Women of Color LeadStrong Health and Well-being Survey Snapshot

Written By

LeaderSpring Center

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ABSTRACT

The Women of Color (WOC) LeadStrong program, launched in January 2019, confronted years of unmet needs, unsustainable practices, and a call to challenge the systems of oppression inside and outside the nonprofit sector. Disrupted in 2020 during COVID-19, political turmoil, and racial tension, we launched the *WOC Health and Well-being Survey* to capture in real-time how our cohort members weathered these storms. It is also a direct response to the cumulative toll that limited resources, inadequate support, and continued social stressors have on the underrepresented and often neglected population of women of color leaders within the social sector. Stress, declining mental health, and burnout are all adverse health outcomes that served as the backdrop to this study. The pilot cohort demonstrated the importance of having a support system uniquely designed for the realities of our society that harm people of color, as well as equip them with the tools to dismantle these oppressive structures. Women of color's well-being should be acknowledged and recognized as necessary for effective and sustainable change.

The mission of LeaderSpring Center is to foster a powerful, equity-driven social sector by strengthening leaders and organizations, developing communities of leaders, and transforming the systems in which they work.

Our values are grounded in work that centers leadership, liberation, collective well-being, deep relationships, learning through reflection, and fluidity and alignment.

By elevating and empowering women of color working toward racial and gender equity in the social sector, this fellowship program aims to promote practices grounded in critical analysis of structures that help cultivate transformative, healing practices for women of color leaders to envision and demand sustainable futures for their organizations.

FELLOWSHIP OUTCOMES

- A clear understanding of what defines and cultivates an ecosystem of well-being and care
- Active practice of a living leadership philosophy that roots power in self-trust and self-knowledge
- Strengthen cultural norms that center an ethic of love and liberation as well as firmly divest from ethics of domination and extraction
- Deepen knowledge and analysis of systems of power
- Strengthen individuals' capacity to enact power for greater organizational and mission impact
- Create space and time for self-care practices to improve overall health and wellbeing
- Establish a foundation of trust to ground existing and new relationships
- Provide emotional support and coaching benefits
- Illuminate a proactive and preventative framework
- Advance collective action efforts and greater social impact

Through these outcomes, we intend to not only improve the personal growth and leadership development important for the individuals involved, but ultimately influence their organization to better advance equity and social justice principles

PRE-RETREAT SURVEY JANUARY 2020 PATTERNS OF OVER WORKING/LACK OF SUPPORT

Do you get the support you need to maintain a healthy work environment from your supervisor to your board?

Never (2)
12%

Rarely (3)
17%

Usually (10)
59%

Sometimes (2)
12%

Is your health and well-being a priority at your workplace?

No (10)
41%

Yes (7)
59%
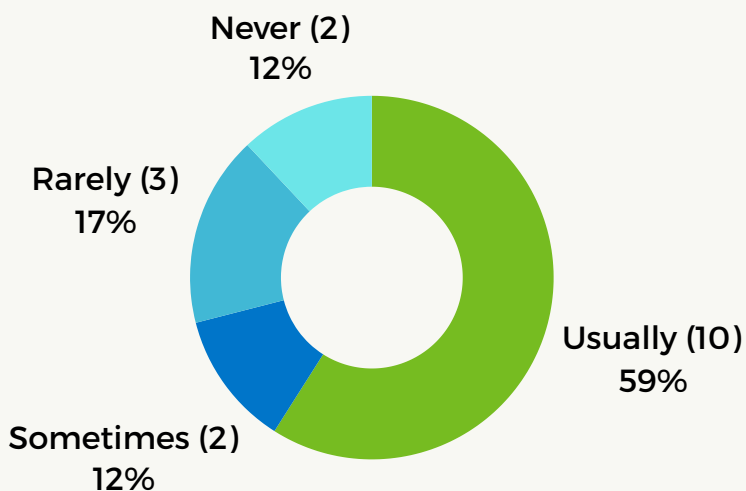
Survey results in Figure 1 showed that one-third (29%) of respondents rarely or never have the support they need to maintain a healthy work environment. Lack of support is a critical issue that prevents participants from being comfortable enough to voice concerns, reach out for help, and alleviate stress or burdens within their work lives.

