more likely to address COVID-19 related issues than those in primarily White communities. However, there was no difference in perceived effectiveness between VGOs in Black and White communities.
- VGOs in Black communities were relatively more likely to address improving access to vaccination sites and improving willingness to get vaccinated, while VGOs in White communities were relatively more likely to address providing emergency food or clothing.
- VGOs in both primarily Black communities and White communities focused on the same social justice issues—including community-police relations and addressing discrimination or racism in systems—although VGOs in Black communities felt more effective.

Key Insights From the Study of Volunteer-led Grassroots Organizations (VGOs)

Analysis of Community Economic Status

- VGOs in both lower- and higher-income communities felt they were similarly very effective in responding to the pandemic.
- VGOs in lower-income communities were more likely to address improving willingness to get vaccinated.
- VGOs in higher-income communities felt they were more effective in their social justice organizing.
- VGOs in both lower- and higher-income communities focused on improving community-police relations and addressing discrimination in systems and institutions.

Pandemic and Social Justice Response of VGOs in Lower-Income Communities of Color

- VGOs in lower-income communities of color were more likely to address COVID-19 related issues than other VGOs that responded to the survey.
- Access to vaccination sites and emergency food/clothing were the top COVID-19-related issues addressed by VGOs.
- VGOs that are incorporated 501(c)3 organizations were more likely to consider their pandemic and social justice responses as 'effective.' The number of volunteers and organization budget amount were not related to how effective VGOs perceived their pandemic response to be.
- Police-community relations and discrimination or racism in local institutions/systems were the most addressed social justice issue by VGOs in lower-income communities of color.
- VGOs that felt their pandemic response and social justice organizing were effective also reported that it was easier for them to find support when needed.

Capacity Needs and Solutions for VGOS in Lower-Income Communities of Color

- VGOs reported that other local nonprofits and city government were the most common sources of support for them, while local colleges and universities were rarely utilized as sources of support.
- In terms of their preferred method for receiving support, VGOs favor online resources and in-person events. They are much less likely to prefer phone consultations or written handbooks/tip sheets.
- The most cited support needs among VGOs in lower-income communities of color were engaging community members, collaborating with other organizations and institutions, building the capacity for community organizing, and assistance in determining how to solve neighborhood problems.

Key Insights From the Study of Intermediary Organizations

Intermediary Structure and Organization

- Nonprofits were the most common intermediaries that responded to the survey, followed by local foundations, community coalitions, and local government offices/departments.
- Most intermediaries reported having some full-time staff, with the number of full-time staff ranging from zero to 115. Their median annual budget was just shy of \$400,000, with funding sources including a mix of foundation grants, donations, local government grants, and private funding.
- Over half of intermediaries (61%) reported that supporting VGOs was the main purpose of their organization.

Intermediary Perceptions of Community Issues

- Intermediaries reported that the VGOs they supported were primarily focusing on crime and affordable housing in their communities. This aligned with earlier findings from the VGO survey.
- Intermediaries reported that the VGOs they support are focusing on emergency food/clothing and providing PPE and other supplies as their primary responses to COVID-19. These responses differed slightly from responses to the VGO survey.
- Intermediaries reported that the VGOs they supported are focusing on addressing discrimination and racism in local institutions/systems in terms of social justice response. This aligned with the top response from the VGO survey.

How Intermediaries Help VGOs

- Intermediaries primarily served non-profits and place-based organizations like neighborhood councils, coalitions, and civic associations. The number of VGOs served by intermediaries ranges from one to 400, with an average of 48 VGOs served.
- The most common types of technical assistance offered by intermediaries included issue-specific workshops, leadership development, and training on advocacy and coalition building.
- The most common capacity building services offered by intermediaries included creating communities of practice and connecting grassroots leaders to larger institutions. Relatively fewer intermediaries provided grants to VGOs.

Capacity Needs and Solutions for Intermediary Organizations and VGOs

- Supporting VGO leadership and organizational development along with improved fundraising abilities were the top capacity needs reported by intermediaries.
- Intermediaries reported wanting to either start offering or improve their ability to offer services on peer learning/community of practice, issue-specific workshops, and webinars.
- Intermediaries needed assistance in overcoming the digital divide and adapting their services to become virtual, especially during this period when in-person contact is not possible.

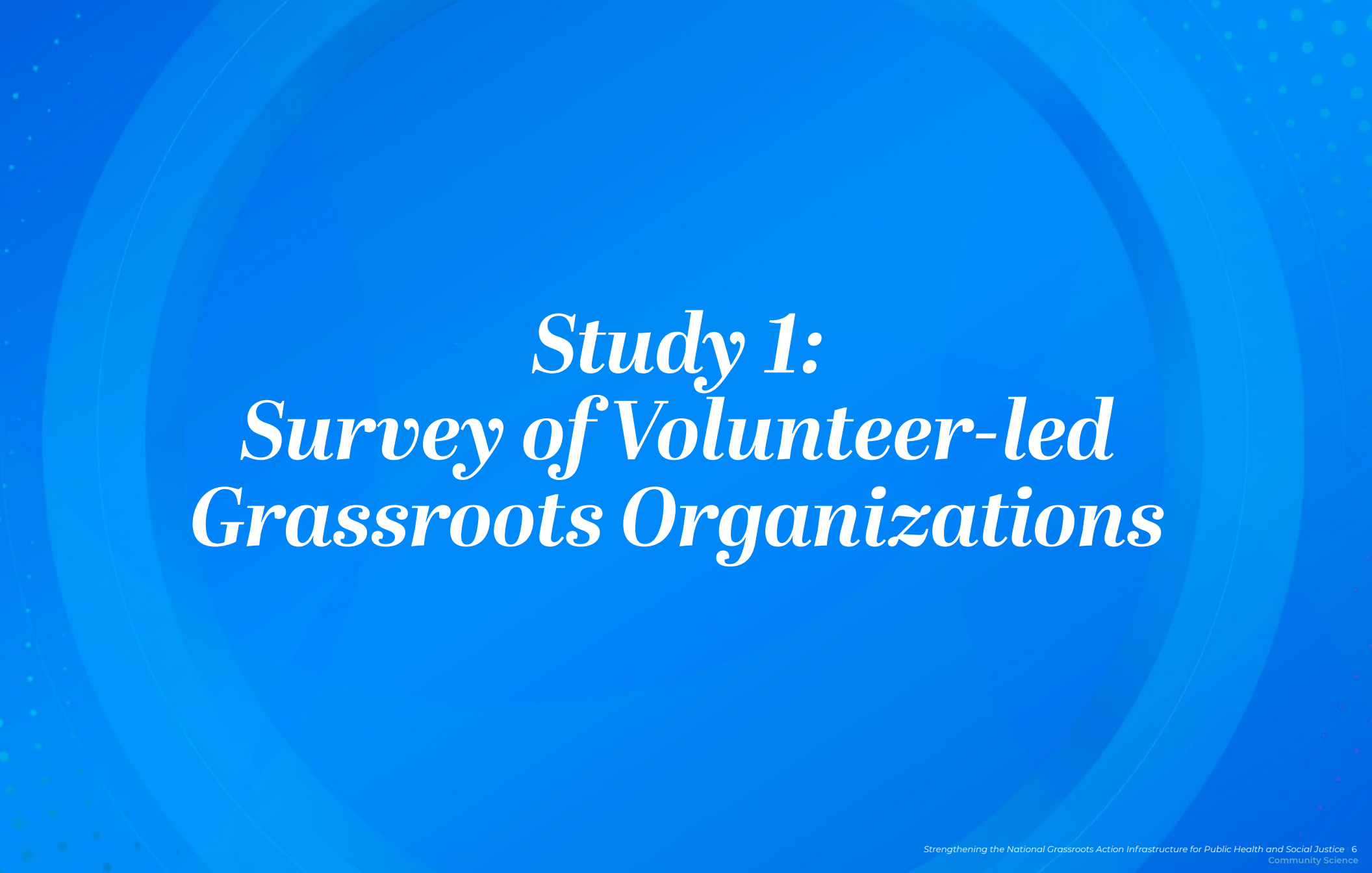
Summary of Recommended Action Steps

Strengthen VGOs

- Continue to develop the inventory and database of VGOs and intermediaries for research, monitoring, and action.
- Conduct research on what leads to VGO and intermediary effectiveness in addressing public health, social justice, and other critical issues facing their communities.

By Strengthening Intermediaries

- Convene an active network or Hub for intermediaries and other support services for VGOs and related community-led organizations.
- Generate or compile resources that can be used by the VGOs to address public health and social justice issues to be distributed through intermediaries and online.

The background is a solid blue color with several concentric circles of varying shades of blue, creating a ripple effect. There are also small, light blue dots scattered across the background, particularly in the upper right and lower left corners.

Study 1: Survey of Volunteer-led Grassroots Organizations

Context of These Studies

The studies we conducted required the participation of neighborhood leaders and intermediary organization staff who were still responding to the COVID-19 and social justice crises. It was very difficult to recruit participants even when using methods that had been highly successful in the past.

We heard from neighborhood leaders in these and other studies about how they are exhausted and traumatized. Intermediary staff frequently reported that their organizations are not remotely close to the capacity they need. Study participants that were willing to speak with us reported they were getting overwhelmed by requests for information.

The city or county was the largest level where contact information was available for these groups, so a national list had to be created. An extensive national outreach effort was conducted to create a much larger list. The actual response rates are acceptable under these and even better circumstances.

The surveys could not be promoted on social media or general mailing lists because of the recent surge in internet hacking of online surveys, especially when financial incentives are involved. These hacks are pervasive even when using the highest security feature provided by a best-in-class provider.

Implications of Context and Adjustment

Implications for Study Findings

The study of VGOs is not presented as representative of the national picture of these organizations.

Based on a few previous studies and our own work, we would have anticipated much larger numbers. Major cities are under-represented. Citizens Committee for New York City estimated that there are at least 4,000 of these groups in New York City alone based on their mailing list.

Survey participants disproportionately represented White communities in comparison to communities of color given that our search focused on the 30 largest US cities. These cities would be expected to have more VGOs representing communities of color and ethnically diverse communities due to population and social factors that traditionally present in these communities.

Adjustment in Study Analysis

This study took a deeper look by making comparisons based on economic class (income level) and race/ethnicity in order to understand their experience and needs rather than national generalizations. We also focused our analysis on low-income communities of color.

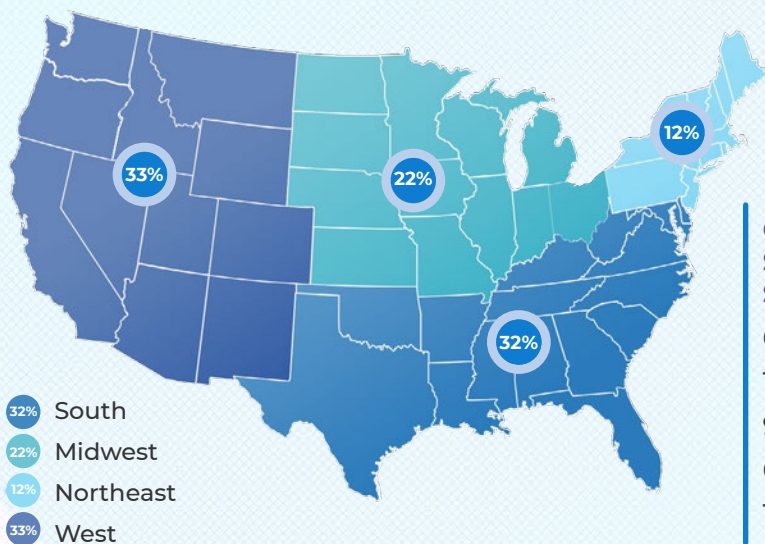
Online Survey Methodology

We conducted internet searches to identify volunteer-led grassroots organizations (VGOs), particularly focused in the top 30 metropolitan areas in the United States.

An online survey link was distributed via email to 3,899 VGOs. A total of 427 responses were usable for analysis for a response rate of 11%. Five different outreach attempts were made to increase participation.

A complete description of the survey methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

National Distribution of Respondents (n=416)



Community Settings in the Sample:

67% Urban
17% Suburban
9% Mixed
6% Other
1% Rural

Regions based on U.S. Census Bureau



Characteristics of Participating VGOs

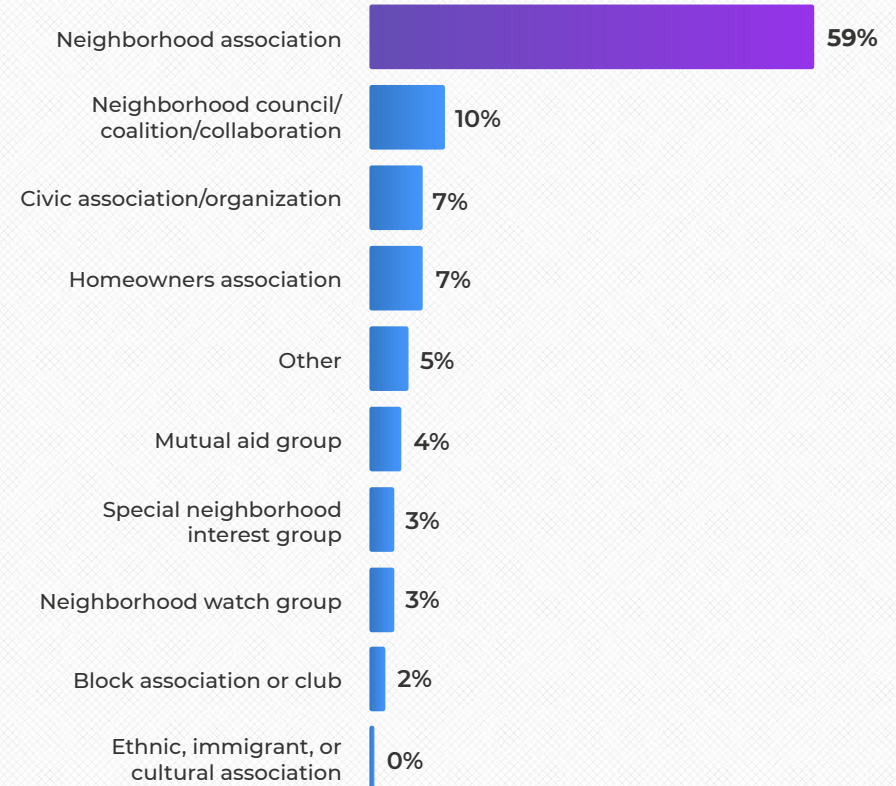
Organization Characteristics:

