A Report from the View of those Aspiring to be Allies on the Leadership Experiences of Women of Color, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Individuals of Color, Individuals with Disabilities, Native Women, Aspiring Allies, Immigrant Women, Working in the Anti-Violence Movement in Four States
This report is the pre-assessment study of the leadership of underrepresented groups in the field of domestic violence in the states that participated in the 1st Round of the WOCN/FVPSA Expanding Leadership Opportunities for Underrepresented Populations project. These states include Vermont, Minnesota, New Jersey and Virginia, and was conducted under the direction of the Women of Color Network and Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

The project is led by Tonya Lovelace, Senior Director of the Women of Color Network, and Sumayya Coleman is the lead consultant on the project.

Department of Health and Human Services
Family and Youth Services Bureau
Division of Family Violence Prevention and Services

Marylouise Kelley, Director
Edna James, Program Specialist
Shena Williams, Program Specialist

Project State Leads

Minnesota
Melani Suarez, Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women Program Manager

New Jersey
Rose A. Williams, MSW, New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women Social Justice Administrator

Vermont
Rocio Mora, Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence Training and Technical Assistance Specialist

Virginia
Quillin Drew, Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance Training Institute Manager

Women of Color Network Staff, a project of the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence
Tonya Lovelace, WOCN Senior Director
Rebecca Balog, WOCN Project Manager
Shasme Jackson, WOCN Project Assistant

Women of Color Network
The mission of the Women of Color Network (WOCN) is to provide and enhance leadership capacity and resources that promote the activities of women of color advocates and activists within the Sovereign Nations, the United States and U.S. Territories to address the elimination of violence against women and families.

WOCN has broadened its mission beyond the fields of domestic violence and sexual assault in order to address a broad range of violence affecting communities of color such as human trafficking and police brutality, and to refocus its theoretical lens to more readily examine a global context of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression that intersect with violence against women of color.

WOCN Advisory Members
Alice Lynch, Advisory Chair
C. Hermanex
Cathy Maxfield-Coleman
Ho-Thanh Nguyen
Rose Pulliam
Sumayya Coleman, Share Time Wisely Consulting Services

This project is funded under a grant to the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence and is made possible through cooperative grant number #90EV0402 by the Family Violence Prevention and Services Program (FVPSA), U.S. Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
WOCN Expanding Leadership Opportunities within the Domestic Violence Field for Members of Underrepresented Groups

**Purpose**
The purpose of this project is to extend and strengthen ongoing national outreach efforts to serve all victims of domestic violence by enhancing, supporting, promoting and increasing the presence of leaders of underrepresented groups and promising Aspiring Allies within DV programs and state coalitions.

**Initiative Overview**
Women of Color Network will join with project partners and the FVPSA Office to develop the first federally-funded leadership academy within the domestic violence field. Four collaborative partners representing diverse communities, including immigrant, Tribal and LGBT communities, will lend their expertise to the project.

Over the next five years, two 18-month Leadership Academies will be offered in two rounds of states. Academies will consist of face-to-face training, webinars, social networking, a fundraising activity and outreach to state & local programs, Tribes and FVPSA State Administrators. Additional features of the project include an 18-month Mentor Project and an 18-month Aspiring Ally Project.

**First Round States**
Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women
New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women
Vermont Network to End Sexual and Domestic Violence
Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance

**Second Round States**
Arizona Coalition Against Domestic Violence
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
Jane Doe Inc.
The Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence
Oregon Coalition Against Domestic Violence
West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence

**Project Partners**
National Immigrant Women’s Advocacy Project
Native Wellness Institute
algo, a statewide queer people of color organization
New York City Anti-Violence Program
Project Consultants
University of Colorado, Center on Domestic Violence
Share Time Wisely Consulting Services
Clarina Howard Nichols Center
Dr. Nawal Ammar, University of Toronto
Vermont Center for Independent Living
Keri Darling, Deaf Vermonters;

NRCDV Capacity Building and Education Team
Women of Color Policy Network, NY University (former)
Holmes Consulting (former)

**Project Advisors**
Frontline Consulting (faith-based)
California Coalition Against Sexual Assault/Prevent
Connect
A CALL TO MEN
National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health
National Clearinghouse on Abuse in Later Life
Battered Women’s Justice Project
National Clearinghouse for the Defense of Battered Women
National Network to End Domestic Violence
Women of Color Network Advisors

**Culturally Specific Advisors**
Asian Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence
Casa de Esperanza, National Latin@ Network
Institute on Domestic Violence in the African American Community
National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center
• INTRODUCTION

This report, a part of the Gaining Ground, Breaking Through report of the Women of Color Network focuses on the experiences of Aspiring Allies working in the anti-violence field in four states. Aspiring Allies are an essential part of building and sustaining an inclusive and representative anti-violence movement. Within organizations Aspiring Allies can provide invaluable support to members from underrepresented groups; identify ways to collaborate and work across communities; and work with other Aspiring Allies to counter the impact of discrimination within organizations and the field. Through a field survey and focus groups, this report provides a snapshot of more than 100 self-identified Aspiring Allies working in the states of Minnesota, Virginia, New Jersey and Vermont.