More so, Figure 2 findings show that most respondents (60%) do nor feel their health and well-being are a priority in their workplace. Evaluating this, along with feelings of dissatisfaction with one's work environment, is essential to assess feelings of neglect and stress accompanying an unsupportive or unhealthy work environment.

Pre COVID, 82% of participants were dealing with stress <u>half of the time</u> to <u>always</u>, which can lead to mental and emotional health concerns, a major issue we aim to acknowledge and address. In the second chart, almost <u>half</u> of respondents have health issues caused by work, likely exacerbated by working long hours as well as juggling responsibilities that induce stress. When adding COVID-19 and lack of time on top of this, it is important to consider the added pressures that further contribute to the deterioration of the participant's mental and emotional well-being to better understand what is needed for a supportive and healthy work environment.
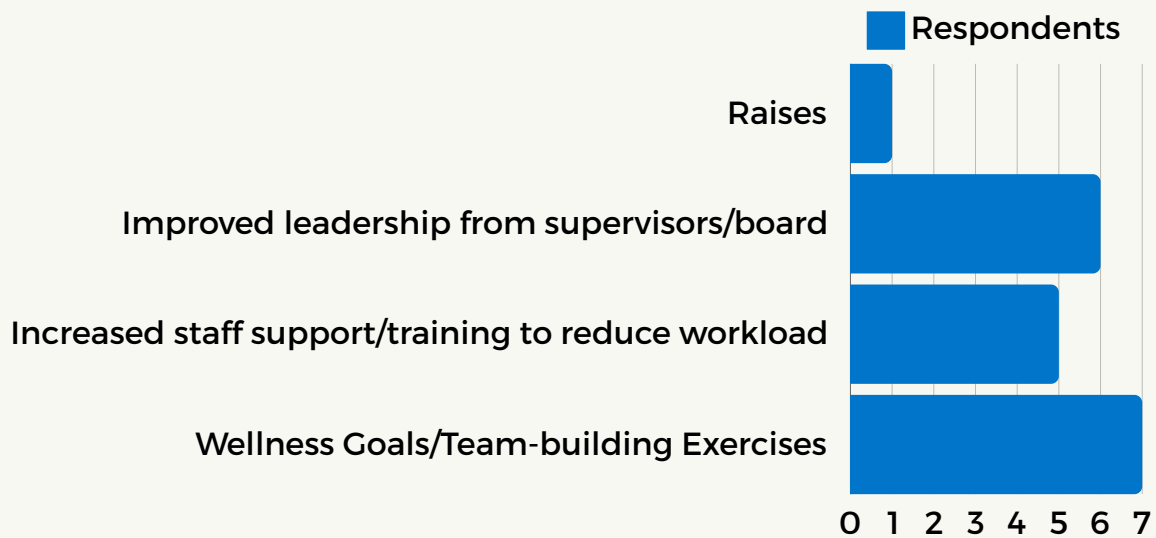
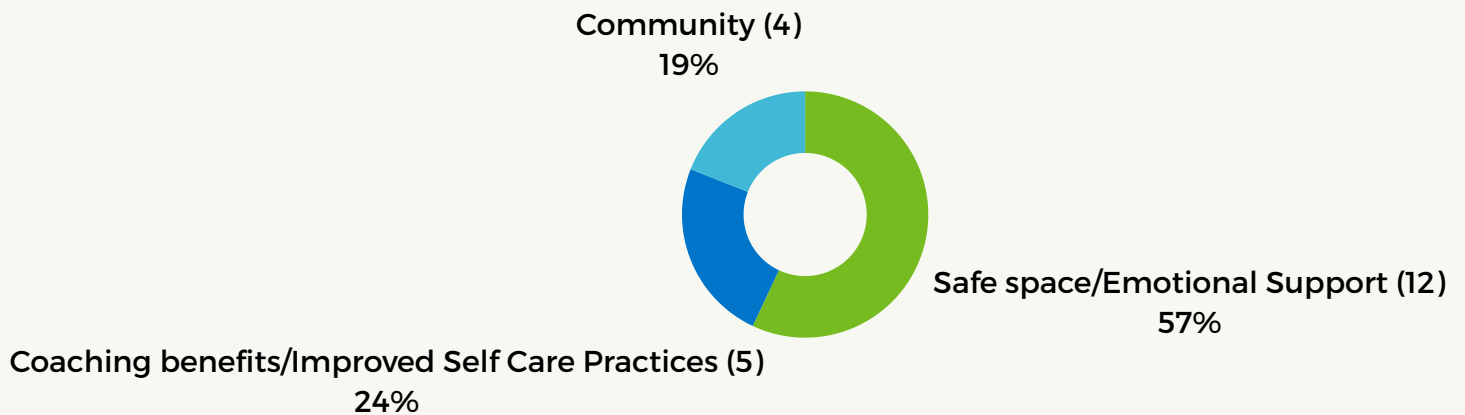## In a typical week, how often do you feel stressed at work?