- Over half were neighborhood associations (59%)
- Average annual budget of \$11,383.99, median \$2500
- 42% had 501(c) or nonprofit status
- 94% were established before the COVID-19 pandemic and 72% had been in operation for 12 years or longer

Membership Characteristics:

- Median = 20 active members
- 52% said their membership was primarily older adults (51 years and older) and 44% said middle-aged adults (25 to 50 years)
- 64% said their membership was primarily White and 21% said primarily Black

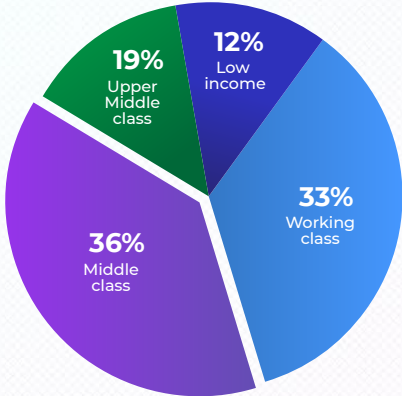
Types of Grassroots Organizations (n=427)



Community Characteristics

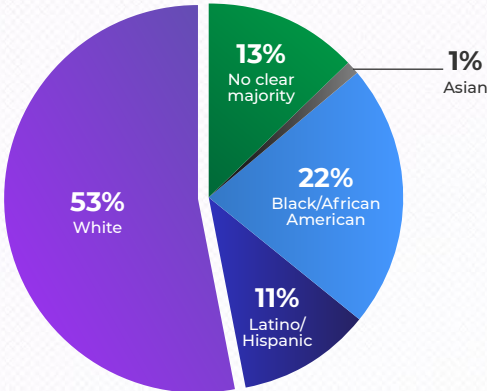
Most VGOs surveyed served predominantly White and middle-class communities.

Primary Economic Status in the Community Served



N=416 Note. Participants self-identified economic status using these categories.

Primary Race in the Community Served



n=414

The highest concentrations of survey responses came from VGOs serving higher-income White communities and lower-income communities of color.

	Predominantly Black, Latino/Hispanic, or Asian	Predominantly White	No Clear Racial/Ethnic Majority	Total
Lower Income (low income and working class)	27% (113)	11% (46)	7% (27)	45% (186)
Higher Income (middle class and upper middle class)	7% (28)	42% (175)	6% (25)	55% (228)
Total	141	221	52	414

Note. Participants self-identified economic status using these categories.

*How are VGOs
structured and
operated?*



Section Purpose

This section presents information on the structure and operations of VGOs who responded to the survey.

Please note that survey responses were limited to VGOs that:

- Are led by a resident who lives in the community served by the organization
- Having no more than one full-time paid staff person
- Having an annual budget below \$100,000

Identifying the structure and operations of these organization is crucial to both understanding how they responded to the pandemic and social justice concerns and for designing interventions to assist VGOs going forward.

Insights on VGO Structure and Operations

- VGOs were semi-formally run organizations with often more casual decision-making and communication procedures.
- VGOs had very basic organizational capacities, rarely had staff, and relied on more informal fundraising methods.
- VGOs used the internet and social media to communicate but found word of mouth the most effective for engaging residents.
- VGOs had very limited involvement by younger adults.
- VGOs provided the opportunity for people to come together and discuss in an accessible, democratic way.

What the Literature Tells Us About VGO Communications and Outreach



There are pros and cons of using social media for communication to residents. Furthermore, VGOs struggle with outreach techniques that work for diverse populations.

(Halegoua & Johnson, 2014; Meenar, 2015)

- Social media might be appropriate to attract the young and tech-savvy, but VGOs that work in disadvantaged neighborhoods must contend with the digital divide.

(Halegoua & Johnson, 2014; Meenar, 2015)

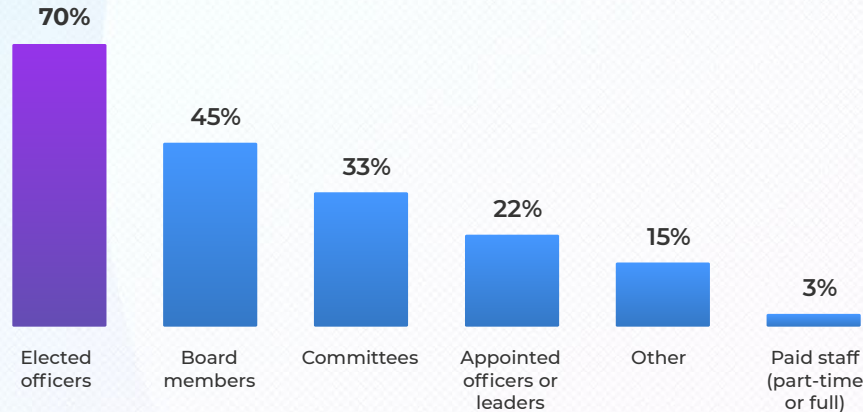
- Research suggests VGO membership is often very homogeneous even in situations where membership heterogeneity is both likely and actively desired. Outreach techniques are needed that are appropriate for racially and ethnically diverse populations, immigrant populations, and economically diverse populations.

(Kwon & Ruef, 2016)

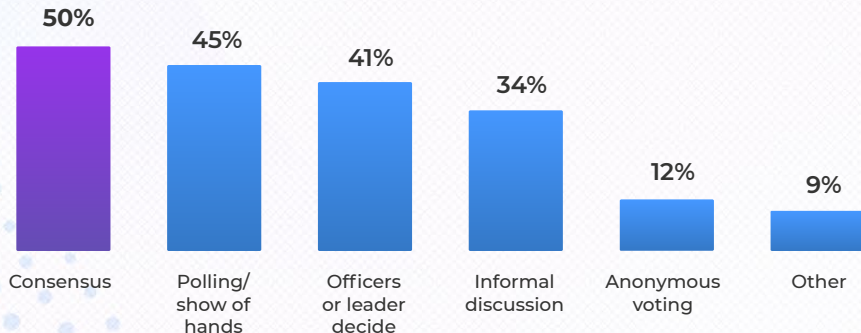
VGO Structure and Operations

Elected officers were the most frequently reported form of leadership, with consensus the most common form of decision-making.

Leadership Structure

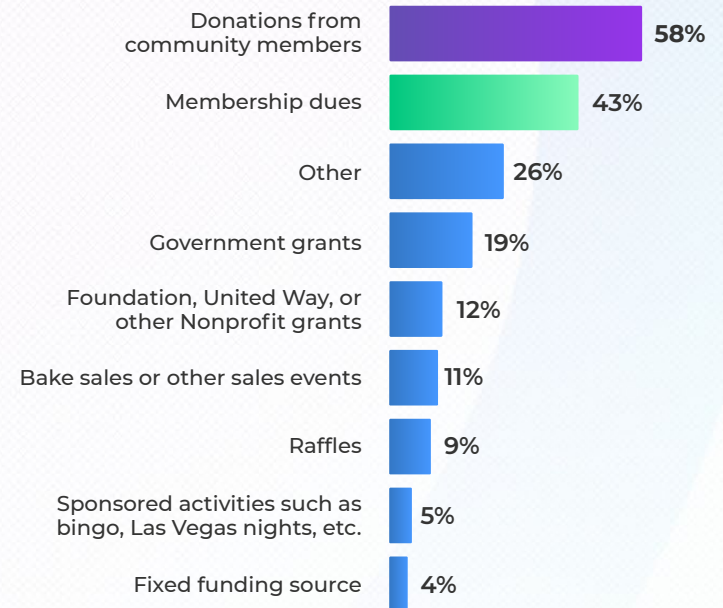


Decision-making Procedures



n= 427 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Community donations and membership dues were the primary methods of fundraising for VGOs.



n= 427 Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

*What are VGOs
working on?*



Section Purpose

This section identifies the issues that VGOs have both prioritized and are working on.

Survey participants could identify up to three 'priorities' and, in addition, an unlimited number of other issues their organization was working on.

Knowing the issues that VGOs are working on provides opportunities for intermediaries and foundations to collaborate on advancing their common goals as well as understanding where priorities may not align and need to be addressed in order to increase VGO engagement.

Insights on What VGOs Are Working On

- Crime/safety and housing/community beautification and other concerns remained more pressing concerns than the COVID-19 pandemic and social justice issues.
- Race and class interacted to affect what issues groups are working on, with upper-income White and lower-income Black VGOs more likely to address both COVID-19 and social justice issues.
- Social justice issues and economic development may have been outside VGOs' perceived reach without collaboration with other organizations. However, research shows that VGOs can be effective in this space and can be part of the solution to poverty.

What the Literature Tells Us About VGOs and Crime Reduction



There is a long history of residents forming VGOs to address neighborhood crime and safety.

- The activities VGOs take on often have an indirect impact on criminal activity by promoting social ties, mutual trust/cohesion, and common values/goals.
(Gasteyer, Johansen, & Neal, 2015; Wo, 2019)
- Other benefits of crime and safety initiatives are increased vigilance among residents and the institutionalization of informal social control in neighborhoods.
(Kwon & Ruef, 2016)
- VGOs can have an impact on property values and quality of life by facilitating collective action (e.g., beautification efforts, poverty alleviation). Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) is one approach that uses beautification efforts to enhance public safety.
(Craw, 2017; Crubaugh, 2020)

What the Literature Tells Us About VGOs and Poverty



Research shows VGOs are more likely to organize in impoverished neighborhoods, and the establishment of VGOs in impoverished places substantially decreases poverty segregation.

(Crubaugh, 2018)

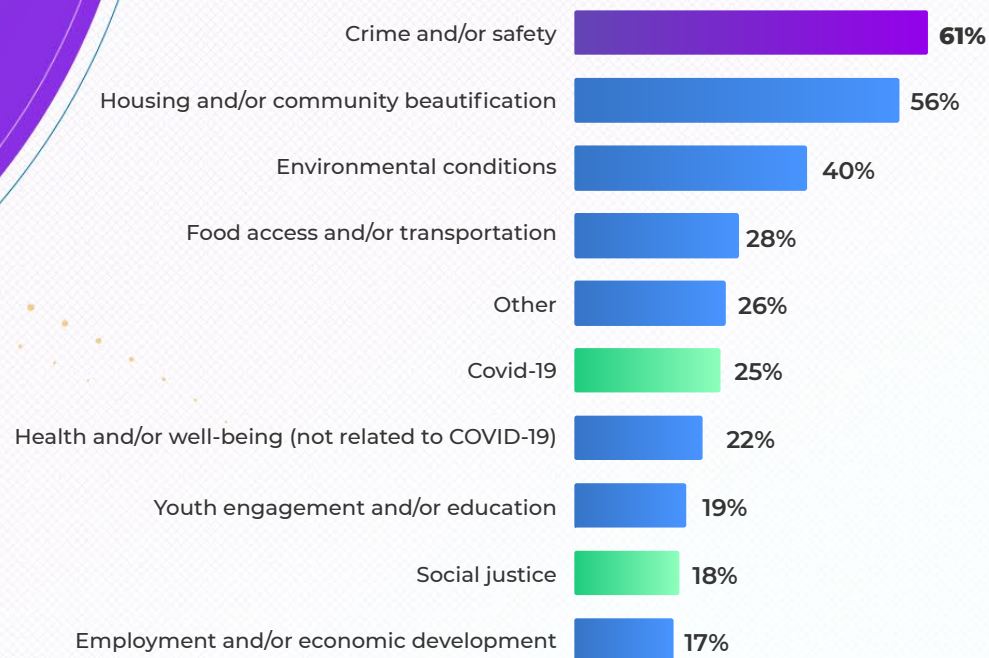
- VGOs typically focus on bringing in resources and institutions and developing social integration specifically for their neighborhoods.
- Some VGOs provide relief after disasters and support for those living through the challenges of poverty and housing costs.

(Crubaugh, 2020; Spade, 2020)

- Other poverty relief activities include promoting/developing affordable housing in the face of gentrification, securing funding for their neighborhoods through city connections, and establishing work and skill development programs.

(Crubaugh, 2018; 2020)

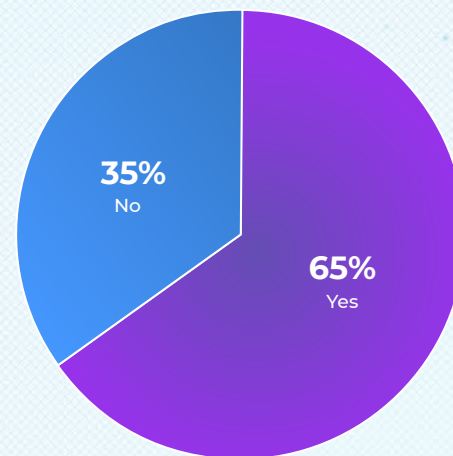
COVID-19 and social justice were considered less important priorities than crime and safety and other issues facing their communities.



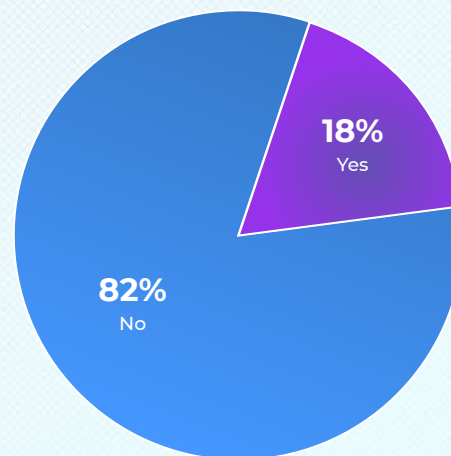
n= 408 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

***VGOs were
more focused on
addressing COVID-19
in their communities
than social justice.***

***Did any of your
organization's work
address COVID-19?***



n=413



n=409

***Did your organization
do any social justice
organizing in response
to the summer 2020
protests?***

Pandemic Response Is Influenced by Race and Class

VGOs in predominantly White, higher-income (self-reported as primarily middle or upper middle-class neighborhoods) and Black, lower-income communities (self-reported as primarily low income or working-class neighborhoods) were more likely to address COVID-19.