• WHAT IS AN ASPIRING ALLY?

Aspiring Allies are individuals who identify as white, male, heterosexual, without disability, hearing, non-immigrant or are otherwise a part of a group considered the majority, mainstream or a part of the dominant culture. For example, white non-Hispanic women working in the anti-violence field alongside people of color to address structural and institutional discrimination would be considered Aspiring Allies.

In our six-month study, we conducted a focus group with Aspiring Allies to better understand their experiences working in the anti-violence field and how they individually and collectively have been able to support racial and ethnic minority women and others from underrepresented groups in their organizations.

• IDENTIFYING AS AN ASPIRING ALLY

Aspiring Allies are essential part of building and sustaining an inclusive and representative anti-violence movement. Within organizations, Aspiring Allies can provide support to members from underrepresented groups, identify ways to collaborate and partner across difference and work with other Aspiring Allies to institutionalize strategies to counter racism, homophobia, sexism, transphobia and other forms of discrimination within organizations.

Being an Aspiring Ally does not mean having all of the issues and challenges facing the field or organizations figured out, but entails a willingness to work collectively with marginalized groups and individuals to create a safer, more inclusive field. The term “Aspiring Ally” is meant to further identify someone who takes on the lifelong, daily process of working toward acknowledging their privilege and using it to provide support to underrepresented communities.

Individuals surveyed reported being an Aspiring Ally within the field, Aspiring Allies to people of color as well as immigrant survivors and coworkers. Three percent of the respondents identified did not have experience serving as an Aspiring Ally to people with disabilities, individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, and LGBTQ identified individuals. And fewer than 10 percent of those surveyed did not know what it meant to be an Aspiring Ally to either individuals under 35 or those who lacked education or training.
• THE ROLE OF WHITE PRIVILEGE IN THE ANTI-VIOLENCE MOVEMENT

The recognition of privilege and access to opportunities and resources as result of membership in the dominant culture was a major theme for participants of the Aspiring Allies focus group. Individuals spoke candidly and honestly about the role of white privilege within their organizations and how many of them struggled with being able to speak to their colleagues about issues related to race, privilege or oppression.

Many Aspiring Allies who participated in the study readily acknowledged their privilege based on their race, but most were unsure how to apply that knowledge and understanding to their work and within their organization.

“\[\text{I think one of the barriers that I personally have struggled with, and I think a number of the organizations that I've worked professionally in, and personally in—is that it's really easy to live with your privilege in most parts of the state and not be challenged on it.}^{\text{1}}\]

“\[\text{But then, also, another challenge that I've had in being an Aspiring Ally . . . is figuring out how to get everybody on board...a lot of the white folks I'm working with . . . it becomes really painful to even dive into the places that like—yeah, but to really do this means recognizing that pain, and acknowledging white privilege.}^{\text{2}}\]

• WORKING WITH MEMBERS OF UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

Participants of the Aspiring Allies groups spoke candidly about their organization’s struggle with integrating members of underrepresented groups within the institution. Many also spoke about not feeling comfortable speaking up on the behalf of individuals who are being mistreated or discriminated against in the organization because of the fear of backlash.

Connectedly, participants also talked about the weight of being the only white identified person within the organization willing to take on issues related to race, oppression and discrimination and how difficult it is to challenge or question the organizational culture or practices.

A related theme that emerged related to working with members of underrepresented groups is that individuals who identify as Aspiring Allies are often the trusted confidants of individuals from underrepresented groups who experience discrimination and mistreatment within organizations.

In addition to a thorough understanding of institutional and structural discrimination and oppression, Aspiring Allies need concrete skills, techniques and tools to enable them to support members of underrepresented groups within organiza-
tions and in the broader community.

**DEMOGRAPHICS**

- **RACIAL AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND**

Of the respondents who completed the Aspiring Allies survey across the four states, 85 percent identified as white. Seven percent identified as Latino, two percent identified as Black, African American, Middle Eastern, Native American or multi-racial.

- **AGE**

Nearly 30 percent of the Aspiring Allies surveyed were between the ages of 25-35 and more than half (52 percent) were over 46, none of the individuals surveyed reported being under 25 and only 20 percent were between the ages of 36-45.
• GENDER IDENTITY

Nearly all of the individuals surveyed were female (96 percent), only 2 percent of the survey participants identified as male or gender non-conforming.

![Figure 4. Allies, Gender Identity](image)

- Female
- Male
- Gender Non-Conforming

• EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Nearly 60 percent of the Aspiring Allies surveyed had completed a graduate degree and one-third had completed a bachelor’s degree, fewer than three percent had completed high school or an equivalent degree.