Once in a while (3)
18%

Always (3)
18%

About half of time (5)
29%

Most of the time (6)
35%
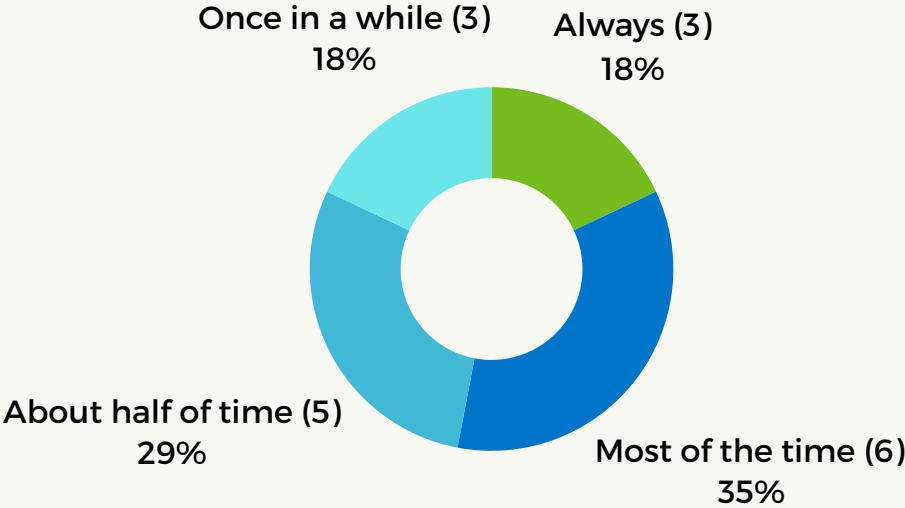
Do you have health issues caused by work?

No (9)
53%

Yes (8)
47%

If you could change something in your workplace to promote a healthy work environment, what would that be?

Respondents

Category	Value
Raises	1
Improved leadership from supervisors/board	6
Increased staff support/training to reduce workload	5
Wellness Goals/Team-building Exercises	7

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How did WOC LeadStrong Cohort contribute to your health and well being?

Community (4)
19%

Safe space/Emotional Support (12)
57%

Coaching benefits/Improved Self Care Practices (5)
24%

It is important to note that the changes needed to create a healthy work environment as outlined in graph 3 (more wellness goals and team building exercises, increased staff support and training to reduce workload, as well as improved leadership from supervisors and board members) align with and are supported by the outcomes of the WOC LeadStrong Cohort (safe space/emotional support, coaching benefits and improved self-care practices, as well as community) considering the Fellowship provides the necessary tools and resources to combat existing gaps within participant's workplace environment. More importantly, the knowledge and connections formed help reinforce the core belief that their mental and emotional well-being should be a priority, not just to further their work but also to decrease burnout in themselves.