Meanwhile, VGOs in predominantly White, lower-income communities as well as Black, higher-income communities were less likely to address the pandemic.

A chi-square test of independence determined these differences are not likely by chance, $\chi^2 (1, N = 198) = 62.22, p > .05$.

Acting on Social Justice Depends on Race and Class

VGOs in predominantly White, higher-income (self-reported as primarily middle or upper middle-class neighborhoods) and Black, lower-income communities (self-reported as primarily low income or working-class neighborhoods) were more likely to address social justice issues.

Meanwhile, VGOs in predominantly White, lower-income communities as well as Black, higher-income communities were more likely to address social justice issues.

A chi-square test of independence determined these differences are not likely by chance, $X^2(1, N = 198) = 1657, p > .05$.

A Closer Look

Differences Based on Primary
Race of the Community



Section Purpose

This section compares the pandemic and social justice responses of VGOs serving predominantly Black and predominantly White communities.

VGOs serving predominantly Black and White communities were only included in this analysis because these communities represented the largest groups in our sample (22% and 53% respectively) .

VGOs in this section are those that identified themselves as serving a community where the most common racial/ethnic group was either Black or White.

VGOs were excluded from this section if the communities they served were not predominantly White or predominantly Black.

Insights on Differences Based on Race

- VGOs in Black communities were more likely to address COVID-19 related issues than those in primarily White communities; though there was no difference in perceived effectiveness between VGOs in Black and White communities.
- In terms of their COVID-19 response, VGOs in Black communities were relatively more likely to address improving access to vaccination sites and improving willingness to get vaccinated, while VGOs in White communities were relatively more likely to address providing emergency food or clothing.
- VGOs in both Black communities and White communities focused on the same social justice issues—including community-police relations and addressing discrimination or racism in systems—although VGOs in Black communities felt more effective.

Breakdown of the Sample Used for Analysis by Race

Predominantly White

(n=221)

58%

(129)

Number of VGOs who indicated the specific COVID-19 related issues they addressed

20%

(43)

Number of VGOs who rated the perceived effectiveness of their pandemic response

14%

(31)

Number of VGOs who indicated the specific social justice issues they addressed

11%

(25)

Number of VGOs who rated the perceived effectiveness of their social justice organizing

Predominantly Black

(n=89)

74%

(66)

Number of VGOs who indicated the specific COVID-19 related issues they addressed

34%

(30)

Number of VGOs who rated the perceived effectiveness of their pandemic response

24%

(21)

Number of VGOs who indicated the specific social justice issues they addressed

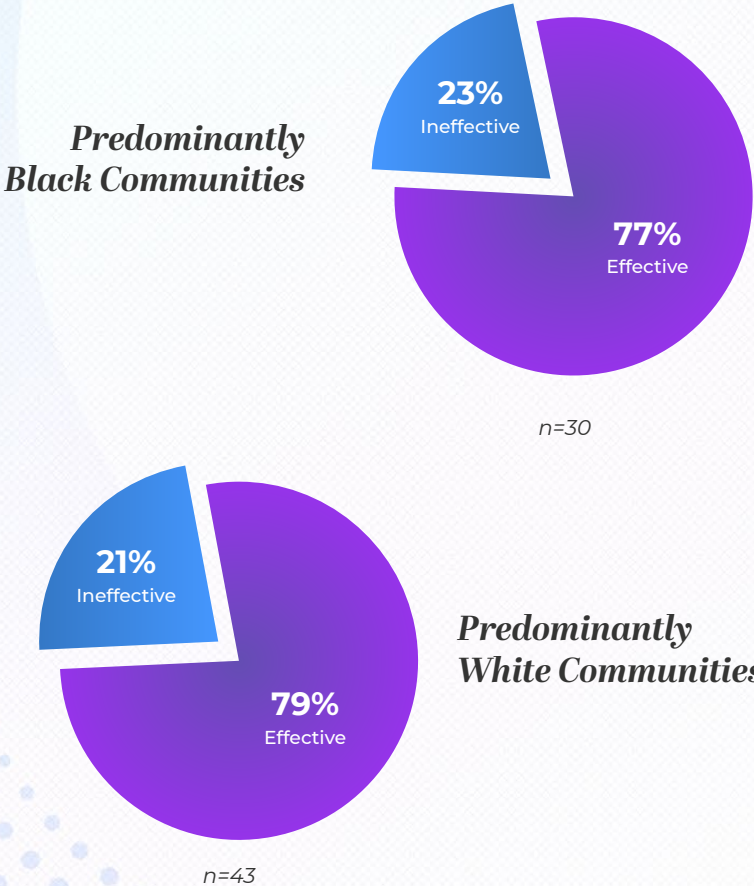
30%

(27)

Number of VGOs who rated the perceived effectiveness of their social justice organizing

Responding to COVID-19

VGOs in Black and White communities rated the effectiveness of their pandemic response the same.



VGOs in Black communities worked on “access to vaccination sites” and “willingness to get vaccinated” more than other VGOs addressing COVID-19. Most VGOs in Black communities reported working on COVID-19 related issues.

Predominantly Black Communities

Rank	Top Issues	Percent
1	Access to vaccination sites	68
2	Improving willingness to get vaccinated	58
3	Emergency food or clothing	53

n=66

Predominantly White Communities

Rank	Top Issues	Percent
1	Emergency food or clothing	46
2	Access to vaccination sites	43
3	PPE or other emergency supplies	29

n=129

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Responding to Social Justice Issues

VGOs in Black and White communities focused on the same social justice issues.

Predominantly Black Communities

Rank	Top Issues	Percent
1	Community-police relations	76
2	Discrimination or racism in institutions or systems	61
3	Redlining or redistricting	48

n=21

Predominantly White Communities

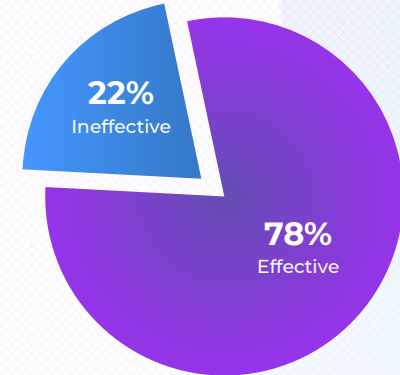
Rank	Top Issues	Percent
1	Community-police relations	81
2	Discrimination or racism in institutions or systems	58
3	Redlining or redistricting	39

n=31

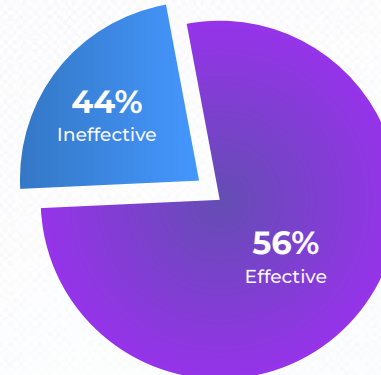
Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

VGOs in Black communities reported greater perceived effectiveness for their social justice organizing.

Predominantly Black Communities



n=27



n=25

Predominantly White Communities

A Closer Look

Differences Based on the
Primary Economic Status of
the Community



Section Purpose

This section compares the pandemic and social justice responses of VGOs serving predominantly lower- and upper-income communities.

We separated these groups due to the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on lower-income communities, as well as the likely higher resources available to VGOs serving higher-income communities.

VGOs who reported working in primarily low income or working-class neighborhoods were combined into a “lower-income” (45% of participants) category, whereas those in primarily middle or upper-middle class neighborhoods were combined into a “higher-income” (55% of participants) category.

Insights on Differences Based on Income

- VGOs in both lower- and higher-income communities felt they were similarly very effective in responding to the pandemic.
- VGOs in lower-income communities were more likely to address improving willingness to get vaccinated.
- VGOs in higher-income communities felt they were more effective in their social justice organizing.
- VGOs in both lower- and higher-income communities focused on improving community-police relations and addressing discrimination in systems and institutions, which can serve as common ground for future collaborative action.

Breakdown of the Sample Used for Analysis by Economic Status

Predominantly Higher-Income (n=229)

58%
(133)

Number of VGOs who indicated
the specific COVID-19 related
issues they addressed

21%
(47)

Number of them who rated the
perceived effectiveness of their
pandemic response

17%
(38)

Number of VGOs who indicated
the specific social justice issues
they addressed

12%
(27)

Number of them who rated the
perceived effectiveness of their
social justice organizing

Predominantly Lower-Income (n=187)

72%
(134)

Number of VGOs who indicated
the specific COVID-19 related
issues they addressed

29%
(55)

Number of VGOs who rated the
perceived effectiveness of their
pandemic response

20%
(37)

Number of VGOs who indicated
the specific social justice issues
they addressed

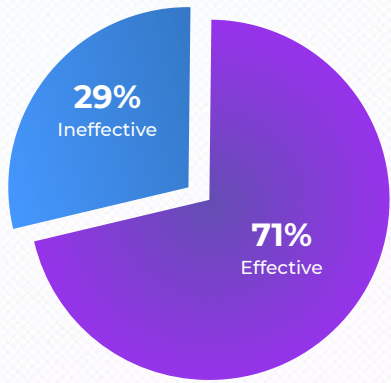
24%
(44)

Number of VGOs who rated the
perceived effectiveness of their
social justice organizing

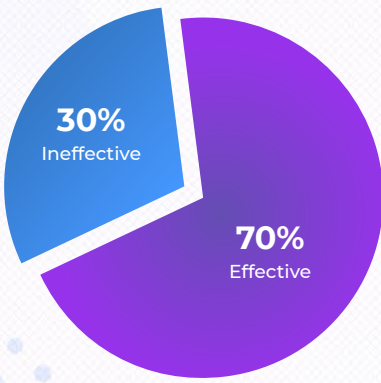
Responding to COVID-19

VGOs in lower- and higher-income communities rated the effectiveness of their pandemic response the same.

Predominantly Lower-Income Communities



n=55



n=47

Predominantly Higher-Income Communities

Improving willingness to get vaccinated was addressed more by VGOs in lower-income communities.

Predominantly Lower-Income Communities

Rank	Top Issues	Percent
1	Access to vaccination sites	57
2	Emergency food or clothing	54
3	Improving willingness to get vaccinated	42

n=134

Predominantly Higher-Income Communities

Rank	Top Issues	Percent
1	Access to vaccination sites	48
2	Emergency food or clothing	45
3	PPE or other emergency supplies133	27

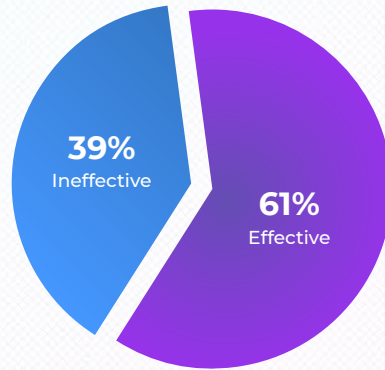
n=133

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

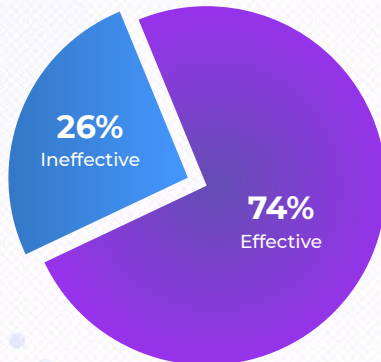
Responding to Social Justice Issues

VGOs in higher-income communities reported greater perceived effectiveness for their social justice organizing.

Predominantly Lower-Income Communities



n=44



n=27

Predominantly Higher-Income Communities

Redlining or redistricting was addressed more by VGOs in higher-income communities.

Predominantly Lower-Income Communities

Rank	Top Issues	Percent
1	Community-police relations	57
2	Discrimination or racism in institutions or systems	54
3	Hate crimes	42

n=38

Predominantly Higher-Income Communities

Rank	Top Issues	Percent
1	Community-police relations	48
2	Discrimination or racism in institutions or systems	45
3	Redlining or redistricting	27

n=37

Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

A Closer Look

Lower-Income Communities
of Color

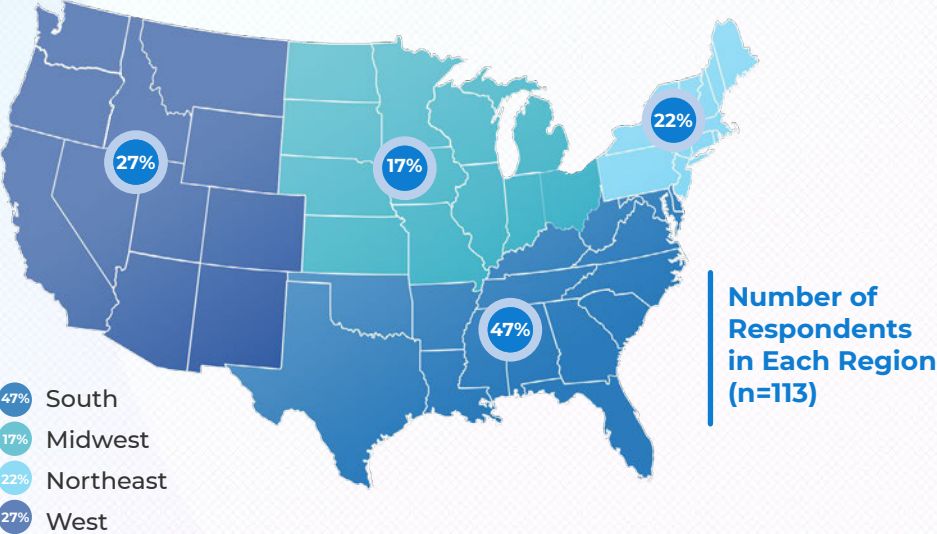


Defining VGOs Primarily Serving Communities of Color

Only VGOs who reported that the neighborhood they served was primarily Black, Asian, or Latino/Hispanic and low income or working class were included (n=113). These self-identified economic statuses were combined into a “lower-income” category.