![Figure 5. Allies, Educational Attainment](image)

- High School or Equivalent
- Some College
- Associate’s Degree
- Bachelor’s Degree
- Graduate Degree
• LOCATION

Thirty percent of the Aspiring Allies who participated in the survey were located in Minnesota and nearly one-quarter were located in New Jersey or Vermont. Approximately 20 percent were located in the state of Virginia.

Employment Status

There was far less diversity in terms of employment status for those individuals who completed the Aspiring Allies survey as compared to the advocate survey. Ninety-five percent of the Aspiring Allies reported they were full-time employees of their organizations and only two percent reported being independent consultants, volunteers, or interns. No one reported being employed part-time or as a seasonal employee or member of the board.
Organizational Position

Nearly one-quarter of the Aspiring Allies surveyed indicated that they were the executive directors of their organization while more than 15 percent reported they were employed as managers or program directors. Just under 10 percent reported that they were employed as deputy director and nearly 15 percent reported that they worked in the capacity of coordinator. Nearly 20 percent of respondents reported that they worked as case managers and only two percent of those surveyed worked as fundraising directors or executive assistants.

• LENGTH OF TIME IN FIELD

Nearly 30 percent of those who completed the Aspiring Allies survey have been working in the field for more than 10 years, an equal percentage have been in the field for only 4-6 years, and one-quarter of respondents have been in the field for only 1-3 years.
• SUPPORT FOR LEADERSHIP & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The respondents of the allies survey were more likely to feel that everyone in their organization is equally supported in terms of opportunities for leadership and professional development, fewer than one-third of the survey participants felt that some were more supported than others within their organizations. When asked why they felt that some were more supported than others, the survey participants identified a number of reasons including lack of education or experience, favoritism, disinterest in professional and leadership development, as well as race and age.

![Figure 10. Level of Support for Leadership and Professional Development](image)

Aspiring Allies were also asked if they discuss these inequities in support for coworkers with anyone and an overwhelming majority (39 percent) indicated that they often bring it up in their staff meetings and approximately 15 percent discuss the issue with their executive director. Nearly 20 percent of Aspiring Allies reported discussing the issue with their friends or family and slightly less than 10 percent do not talk to anyone about the inequity in support for coworkers.

• SUPPORT TO DISCUSS ISSUES

In a related battery of questions, Aspiring Allies were asked about the level of support they receive if they were to speak out on issues such as racism, homophobia or transphobia, ageism, abilityism or bias towards immigrants. Close to 70 percent of all Aspiring Allies felt that speaking up on these various issues leads to helpful dialogue. Fewer than 20 percent of the survey participants felt that bringing the issues up resulted in no dialogue and less than 10 percent felt than bringing the issues up resulted in tension or discomfort.

![Figure 11. Level of Support to Discuss Issues](image)
• SPACES WHERE BUILDING ASPIRING ALLY SKILLS TAKE PLACE

In the field survey, Aspiring Allies were also asked to identify spaces in which Aspiring Ally skill development can occur. Nearly 60 percent of the Aspiring Allies indicated that skill development takes place either in staff meetings, retreats, or in informal social groups and 45 percent of survey participants identified that these skills are developed during caucuses. A small percentage (12.5 percent) identified that there are no spaces where building Aspiring Ally skills take place within their organizations.

Additionally, more than 40 percent of the Aspiring Allies who participated in the survey indicated that there was a group within their organizations dedicated to building Aspiring Ally skills and nearly 60 percent of Aspiring Allies participate in this group. For those individuals who indicated that such a group did not exist within their organization, they were asked if they felt a need for such a group to exist within their organizations and more than 60 percent responded affirmatively and of those, 70 percent indicated they would participate in such a group if it existed in their organization.

For Conclusions and Recommendations for Aspiring Allies and other key stakeholders, please see page 58 of the Gaining Ground Report, Volume 1
• WORKING DEFINITIONS

There are a variety of different ways to define or talk about race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other markers of difference. For the purposes of this report, we will employ the definitions below.

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<td><strong>Ability</strong></td>
<td>The quality or state of being able to have or having the power to perform tasks physically, mentally or legally.</td>
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<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>The time of life at which some particular qualification, power, or capacity arises or rests.</td>
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<td><strong>Class</strong></td>
<td>Position in economy with regards to the distribution of wealth and resources, income and poverty, and the distribution of power and authority in the workforce.</td>
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<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>Belonging to or deriving from the cultural, racial, religious, language or beliefs of a particular group of people or country.</td>
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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>Culturally and socially constructed relationships between men and women</td>
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<td><strong>Nationality</strong></td>
<td>The quality or membership in a particular nation, whether original or acquired.</td>
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<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td>Ancestry and selected physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture and eye shape.</td>
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<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Biological and anatomical characteristics attributed to male and females</td>
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<td><strong>Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Sex of partners in emotional-sexual relationships</td>
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<td><strong>Gender Identity</strong></td>
<td>Gender identity can be defined as a person’s inner sense of being male or female, usually developed during early childhood as a result of parental rearing practices and societal influences and strengthened during puberty by hormonal changes.</td>
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