POST HEALTH AND WELLBEING SURVEYS MARCH - NOVEMBER 2020 HIGH-LEVEL OUTCOMES

One crucial pattern consistent throughout most of the survey is that participants' work hours continue to rise, with more than 80% of respondents having increased their work hours in the last two months.
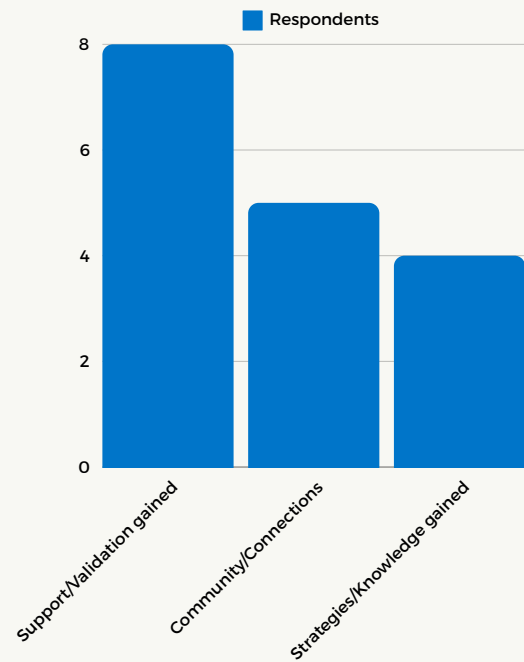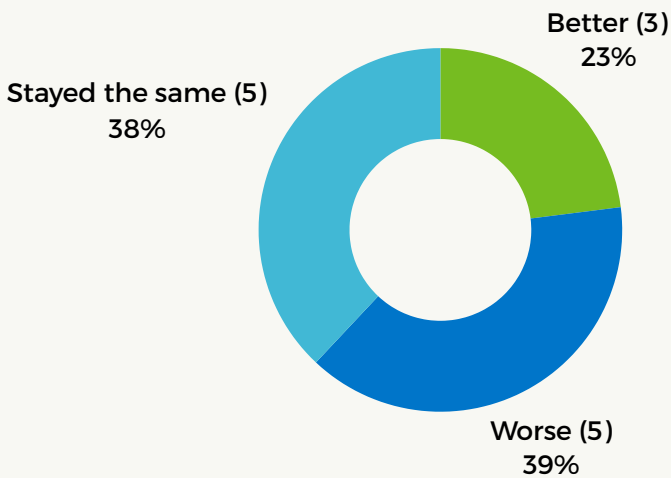
It is also important to note that self-care practices increased despite their time constraints in March, which displays participants' commitment to honoring themselves and their needs despite the demands of their work. However, this slowly declined in November, pointing to a clear gap within their work environment's ability to provide folks a space or schedule to incorporate self-care practices and ask for support.

This gap is nurtured and supported by the guidelines set by the WOC Fellowship, which actively works to address the needs of their cohort and amplify the tools or resources that support their journey.

Since Jan. 2020 has your mental health changed?

Better (3)
23%

Stayed the same (5)
38%

Worse (5)
39%

How has the WOC LeadStrong Cohort contributed to your health and well-being?

Respondents

Support/Validation gained · Community/Connections · Strategies/Knowledge gained

When asked if, "Since Jan. 2020, has their mental health changed?", FIGURE 5 shows more than a third of respondents (39%) view their mental health as worsening. Compared to the pre-health survey in January (Q35), which had a majority answering either somewhat or very healthy, there is a clear difference in responses, indicating several factors affecting this cohort's health negatively.

It is also important to note the other challenges they faced in promoting self-care and well-being: support or flexibility from work, more accessible services, financial stability, and childcare services. In understanding these obstacles, the Fellowship was better able to provide a safe space to support their needs contributing to their health and well-being in significant ways.