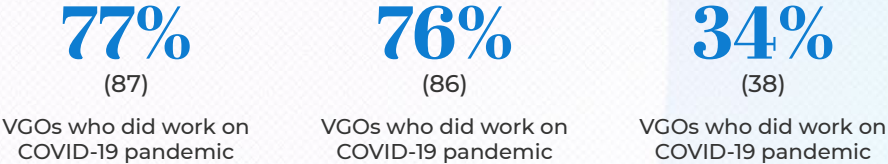
80% of the VGOs serving communities of color reported their neighborhood as being predominantly lower-income.

26% of the VGOs in the survey sample operated in predominantly lower-income communities of color.

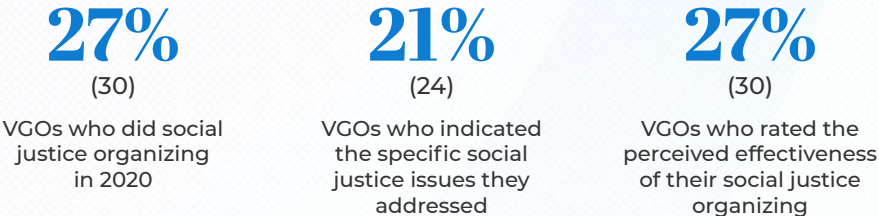


Focus of VGOs Used in the Analysis of Lower-Income Communities of Color (n=113)

Pandemic Response



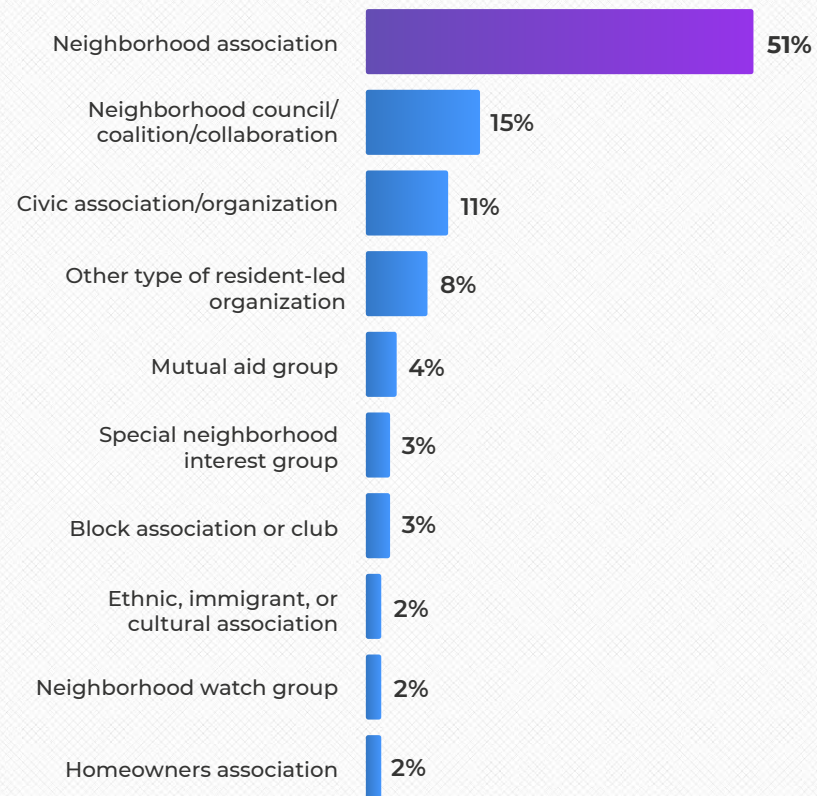
Social Justice



Characteristics of VGOs in Lower-Income Communities of Color

- The average annual budget was \$11,780.80, with a range of \$0 to \$70,000 (n=88).
- The average number of volunteers was 32, with a range of 2 to 300 (n=113).

Types of VGOs (n=113)



Note. Percentages exceed 100% due to rounding.

*How did VGOs
in lower-income
communities of
color address
COVID-19 and
its effects?*



Section Purpose

Given the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on lower-income communities of color—as well as the importance of social justice concerns in these communities—we identified VGOs serving these communities worthy of closer analysis.

VGOs in this section are those that identified themselves as...

- Serving a community where most of the population was primarily Black, Latino/Hispanic, or Asian.
- Serving a community where the predominant income group was either lower-income or working class.

Insights on Addressing COVID-19 in Lower-Income Communities of Color

- VGOs in lower-income communities of color were more likely to address COVID-19 related issues than other VGOs that responded to the survey.
- Access to vaccination sites and emergency food/clothing were the top COVID-19 related issues addressed by VGOs.
- VGOs that are incorporated 501(c)3 organizations were more likely to consider their pandemic response as 'effective.' The number of volunteers and organization budget amount were not related to how effective VGOs perceived their pandemic response to be.
- Most VGOs that considered their pandemic response effective found it easier to get help when needed.

Analysis of VGO Pandemic Response

(n=113)

77%
(87%)

Number of VGOs who did work
around COVID-19

76%
(86)

Number of VGOs who indicated
the specific COVID-19 related
issues they addressed

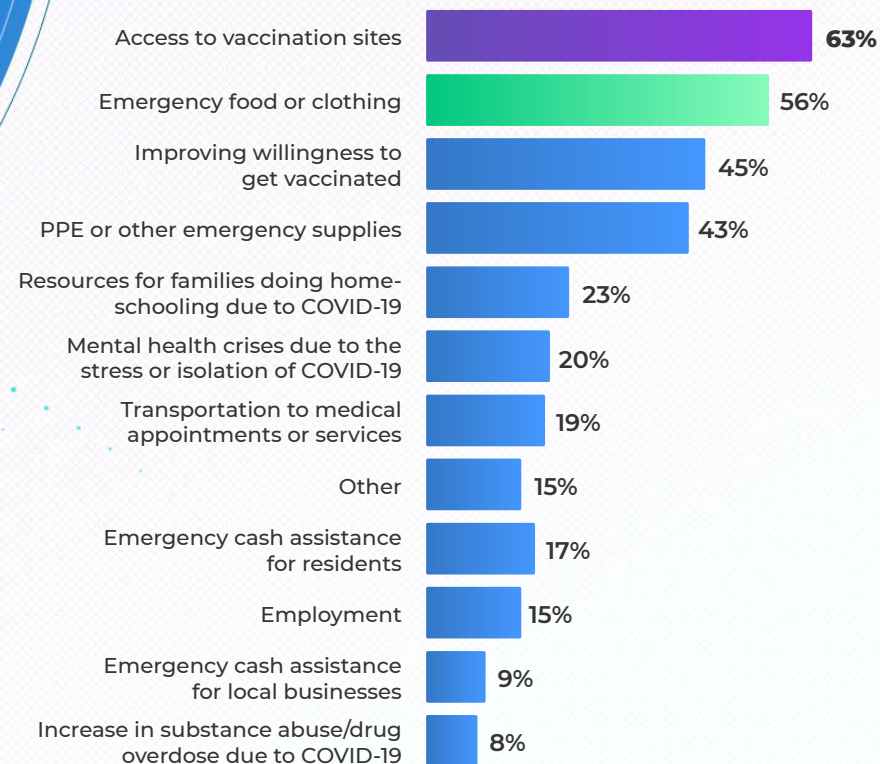
34%
(38)

Number of VGOs who rated the
perceived effectiveness of their
pandemic response

Pandemic Response

VGOs in lower-income communities of color were more likely (77%) to report doing something to address the impact of the pandemic in their community compared to the overall sample (65%).

Access to vaccination sites and emergency food/clothing were the top COVID-19 related issues addressed by VGOs.



n= 86 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Pandemic Response Effectiveness

Perceived effectiveness was not tied to the type of issue being addressed. There were no differences in the pandemic-related issues addressed by VGOs who considered their efforts effective or ineffective.

*Budget amount
and volunteer count
did not make a
statistical difference in
VGO perceived
effectiveness.*

Organization's Annual Budget

Pandemic Response	Observations	Mean	Median
Effective	22	\$10,931.82	\$2,750
Ineffective	12	\$19,375	\$15,000

Note. An independent samples t-test revealed this difference was not statistically significant $t(32)=1.35$, $p=.187$.

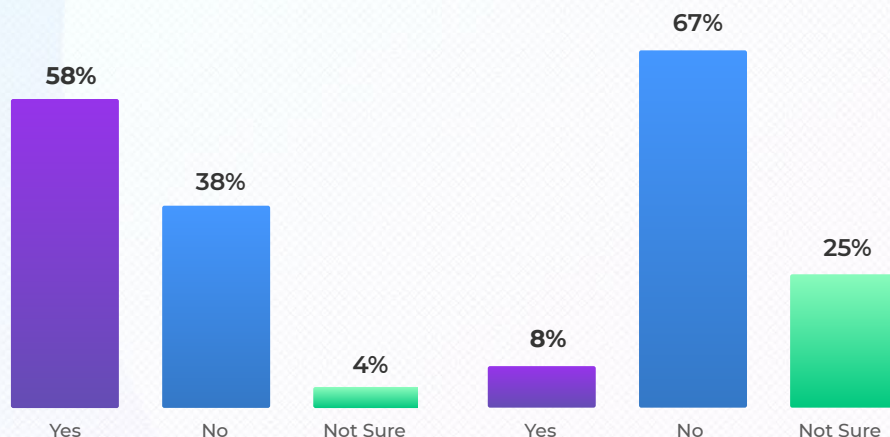
Number of Volunteers

Pandemic Response	Observations	Mean	Median
Effective	26	41.31	22.5
Ineffective	12	34.25	17.5

Note. An independent samples t-test revealed this difference was not statistically significant $t(36)=-.58$, $p=.564$.

VGOs who rated the effectiveness of their response to the pandemic

501(c) or nonprofit status



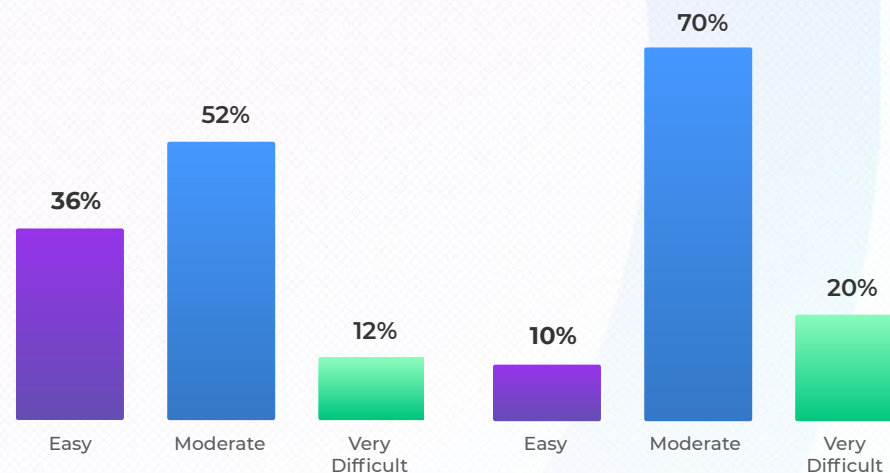
VGOs that consider themselves effective

n=26

VGOs that consider themselves ineffective

n=12

Ease of finding help when needed



VGOs that consider themselves effective

n=25

VGOs that consider themselves ineffective

n=10

The most common type of VGO working in lower-income communities of color with nonprofit status were neighborhood associations (n=24, 21%) and civic associations (n=7, 6%).

*How did VGOs
in lower-income
communities of
color address
social justice
issues?*



Section Purpose

As with the pandemic, lower-income communities of color also disproportionately face the impact of social justice issues. Given this, we identified VGOs serving these communities as worthy of closer analysis.

As with the prior section, VGOs in this section are those that identified themselves as...

- Serving a community where the population was primarily Black, Latino/Hispanic, or Asian.
- Serving a community where the predominant income group was either lower-income or working class.

Insights on VGOs Addressing Social Justice in Lower-Income Communities of Color

- Police-community relations and discrimination or racism in local institutions/systems were the most addressed social justice issue by VGOs in lower-income communities of color.
- While most VGOs in these communities felt their social justice efforts were ineffective, those with 501(c)3 status were more likely to rate their social justice organizing as effective.
- VGOs that felt their social justice organizing was effective also reported that it was easier for them to find support when needed.

Analysis of Social Justice Organizing

(n=113)

27%
(30)

Number of VGOs who did social
justice organizing in 2020

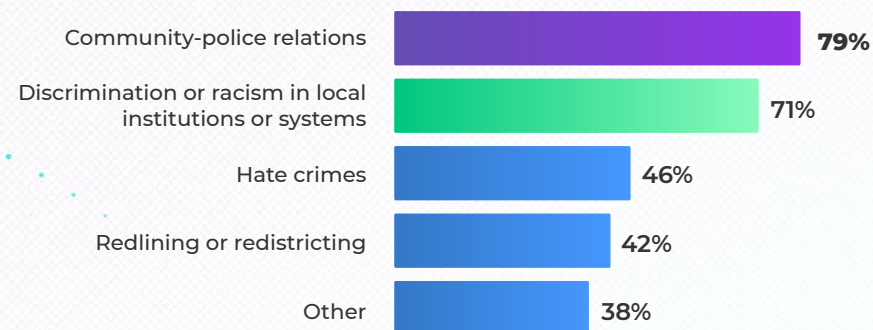
21%
(24)

Number of VGOs who indicated
the specific social justice issues
they addressed

27%
(30)

Number of VGOs who rated the
perceived effectiveness of their
social justice organizing

Community-police relations and systemic racism were the top social justice issue addressed by VGOs.



n= 24 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Social Justice Effectiveness

There were no differences in the issues addressed by VGOs who felt effective or ineffective.

VGOs who felt effective did not operate with significantly higher budgets or more volunteers.

Organization's Annual Budget

Social Justice Organizing	Observations	Mean	Median
Effective	16	\$16,250	\$5,000
Ineffective	8	\$8,375	\$1,000

Note. An independent samples t-test revealed this difference was not statistically significant $t(22)=-1.02, p=.317$.

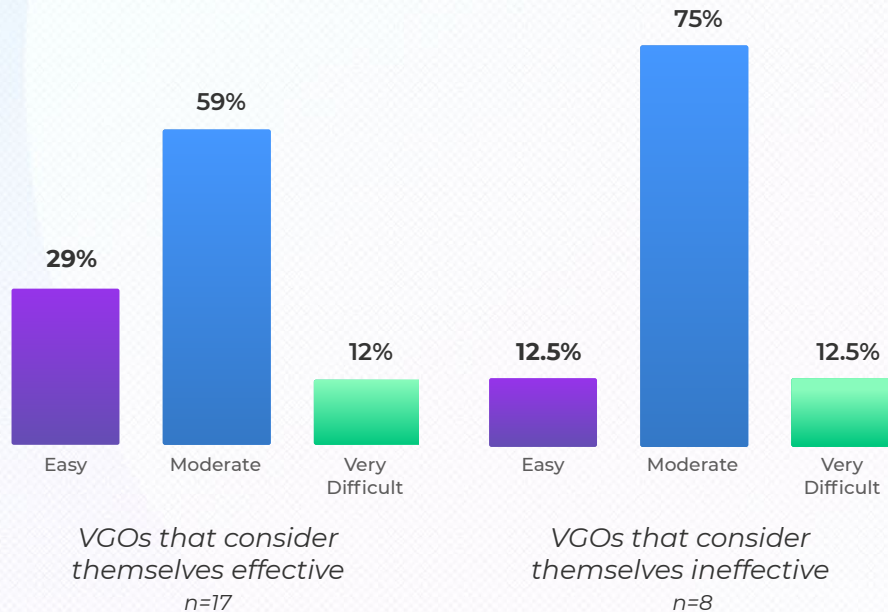
Number of Volunteers

Social Justice Organizing	Observations	Mean	Median
Effective	20	49.5	27.5
Ineffective	10	28.5	11

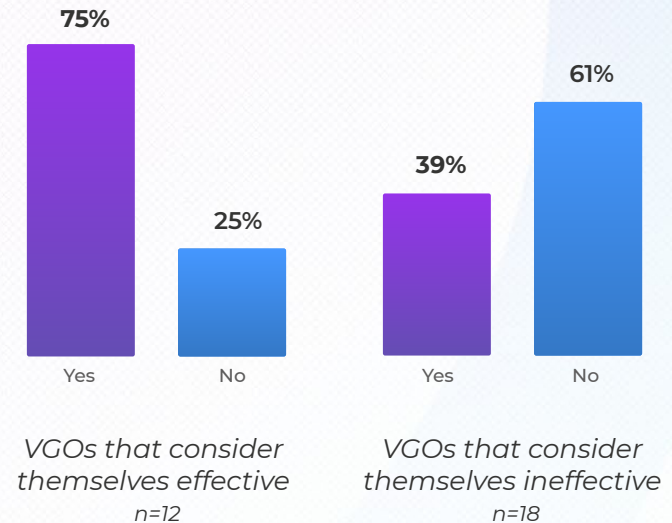
Note. An independent samples t-test revealed this difference was not statistically significant $t(28)=-1.34, p=.192$.

VGOs who rated the effectiveness of their response toward social justice

Ease of finding help when needed



501(c) or nonprofit status



The most common type of VGO working in lower-income communities of color with nonprofit status were neighborhood associations (n=24, 21%) and civic associations (n=7, 6%).

*Capacity Needs
and Solutions in
Lower-Income,
Communities
of Color*



Section Purpose

This section reviews where VGOs in lower-income communities of color go to find support and their preferred methods of receiving support. It also reports what leadership and management supports they would like to receive.

This section only includes responses from VGOs that...

- Report serving communities that have predominantly Black, Latino/Hispanic or Asian residents.
- Report serving communities that are predominantly low income or working class.

The section provides information on how to improve the content and type of support available to build the capacity of VGOs.

Insights on Capacity Needs & Solutions in Lower-Income Communities of Color

VGOs reported that other, local nonprofits and city government were the most common sources of support for them, while local colleges and universities were rarely utilized as sources of support.

In terms of their preferred method for receiving support, VGOs favored interactive online resources and in-person events. They were much less likely to prefer phone consultations or written handbooks/tip sheets.

The most commonly-cited support needs among VGOs in lower-income communities of color were engaging community members, collaborating with other organizations and institutions, and building the capacity for community organizing in addition to assistance on how they can solve neighborhood problems.

What the Literature Tells Us About How VGOs Manage Volunteers



Recruiting and managing volunteers effectively are key aspects of a VGO's internal capacity.

(Collins & Del Rey, 2020; Cooper, Li, & Wen, 2019)

- VGO programs and events are run mostly by volunteers. These volunteers are often temporary; sometimes they participate as part of a service-learning course or school project, or due to work requirements. Thus, challenges arise when VGOs do not have members who are committed to the programming for the long-term.

(Meenar, 2015)

- This also limits their capacity to perform program evaluation, which is one of the key deliverables for many grants – ultimately, hindering their ability to acquire much needed funding.

(Meenar, 2015)

What the Literature Tells Us About How VGOs Collaborate



Collaborating and networking are essential for VGO capacity, efficiency, and perceived impact. However, collaborating with the right community partners to ensure long-term success is a key challenge.

(Anderson, Blair, Shirk, 2018; Collins & Del Rey, 2020; Cooper, Li, & Wen, 2019; Meenar, 2015; Tagai et al., 2018)

- Partnerships between VGOs most often are dependent on successful past collaborations and the trust generated amongst them.

(Meenar, 2015)

- VGOs with more ties to other organizations and local government have greater self-rated effectiveness. This is referred to as associational leverage or coalitional embeddedness, which enhances organizational effectiveness and is the result of having members who belong to or work directly within other organizations.

(Baggetta, 2016; Collins & Del Rey, 2020; Craw, 2017; Scheller & Yerena, 2018)

- Challenges arise when neighborhoods have a high density of VGOs and experience factionalism and “turf battles” over collective resources. When these VGOs lack coordination, it can lead to duplication of effort and competition for influence as well.

(Kwon & Ruef, 2016)

What the Literature Tells Us About Collective Action by VGOs



When community members work together it can produce impacts that change neighborhoods and create lasting solidarity.

(Baggetta, 2016; Crubaugh, 2018)

- The products of community organizing can be used for structural change, such as reversing urban decay or uniting and creating a space for diverse neighborhood residents to form relationships.

(Baggetta, 2016; Crubaugh, 2018)

- Community organizing is also used to connect neighborhoods to government and private resources like funding, while also promoting and sustaining good relationships with city officials.

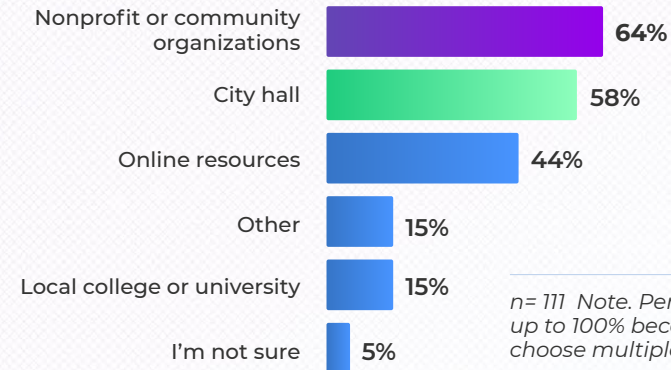
(Crubaugh, 2018; 2020; Bollinger & Hur, 2015; Scheller & Yerena, 2018)

- It also provides a way to maintain active communication with residents through social events and other communications.

(Bollinger & Hur, 2015)

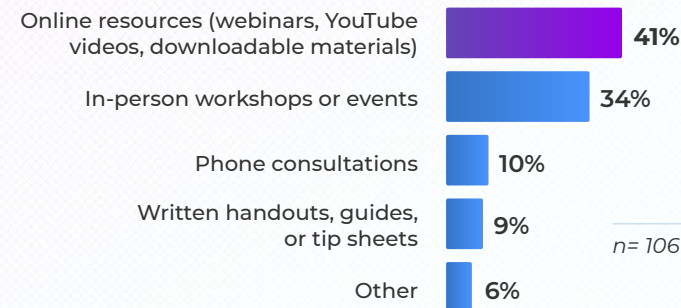
Nonprofits and city hall are primary sources of VGO support, while online resources are their preferred method of support.

Where do you go to find support?



n=111 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Preferred Method of Support



n=106

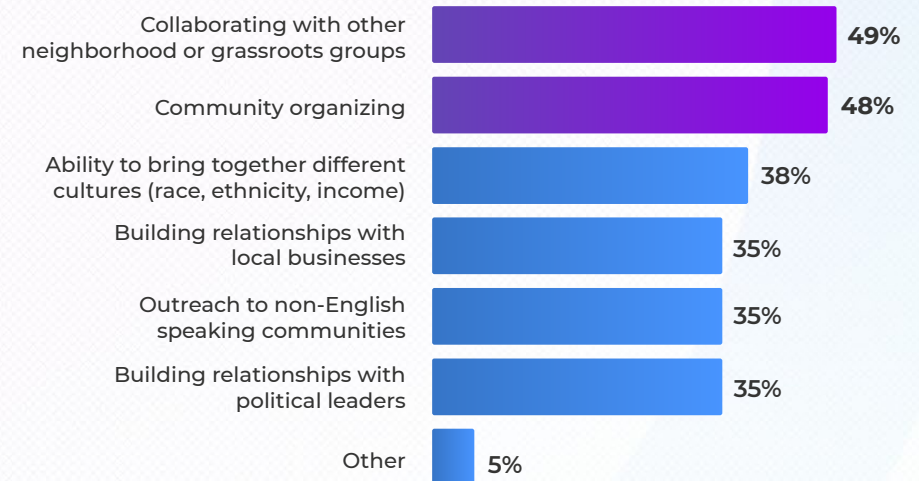
VGO Needs

Recruiting and increasing participation were the greatest leadership/management needs of VGOs.



n= 106 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Collaborating with other grassroots groups and improving community organizing ability were other top needs of VGOs.



n= 104 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Study 2: Intermediary Organizations

NOTE: This is not a representative sample, so results cannot be generalized. However, these findings provide insights into the experiences of intermediary organizations and the communities they serve.

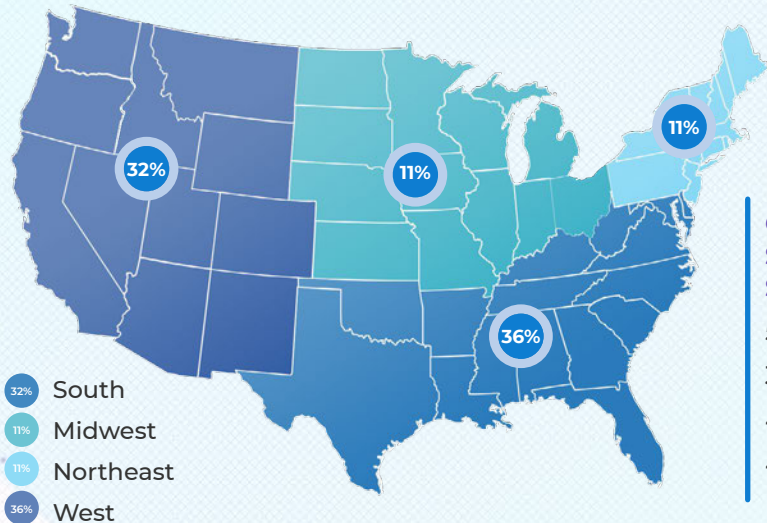
Online Survey Methodology

We conducted internet searches to identify intermediary organizations, with a particular focus on those in the top 30 metropolitan areas in the United States.

An online survey link was distributed via direct email to 248 intermediary organizations. A total of 28 responses were usable for analysis for a response rate of 11%. Five different outreach approaches were used to increase participation.

A complete description of methodology can be found in Appendix 2.

National Distribution of Respondents (n=28)



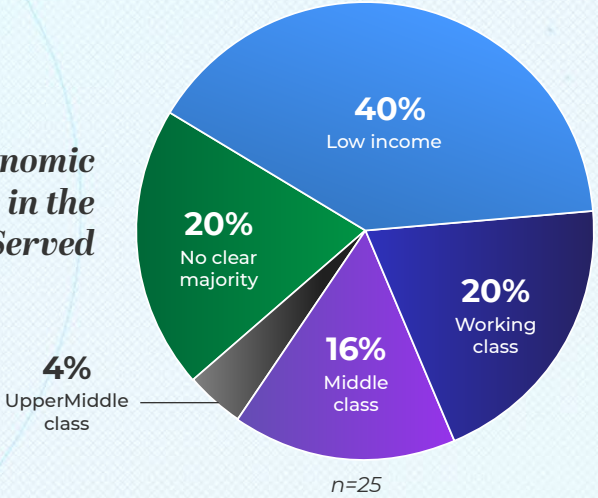
Community Settings in the Sample:

56% Urban
36% Mixed
4% Statewide
4% Rural

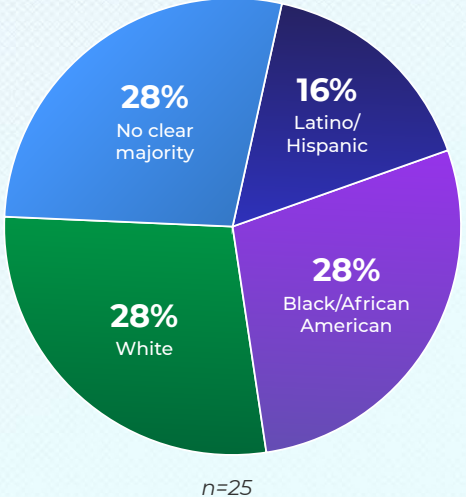


Intermediaries served predominantly lower-income areas, but the primary race of the communities varied.

Primary Economic Status in the Community Served



Primary Race/Ethnicity in the Community Served





*How are
intermediary
organizations
structured and
operated?*

Section Purpose

This section reviews the structure and operations of intermediary organizations that responded to the survey.

Identifying the structure and operations of these organizations is crucial to understanding how they assist VGOs in their communities who respond to the pandemic and social justice concerns.

It can also provide information on how they can expand the supports provided to VGOs.