Have you increased or decreased your self-care and well-being practice?

No time for self-care since COVID-19 (1)
7%

Increased (6)
43%

Decreased (7)
50%

Has the WOC LeadStrong Cohort contributed in any way to your health and well-being?

Not Sure (2)
13%

Yes (13)
87%
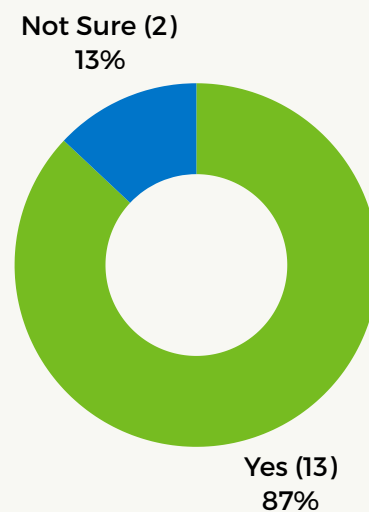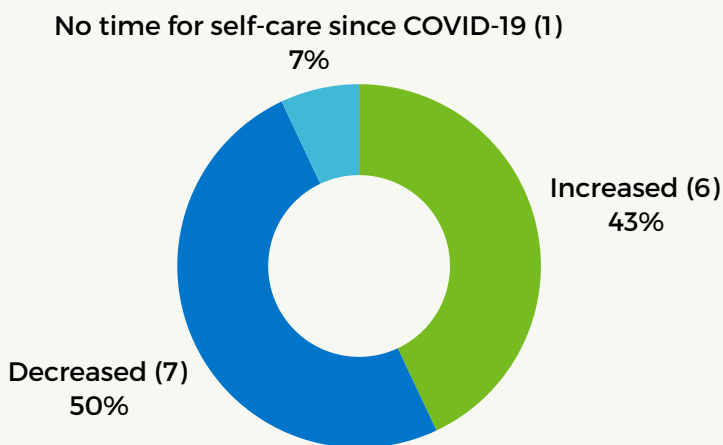
When asked, "Have you increased or decreased your self-care and well-being practice?" more than _half_ of respondents either decreased or didn't have time for self-care and well-being practices. This correlates with the increased number of hours this cohort experienced as well as the deteriorating mental health levels reported in the March survey (Q13). While self-care practices increased in March, they have decreased since then, showing a negative trend.

Despite this, survey results consistently show that the cohort provided structure, support, and strength during the pandemic. When asked, "Has the WOC LeadStrong Cohort distributed, in any way, to your health and well-being?" almost 90% of respondents (13) agreed that the WOC LeadStrong cohort contributed to their health and well-being. There are several substantive payoffs resulting from participation in the cohort that have marginally increased how cohort members interacted with various obstacles within and outside the workplace.
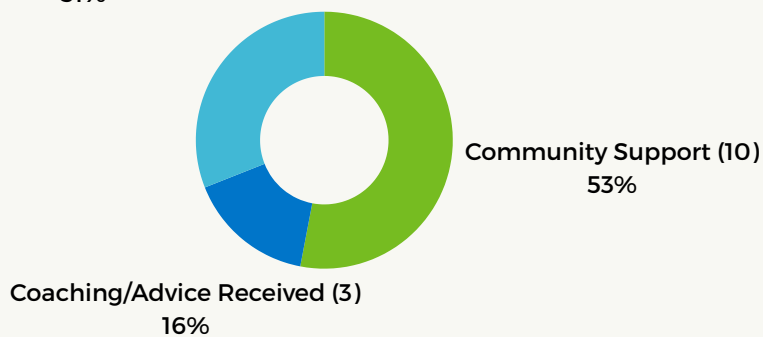
FINAL RETREAT SURVEY
MAY 26 - 28, 2021

In what ways did LeaderSpring Fellowship support you in fulfilling your intentions, if at all?