Insights on VGO Structure and Operations

- Nonprofits were the most common organization home for intermediaries that responded to the survey, followed by local foundations, community coalitions, and local government offices/departments.
- Most intermediaries reported having some full-time staff, with the number of full-time staff ranging from zero to 115. Their median annual budget was just shy of \$400,000, with funding including a mix of foundation grants, donations, local government grants, and private funding.
- Over half of intermediaries (61%) reported that supporting VGOs was the main purpose of their organization.

What the Literature Tells Us About How Intermediaries Are Structured



Most intermediaries and the organizations they serve have business models that rely upon significant philanthropy, often with additional public financing support.

(Butler & Singh, 2015)

- As a result, their underlying business models are susceptible to economic downturn and contractions in social sector funding. Consistent and reliable funding from philanthropy and government is needed to foster success and sustainability.

(Bory & Franks, 2017; Butler & Singh, 2015)

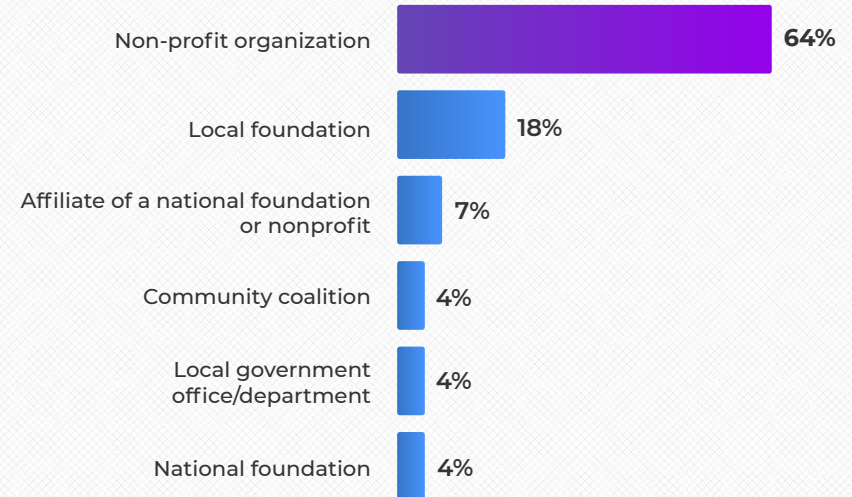
- Many intermediaries lack basic financial control procedures which puts a limit on the number, variety, and complexity of interactions with VGOs.

(Butler & Singh, 2015)

Intermediary Characteristics

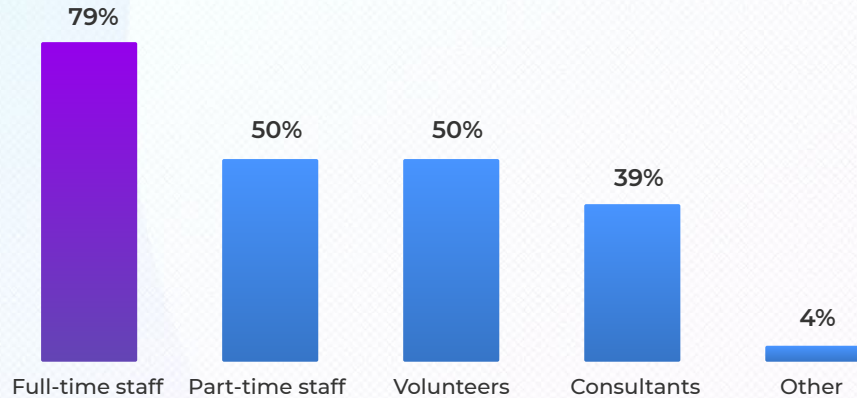
- Number of full-time staff ranged from 0 to 115
- Median annual budget = \$393,763
- 61% reported supporting volunteer-led grassroots organizations was their main purpose as an intermediary
- All had been supporting grassroots efforts prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

Types of Intermediary Organizations (n=28)



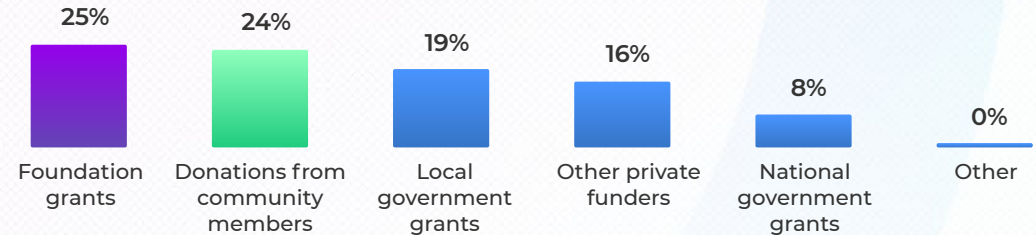
Intermediary Structure and Operations

Most intermediary organizations employed full-time staff.



n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Foundation grants and community donations were the primary sources of funding for intermediaries.



n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.



*How are
intermediary
organizations
helping VGOs?*

Section Purpose

This section reviews the VGOs that intermediary organizations have assisted since the pandemic began. It also provides information on the services that intermediaries provide VGOs in their community.

Insights on Intermediary Services

- Intermediaries primarily served non-profits and place-based organizations like neighborhood councils, coalitions, and civic associations. The number of VGOs served by intermediaries ranges from one to 400 with an average of 48 VGOs served.
- The most common types of technical assistance offered by intermediaries include issue-specific workshops, leadership development, and training on advocacy and coalition building.
- The most common capacity building services offered by intermediaries included creating communities of practice and connecting grassroots leaders to larger institutions. Relatively fewer intermediaries provided grants to VGOs.

What the Literature Tells Us About How Intermediaries Help Communities



Intermediaries can strengthen community capacity through four strategies: (1) enhancing the abilities of individuals, (2) making organizations stronger, (3) building relationships among individuals, and (4) building relationships among organizations.

(Bory & Franks, 2017)

- However, community and other contextual factors are important for fostering success and sustainability, such as the political climate, the local track record of success for building capacity, the systems capacities of the area, and existence of vertical and horizontal collaborations with stakeholders (rather than competition).

(Bory & Franks, 2017; Butler & Singh, 2015)

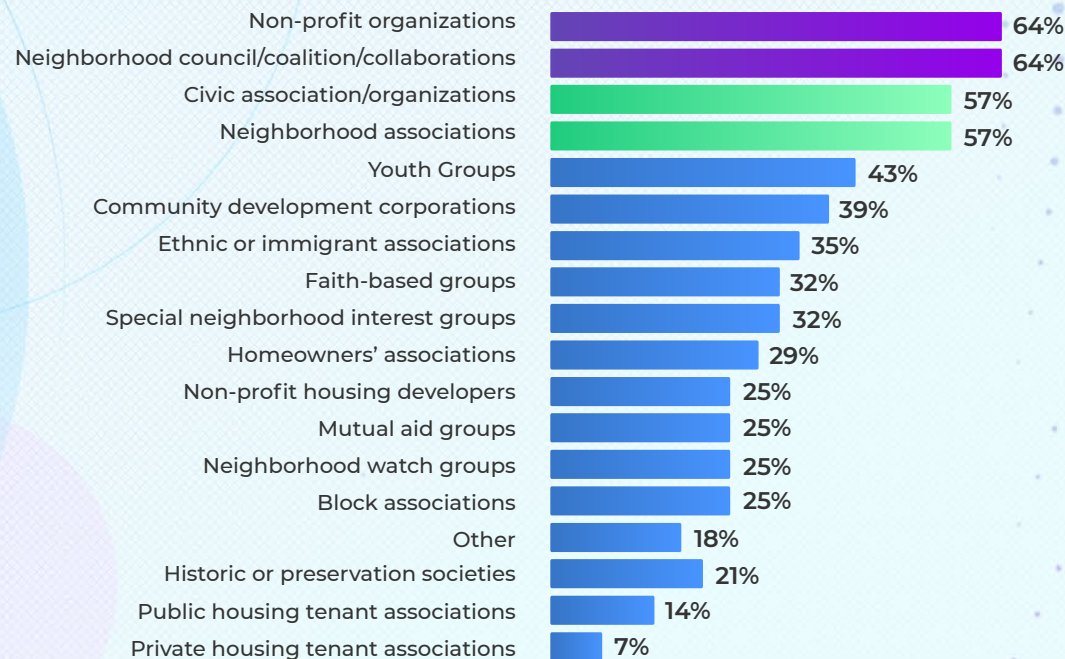
- Many intermediaries lack basic financial control procedures which puts a limit on the number, variety, and complexity of interactions with VGOs.

(Butler & Singh, 2015)

Number of VGOs Helped

The number of VGOs that intermediaries reported offering direct assistance in the last year ranged from 1 to 400, with an average of 48 organizations.

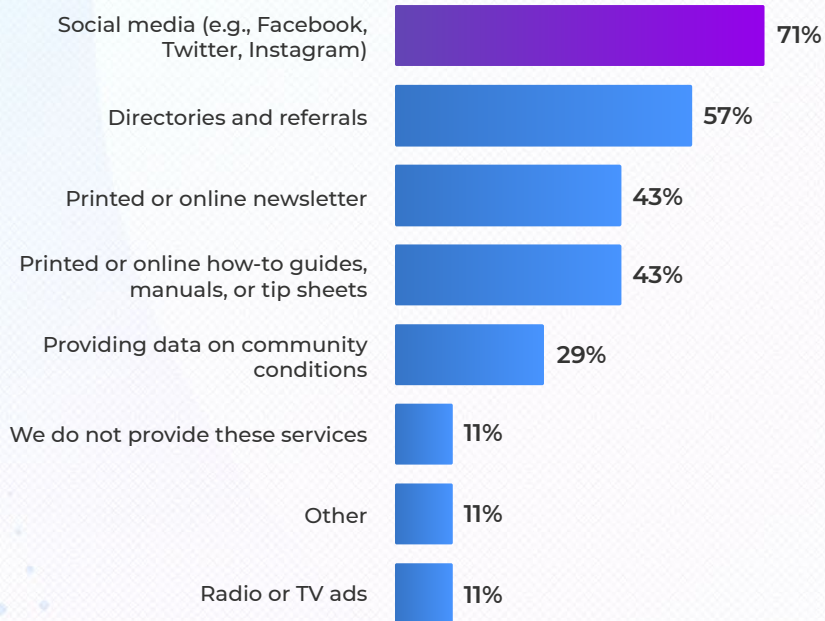
Intermediaries primarily supported nonprofits and neighborhood-based organizations since the start of the pandemic.



n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Intermediary Services

Social media was the most common way of offering information, referrals, and publications to VGOs since March 2020.



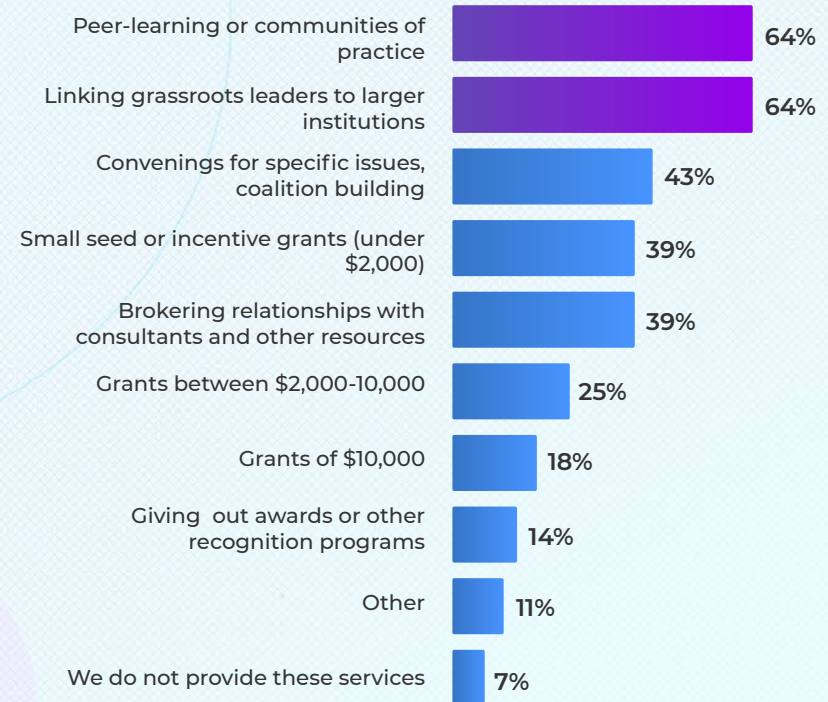
n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Workshops, leadership development, and advocacy training were the top types of technical assistance offered to VGOs since March 2020.



n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Peer-learning and linking grassroots leaders to larger institutions were frequent supports to VGOs since March 2020. Coalition building was offered far less.



n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.



*What
community
issues are being
addressed by
intermediaries
and VGOs?*

Section Purpose

This section reviews the community issues addressed by the VGOs that they serve. It pays special attention to the pandemic- and social justice-related issues that these VGOs are addressing.