Confidence/Motivation Building (6)
31%

Community Support (10)
53%

Coaching/Advice Received (3)
16%

Benefits gained by participants included **community support, a safe space to reflect, coaching and advice, and confidence and motivation**. More importantly, half of the participants agreed they have achieved a greater work-life balance.

Do you agree: I am committed to evolving the nonprofit sector?

Neither (3)
30%

Strongly Agree (6)
60%
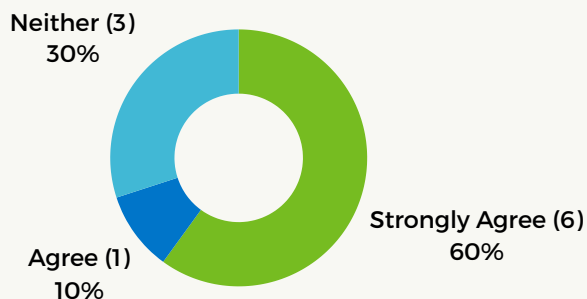
Agree (1)
10%

A significant result of the Fellowship was the impact on the attitude of the participant's commitment to evolving the nonprofit sector; over two-thirds agreed they are working towards improving and expanding the nonprofit sector for the better. More notably, most participants (70%) agreed that they have increased their commitment to defining and increasing equity in organizational systems within their organizations to some degree.

FINAL RETREAT SURVEY
MAY 26 - 28, 2021

Do you agree: I am experiencing personal renewal and well-being which helps prevent and diminish burnout?

To complement the growing confidence in their leadership and management skills, 80% of participants believe they are demonstrating more significant levels of excellence in their leadership and management performance. More importantly, half of the participants agree they have achieved a greater level of work-life balance, which is an essential outcome given the trend of increased work hours and time constraints on self-care displayed throughout the previous surveys.

Strongly Agree (1)
10%
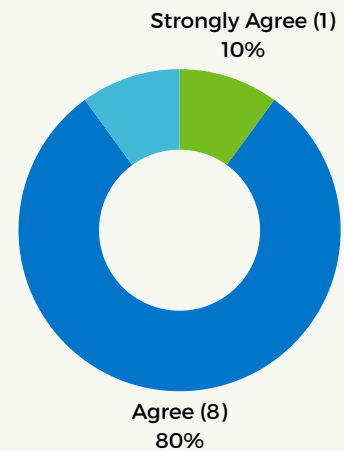
Agree (8)
80%

Do you agree: I am demonstrating greater levels of excellence in my leadership and management performance?

To complement the growing confidence in their leadership and management skills, 80% of participants believe they are demonstrating more significant levels of excellence in their leadership and management performance. More importantly, half of the participants agree they have achieved a greater level of work-life balance, which is an essential outcome given the trend of increased work hours and time constraints on self-care displayed throughout the previous surveys.

Neither (3)
20%

Strongly Agree (4)
40%

Agree (3)
40%
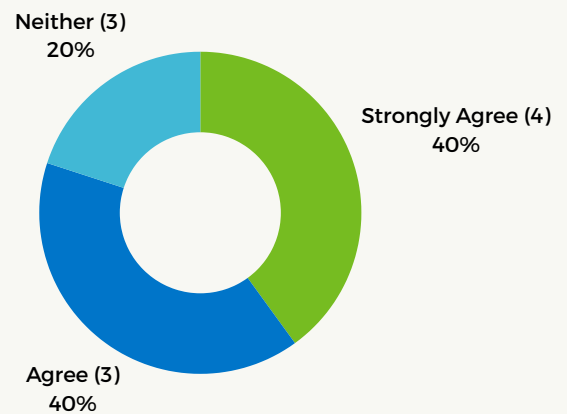
"I gained the confidence to speak my truth, even if it made me and those around me uncomfortable."