Insights on Perceptions of Community Issues

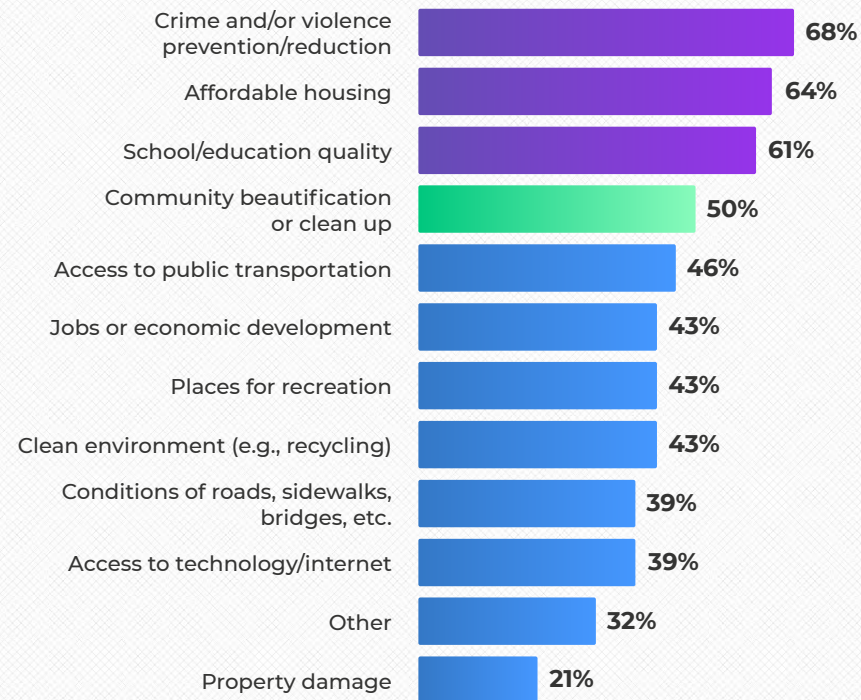
- Intermediaries reported that the VGOs they supported were primarily focusing on crime and affordable housing in their communities. This aligned with earlier findings from the VGO survey.
- Intermediaries reported that the VGOs they supported were focusing on emergency food/ clothing and providing PPE and other supplies as their primary responses to COVID-19. These responses differed slightly from responses to the VGO survey.
- Intermediaries reported that the VGOs they supported were focusing on addressing discrimination and racism in local institutions/ systems in terms of social justice responses. This was also a top response from the VGO survey.

How Intermediaries Responded to the Pandemic

(From Interviews)

- Instead of starting new programming in response to the pandemic, intermediaries often pivoted existing programming to accommodate and address COVID-19 related issues in their communities.
- Federal COVID-19 relief funds allowed some intermediaries to offer new or more flexible grant opportunities.

Affordable housing, crime, and education were the top neighborhood conditions being addressed by VGOs according to intermediaries.

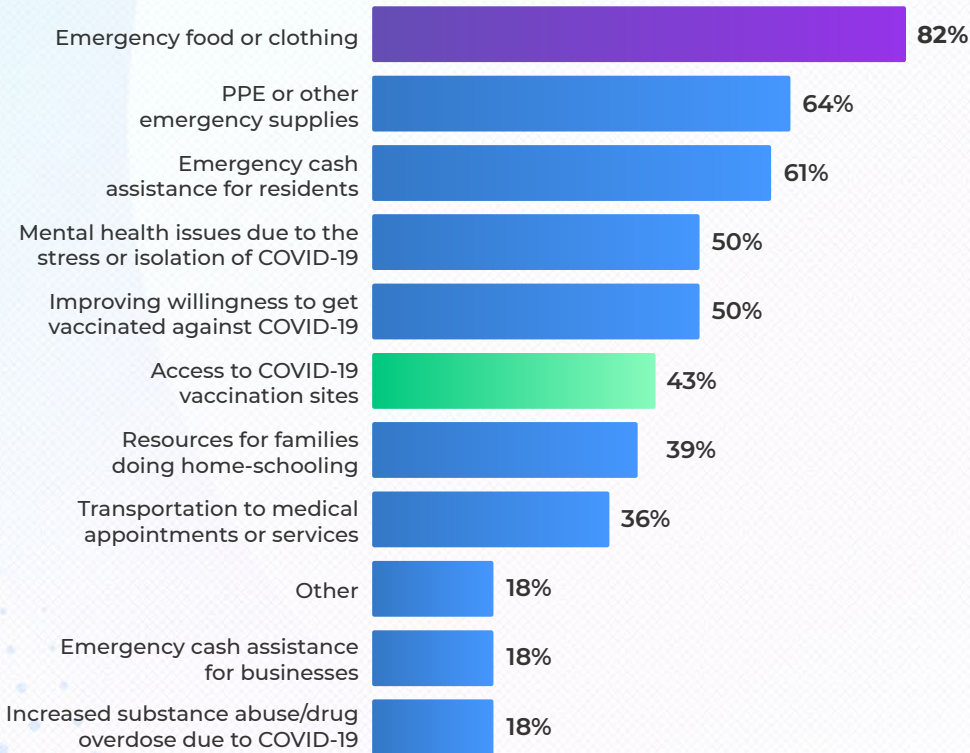


Intermediaries didn't differ much from VGOs who reported crime and safety as the top issues closely followed by housing and/or community beautification. Note: response options were slightly different between the two surveys.

n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Intermediary Perspectives on Community Efforts

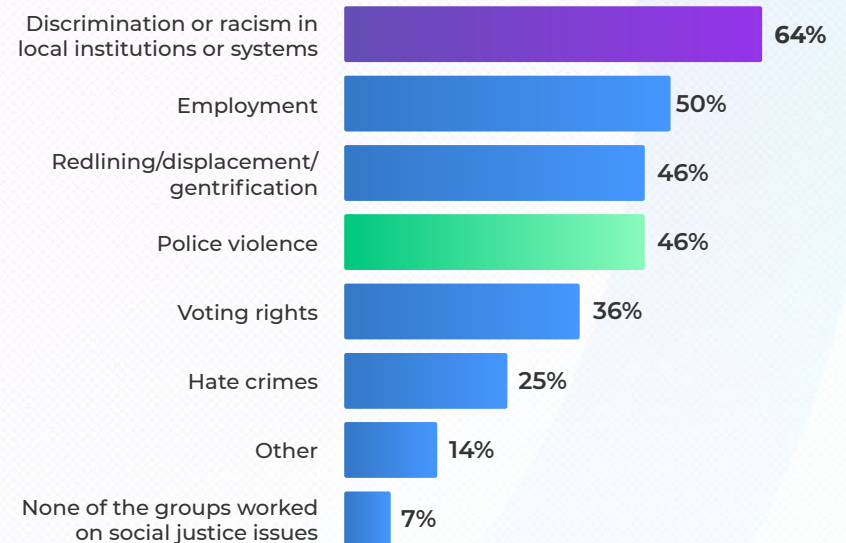
Emergency food/clothing was the top COVID-19 related issue being addressed by VGOs according to intermediaries.



This differs from VGOs who reported access to vaccination sites as the top issue, closely followed by emergency food/clothing.

n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Institutional racism was the top social justice issue being addressed by VGOs according to intermediaries.



This differs from VGOs who reported community-police relations as the top issue, closely followed by system racism. However, response options were slightly different between the two surveys.

n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.



MAKE A CHANGE

*Capacity Needs
and Solutions
for Intermediary
Organizations
and VGOs*

Section Purpose

This section reviews what capacity needs intermediaries face—both for themselves and for the VGOs that they serve. It also notes the VGO supports that intermediaries would like to improve.

Insights on Capacity Needs and Solutions

- Supporting VGO leadership and organizational development along with improved fundraising abilities were the top capacity needs reported by intermediaries.
- Peer learning or community of practice as well as issue-specific workshops and webinars were additional areas that intermediaries wanted to improve or start offering as services.
- Intermediaries needed assistance in overcoming the digital divide and adapting their services to become virtual, especially when in-person contact is not possible.

Intermediary Needs

Leadership or organizational development was the top area to improve in or start offering for intermediaries.

Rank		Percent
1	Leadership or organizational development	43
2	Peer-learning or communities of practice	36
3	Issue-specific workshops/webinars	25

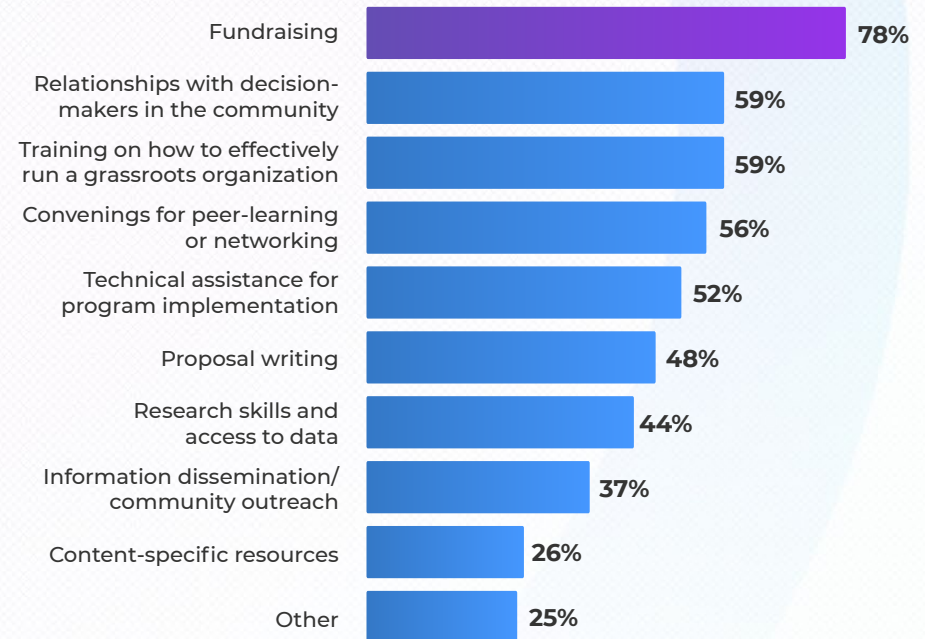
n= 28 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Additional funding for grants was the top resource requested by intermediaries to better serve VGOs.

Rank		Percent
1	Additional funding for grants	74
2	Additional resources for convening nonprofits and grassroots groups	67
3	Additional staff capacity for more grant-making opportunities	59

n= 27 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Fundraising was the top unmet need of VGOs according to intermediaries.



n= 27 Note. Percentages do not add up to 100% because participants could choose multiple responses.

Ongoing Needs for VGOs

(From Interviews)

- Overcoming the digital divide and educating their members on how to access online meetings
- Shifting operations to be virtual
- Finding ways to continue existing programming, while adhering to CDC guidance



Recommended Action Steps

Recommended Action Steps

These are some action steps that can be taken in the near future to increase the impact of VGOs on local conditions that affect the well-being of historically marginalized communities.

Continue to develop the inventory and database of VGOs and intermediaries for research, monitoring, and action.

There continues to be a need for a national database and communication vehicle for VGOs and the intermediaries that support them. An accessible database and communication system to reach these organizations can be valuable in activating and supporting these organizations in times of disaster or opportunity. This database can also be used in research to determine indicators of collective efficacy, sense of community, civic engagement, grassroots democracy, and other public health related indicators. Our effort to get higher levels of participation in our surveys and interviews fell short for several reasons related to the demands and trauma of the pandemic and concurrent social justice crisis. Additional strategies and resources will be needed including engaging a larger array of credible leaders in the field and contacting these organizations at a less stressful time. Public health agencies and other networks could be engaged in the collection of this VGO information and could benefit from access to the database and other information from such a system.

Conduct research on what leads to VGO and intermediary effectiveness in addressing public health, social justice, and other critical issues facing their communities.

Our study clearly found that VGOs who viewed themselves as effective in addressing the pandemic and social justice issues were more likely to report ease in finding assistance than those that considered themselves ineffective. The next phase of research could be to look more specifically at the factors, especially capacities, that contribute to the effectiveness of VGOs. These can include organizational factors, such as leadership development and recruitment, or key components for successful strategies (e.g., community organizing, addressing crime and police relations, etc.) and their implementation. There is some dated and disparate research related to VGO effectiveness. There is far less research available on intermediary effectiveness based on our literature review. A thorough systematic look at either type of organization has not been conducted.

Recommended Action Steps

Generate or compile resources that can be used by the VGOs to address public health and social justice issues.

There are resource materials currently available and used by several intermediaries and other organizations. There is no vehicle that can serve as a repository and distribution site for these types of materials. The development of some of these resources is needed, including written materials, videos, webinars, workshop curricula, and other tools. VGO representatives in our survey reported strong use and appreciation for such materials. Virtual access is especially important during pandemics and promotes greater accessibility generally. This can be a resource for both intermediaries and VGOs as well as other organizations that seek to support and work with these groups.

Convene an active network or hub for intermediaries and other support services for VGOs and related community-led organizations.

The most efficient and sustainable way to increase the overall impact of VGOs on public health and other issues would be to build and expand the capacity of intermediaries. There is no support network for intermediaries outside of larger systems such as the United Way or the Cooperative Extension Services. The recommended first action step would be to create a national hub for peer learning among intermediaries. An institution of significant stature could bring together intermediaries to foster the development of a self-directed network for exchanging tools, developing shared capacity, building resources and opportunities (e, g, webinars and guides), and meeting other mutual needs. For example, different types of communities require different types of assistance, and providing support for the diversity of communities in our cities and other jurisdictions can be resource intensive. This hub could be a vehicle for sharing and making accessible materials to similar communities across the country as well as concurrently developing new materials. Regional and more local networks could also evolve. There appears to be a large void that such a hub could fill to “build the capacity of the capacity builders.” Intermediaries would then be more able to assist VGOs in historically disadvantaged communities in conducting more successful collective actions.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Research in this report and in published scientific research have shown the potential for VGOs to play important roles in large efforts to address public health issues such as crime and violence, housing, poverty, and environmental improvement. VGOs have also been shown to contribute to the social determinants of health such as social support, collective efficacy, and a sense of community. VGOs are being engaged in “Aging in Community” and other services that support persons who are homebound and need care.

VGOs and the intermediaries that support them were found across the country in urban, suburban, and rural areas in substantial number. This report illustrated the range of issues they work on, how they are organized and make decisions, and the difference easier access to support makes to their sense of organizational effectiveness. Over two thirds of the VGOs surveyed worked to address the pandemic, while less than one in five was addressing social justice issues. It is likely that these organizations see the social justice issues and other conditions like economic development as outside the range of what

they can accomplish in the neighborhood. Efforts to engage them in such work would need to demonstrate to the leadership how they can make a difference on these issues given their relatively small size and very local focus.

VGOs in Black and other low-income communities of color play especially important roles in times like this. VGOs in Black and other lower income communities were more likely to work to increase the willingness of people to get vaccinated than VGOs in other communities. Over two thirds of these organizations believe that they were effective in what they were trying to accomplish related to COVID-19 including improving access to vaccination sites.

VGOs serving lower-income communities of color got most of their help from other non-profits/community organizations and city hall. The greatest capacity needs for VGOs serving lower income communities of color are recruiting members and increasing participation, fundraising, and relationship building with local business and nonprofit communities.

We have seen once again that “support matters.” Intermediaries play an important role in helping citizen-led organizations address local problems, hold institutions accountable, and build a culture of health. Diverse types and configurations of intermediary supports for VGOs have been created across the country. Support from an intermediary has been shown in this and other studies to make a difference in VGO effectiveness. Yet, very little support is available to them to improve their impact on VGOs and the communities they serve. Their top capacity needs that were reported are additional funding for seed and other grants, additional resources for convenience, and additional staff capacity.

VGOs are powerful untapped resources that have lost the attention of public health and other systems. This report will hopefully bring to light their enormous potential to do more and the importance to understand and support them along with placing them in the center of equity and other social change efforts not only in crisis, but as an ongoing part of philanthropic and governmental public health and other strategies.

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Appendices

Methodology Study 1 – VGOs Survey

From June–October 2021, Community Science staff conducted web searches for grassroots and intermediary organizations nationwide, prioritizing those in the 30 largest cities (see Exhibit 1 and 2 for a list of cities). Staff searched for small, neighborhood-based, voluntary grassroots organizations frequently described as block, tenant, youth, mutual aid, or neighborhood organizations or associations.

These organizations tend to be informal (unincorporated and without paid staff). For some cities, Community Science staff obtained a list of organizations from a centralized website (i.e., a city’s Neighborhood Services Department website that listed neighborhood organizations throughout the city). Ultimately, we identified 4,080 organizations nationwide.

Concurrently, Community Science staff developed an online survey in Qualtrics that queried organizational structure, communication strategies, operations and focus areas, and both accessed and needed supports. The survey also included several ‘screening’ questions to ensure that the organization met our definition of grassroots organization. These included:

- Being run by a resident who lives in the community served by the organization
- Having no more than one full-time paid staff person
- Having an annual budget below \$100,000

Prior to deploying the survey, we recruited several former non-profit staff members to pilot test the survey for feedback.

On October 6, 2021, we sent an email invitation to 4,080 grassroots organizations to complete the survey. Of those emails, 3,921 were successfully delivered (the remainder bounced due to the email no longer being active). Participants had until November 12, 2021 to complete the survey, and we sent several reminder emails to those who had not done so. Ultimately, 725 grassroots organizations began the survey and 610 completed the survey. However, only 427 survey responses were usable due to the screening questions noted above, resulting in a survey response rate of 11%. A total of 242 respondents opted-in to receiving a \$10 gift card as an incentive for participation.

The regional break-down of responses to the grassroots survey is as follows:

Region	Number of Invitations Sent	Number of Responses	Response Rate
South	1436	131	9%
Northeast	469	50	11%
Midwest	920	94	10%
West	1096	141	13%
Total	3921	416*	-

**Zip code information was not reported for 11 responses used in analyses.*

Participant Demographics for Study 1

Average age

55
Years

Gender (n=364)

36%
Men

1%
Non-binary

59%
Women

Income (n=361)

5%
Low income

20%
Working class

43%
Middle class

33%
Upper middle class

Race/Ethnicity (n=360)

4%
Asian

21%
Black/African American

7%
Latino/Hispanic

2%
Middle Eastern/
North African

2%
Native American/
Alaskan Native

1%
Pacific Islander/
Native Hawaiian

64%
White

Methodology Study 2 – Intermediaries Study

For the intermediary search, Community Science staff looked for organizations that support community organizing or grassroots efforts through grant-making, technical assistance, convenings, or other types of support. Examples of these types of organization include local affiliates of the United Way or LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation), municipal Neighborhood Service Departments, community foundations, and the like.

Like the VGO survey, Community Science staff also developed and tested a survey of intermediary organizations that queried organizational structure, focus area, supports offered to grassroots organizations, and what they perceive as grassroots organizations' strengths and weaknesses. The only screening question on this survey was whether the organization supported local, grassroots organizations in their community.

Our web search identified 250 intermediary organizations across the U.S. who were invited to complete the intermediary survey on October 14, 2021. Only three emails were undeliverable. Organizations had until November 12th to complete the survey. By that time, 43 organizations had completed the survey; however, only 28 organizations met the screening criteria and were included in the analysis.

The regional break-down of responses to the intermediary survey is as follows:

Region	Number of Invitations Sent	Number of Responses	Response Rate
South	87	10	11%
Northeast	44	3	7%
Midwest	46	3	7%
West	70	9	13%
Total	247	25*	-

**Three intermediaries included in analyses did not indicate their location.*

Given the relatively smaller number of intermediary organizations, our staff also reached out to organizations that did not complete the survey to participate in a short interview (45–60 minutes). The goal of this interview was to provide a more in-depth understanding of, and additional context to, how intermediaries have assisted grassroots groups through the pandemic and how grassroots organizations can be better prepared to respond to future crises.

Exhibit 1. Distribution of Study 1 Sample Across Top 30 Cities

City/Metropolitan area	Participants	Percent
Austin , TX	10	4%
Baltimore , MD	16	6%
Boston, MA	5	2%
Charlotte , NC	17	6%
Chicago, IL	8	3%
Columbus , OH	0	0%
Dallas , TX	1	0.4%
Denver, CO	18	7%
Detroit, MI	7	3%
El Paso, TX	1	0.4%
Fort Worth, TX	11	4%
Houston, TX	19	7%
Indianapolis, IN	28	10%
Jacksonville, FL	0	0%
Las Vegas , NV	0	0%
Los Angeles, CA	16	6%
Louisville, KY	1	0.4%
Memphis, TN	2	1%
Nashville, TN	4	1%
New York City, NY	1	0.4%
Oklahoma City, OK	0	0%
Philadelphia, PA	32	12%
Phoenix, AZ	20	7%
Portland, OR	20	7%
San Antonio, TX	16	6%
San Diego, CA	0	0%
San Francisco, CA	12	4%
San Jose, CA	0	0%
Seattle, WA	4	1%
Washington, D.C.	2	1%
Total	271	100%

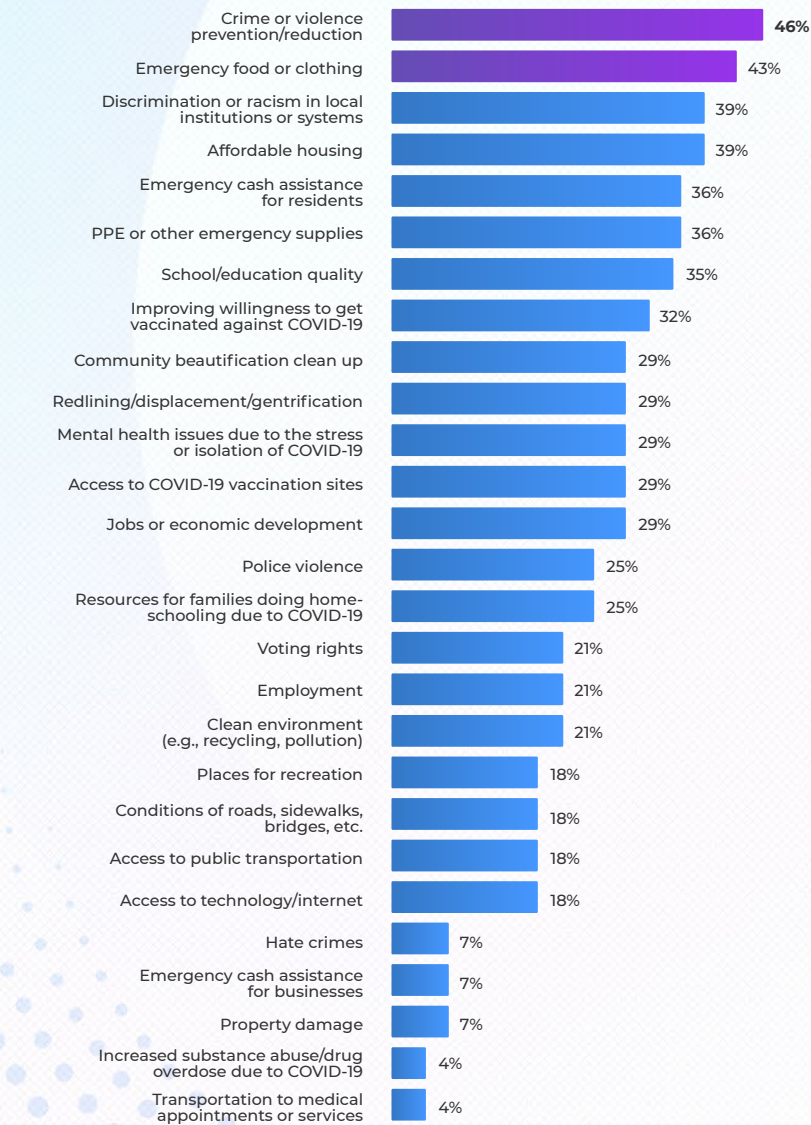
Note. 63% of the sample were from the top 30 cities.

Exhibit 2. Distribution of Study 2 Sample Across Top 30 Cities

City/Metropolitan area	Participants	Percent
Austin , TX	0	0%
Baltimore , MD	1	7%
Boston, MA	0	0%
Charlotte , NC	0	0%
Chicago, IL	1	7%
Columbus , OH	0	0%
Dallas , TX	1	7%
Denver, CO	0	0%
Detroit, MI	0	0%
El Paso, TX	0	0%
Fort Worth, TX	0	0%
Houston, TX	0	0%
Indianapolis, IN	0	0%
Jacksonville, FL	0	0%
Las Vegas , NV	0	0%
Los Angeles, CA	2	14%
Louisville, KY	0	0%
Memphis, TN	0	0%
Nashville, TN	2	14%
New York City, NY	1	7%
Oklahoma City, OK	1	7%
Philadelphia, PA	1	7%
Phoenix, AZ	0	0%
Portland, OR	4	29%
San Antonio, TX	0	0%
San Diego, CA	0	0%
San Francisco, CA	0	0%
San Jose, CA	0	0%
Seattle, WA	0	0%
Washington, D.C.	0	0%
Total	14	100%

Note. 50% of the sample were from the top 30 cities.

Intermediary Survey: What issues have been your organization's main priorities since March 2020?



Intermediary Survey: Please indicate if your organization started offering this type of assistance in response to the pandemic—in other words, you did not provide it before March 2020.

Started assistance during pandemic	Count	Percent	Percent of cases
Directories and referrals	2	5%	5%
Printed or online how-to guides, manuals, or tip sheets	2	5%	5%
Printed or online newsletter	1	2%	2%
Special publications	0	0%	0%
Radio or TV ads	0	0%	0%
Providing data on community conditions	1	2%	2%
Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	1	2%	2%
Other	1	2%	2%
Leadership or organizational development	0	0%	0%
Issue-specific workshops/webinars	2	5%	5%
Research & evaluation training or consultation	1	2%	2%
Training on advocacy, community organizing, or coalition building	1	2%	2%
Fundraising and proposal writing	1	2%	2%
Other	1	2%	2%
Conferences or networking events	0	0%	0%
Convenings for specific issues, coalition building	1	2%	2%
Linking grassroots leaders to larger institutions including government, nonprofits, business, etc.	2	5%	5%
Brokering relationships with consultants and other resources to assist grassroots groups	0	0%	0%
Giving out awards or other recognition programs	0	0%	0%
Small seed or incentive grants (under \$2,000)	2	5%	5%
Grants between \$2,000-10,000	2	5%	5%
Grants over \$10,000	1	2%	2%
Peer-learning or communities of practice	3	7%	7%
Other	1	2%	2%
None of the above – we provided all of these services prior to March 2020 as well	17	40%	40%

Total 43 100% 158%

Intermediary Survey:
In general, how successful
has your organization
been at changing or
improving each of the
following since March
2020?

N=28		Frequency (%)						Mean
		Not at all (1)	A little (2)	Somewhat (3)	Very (4)	Not a goal of my organization	Did not answer	
1.	City or local government decisions or policies	2 (7%)	4 (14%)	11 (39%)	3 (11%)	7 (25%)	1 (4%)	3.33
2.	Community-police relations	2 (7%)	8 (29%)	8 (29%)	1 (4%)	8 (29%)	1 (4%)	3.19
3.	Access to COVID-19 vaccines	2 (7%)	3 (11%)	7 (25%)	6 (21%)	9 (32%)	1 (4%)	3.63
4.	People's willingness to get the COVID-19 vaccine	1 (4%)	7 (25%)	7 (25%)	3 (11%)	9 (32%)	1 (4%)	3.44
5.	Availability of businesses and essential services (grocery stores, hospitals, schools, banks)	4 (14%)	3 (11%)	11 (39%)	2 (7%)	7 (25%)	1 (4%)	3.19
6.	Financial resources for residents (benefit programs, subsidies, grants)	2 (7%)	5 (18%)	6 (21%)	3 (11%)	11 (39%)	1 (4%)	3.59
7.	Community safety	3 (11%)	5 (18%)	13 (46%)	1 (4%)	5 (18%)	1 (4%)	3.00
8.	Community physical appearance (cleanliness, conditions)	2 (7%)	5 (18%)	7 (25%)	6 (21%)	7 (25%)	1 (4%)	3.41
9.	Environmental issues	3 (11%)	8 (29%)	8 (29%)	2 (7%)	6 (21%)	1 (4%)	3.00
10.	Housing options or conditions	6 (21%)	5 (18%)	10 (36%)	3 (11%)	3 (11%)	1 (4%)	2.70
11.	Sense of community among residents	1 (4%)	2 (7%)	13 (46%)	8 (29%)	3 (11%)	1 (4%)	3.37
12.	Support for local businesses	2 (7%)	7 (25%)	8 (29%)	2 (7%)	8 (29%)	1 (4%)	3.26
13.	Crime or violence	3 (11%)	8 (29%)	7 (25%)	2 (7%)	7 (25%)	1 (4%)	3.07
14.	Public image of neighborhood	2 (7%)	4 (14%)	7 (25%)	8 (29%)	6 (21%)	1 (4%)	3.44
15.	Educate residents on public health issues in their community	1 (4%)	2 (7%)	10 (36%)	4 (14%)	10 (36%)	1 (4%)	3.74
16.	Emergency food and materials	2 (7%)	1 (4%)	10 (36%)	7 (25%)	7(25%)	1 (4%)	3.59