"I've always known I'm a phenomenal leader, I just feel more comfortable respecting my own excellence and framing it as such in discussions with others. **Because there is a lack of WOC leadership, my leadership is a radical act."**

"There are others in similar positions who want to make a change and make it together, and when we sit and lead with love, **systemic change can happen."**
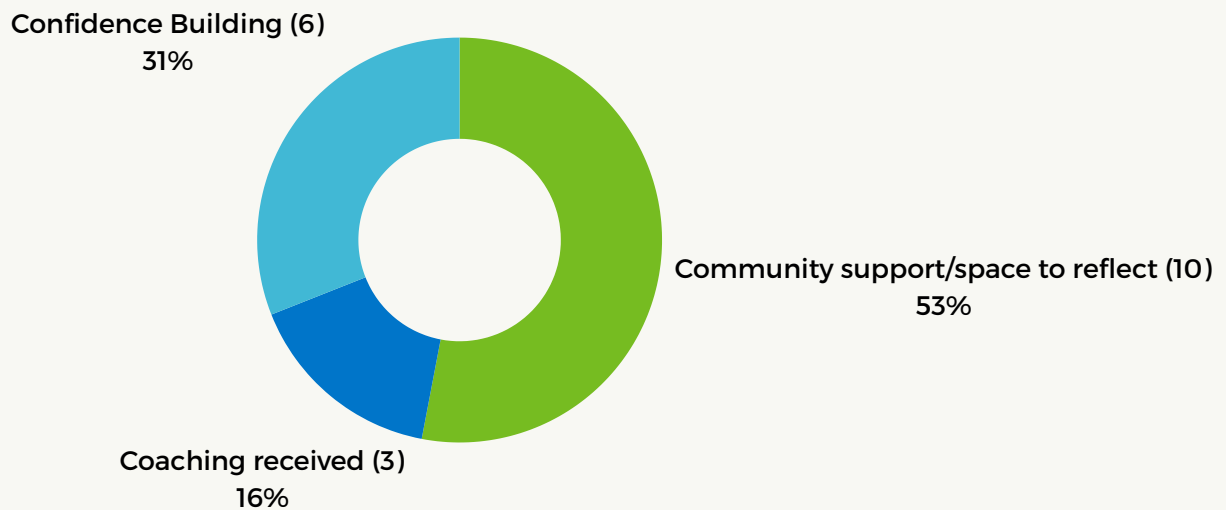
"After the retreat, the strength and support created by the Fellowship was why I was able to honor my own leadership and integrity in how I've responded to situations. I am now able to reach out to a Fellow (cohort member) for support and lean on the learnings about myself and my leadership. **The last 2 years gave me the strength to continue."**

In what ways did LeaderSpring Fellowship support you in fulfilling your intentions, if at all?

Confidence Building (6)
31%

Coaching received (3)
16%

Community support/space to reflect (10)
53%

- **EQUITY AND RADICAL LIBERATION**
  - The mission and goal for our program is to ignite and support existing leaders working to transform the field in a meaningful way promoting values that align with a more equity-driven, inclusive sector. By emphasizing liberation, we choose to acknowledge the limitations of the existing systems and structures while working towards a more safe, secure, and advanced society.
- **TRANSFORM THE SELF AND THE SECTOR**
  - Declining mental health, increasing stress, and lack of support remain problematic trends that not only feed into the sector, but allow the perpetuation of harmful practices that further burnout. When considering the contributing factors that affect the participant's health and well-being and subsequently influence their leadership qualities, it is vital to highlight the various obstacles that negatively impact the workplace environment. It was apparent throughout each survey that lack of time, increased work hours, mental health concerns, neglect of self-care practices, and overall stress are issues that need to be addressed.
- **UNIQUELY QUALIFIED**
  - **In undergoing the WOC LeadStrong cohort, participants were better able to identify their own needs, support themselves and one another, and empower others.**
  - The LeadStrong Fellowship also provided a community that emphasized connection, personal development, and commitment to sustainability, structurally and personally. By engaging in collective practices, they learned techniques to help prevent burnout, over-exhaustion, and fatigue.

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