



Black-Led & Black-Serving Sexual Health Providers Focus Group Summary

Hosted by the Los Angeles County Commission on HIV Black Caucus

Date: April 30, 2025 | Time: 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM | Format: Virtual

Background

As part of the Black Caucus' ongoing community needs assessment initiative, this focus group was convened to hear directly from Black-led and Black-serving sexual health providers who were not included in the initial assessment phase. This one-hour session centered the voices of those on the frontlines, with the goal of informing equitable strategies to support organizational sustainability and advance health outcomes for Black communities in LA County.

Objectives

- Identify barriers to County contracting and funding processes
- Assess organizational capacity challenges and opportunities
- Inform equitable funding and capacity-building strategies
- Strengthen public health procurement processes to better serve Black communities

1. Organizational Challenges

Participants described the daily reality of operating under-resourced and under-supported. Many Black-led organizations rely heavily on volunteer labor and overstretched leadership, often juggling multiple roles without adequate compensation or infrastructure.

- **Staffing Burnout & Lack of Infrastructure:** Several participants noted that their leadership often works without pay or on delayed salaries. Burnout is a recurring concern due to minimal staffing, limited operational support, and increasing community demand.
- **Inability to Scale Services:** Organizations shared stories of having to reduce programs or deny services because of capacity limitations, particularly during peak moments of community need.



- Access to Basic Support: Inadequate access to essentials like office space, reliable technology, or fiscal sponsorship continues to limit sustainability and growth.

"We are organizations that are passionate, but we also have small staff and rely on volunteers to do this work."

"We need staff, we need help, we need resources, we need investment."

2. Barriers to Public Health Funding

Participants expressed deep frustration with systemic inequities in public funding access. Many said the process favors large, well-resourced agencies with existing County relationships.

- Complex and Exclusive Processes: The RFP and application processes are overly technical and difficult to navigate for small agencies, particularly those without grant writers or dedicated administrative staff.
- Lack of Transparency & Feedback: Organizations reported that they rarely receive feedback when proposals are rejected, making it difficult to improve. Some suspect decisions are pre-determined or based on legacy relationships.
- Upfront Cost Burden: Many contracts require agencies to front program costs and wait for reimbursement—an untenable model for organizations with limited cash flow.

"The requirements are written in a way where unless you've done it before or you have a grant writer, it becomes difficult to even be considered."

"There is a lack of transparency in how contracts are awarded and how decisions are made."

3. Need for Capacity Building

There was strong consensus that Black-led organizations need more than technical assistance—they need intentional and sustained investment in their long-term development.

- Beyond One-Time Trainings: Participants asked for ongoing mentorship, peer learning communities, and support networks to strengthen organizational leadership and systems.
- Leadership Development & Wellness: Many recommended including leadership succession planning and mental health support for staff as part of capacity-building strategies.



- Navigating County Systems: Agencies requested help understanding County contracting portals, compliance systems, and reporting expectations, which were described as “clunky” and inaccessible.

“We need support in building internal infrastructure, not just program funding.”

“If we had help with things like HR, grant writing, and data management, we could do so much more.”

4. Representation and Inclusion

The group called out performative inclusion practices that tokenize rather than empower Black-led organizations.

- Meaningful Engagement in Decision-Making: Participants want to be engaged from the beginning—as co-designers of programs and funding strategies, not just implementers.
- Black-Led vs. Black-Serving: Many stressed the need to differentiate between organizations led by Black people and those that merely serve Black communities, noting that only the former often face systemic exclusion.
- Cultural Congruency: Organizations emphasized that lived experience is critical to designing effective public health strategies—and must be valued accordingly.

“Being Black-led is different than being Black-serving. We live this. We are this.”

“We are asked to show up and perform, but not given a seat to shape what’s being performed.”

5. Recommendations for Systemic Change

Participants offered clear, actionable recommendations to improve equity and effectiveness in public health funding.

- Dedicated Funding Streams: Agencies proposed establishing specific funding pools for Black-led organizations, with simplified and accessible processes.
- Community-Driven Grantmaking: There was support for participatory budgeting or grantmaking models where community voices help determine funding allocations.
- Infrastructure Investments: Several recommended funding “backbone” organizations to provide shared evaluation, finance, and compliance support to smaller, Black-led agencies.



- Accountability & Follow-Up: Participants urged the County, DHSP and other funders to implement mechanisms that ensure commitments to equity are tracked and reported publicly.

"Let the people doing the work be part of the planning and decision-making."

"There needs to be funding opportunities that are accessible for grassroots and emerging Black-led organizations."

Overall Recommendation

There was a clear and collective call for the County, DHSP and other public health funders to simplify processes, build authentic partnerships, and prioritize funding for truly Black-led organizations. Participants called for long-term investments, not just short-term contracts, to ensure sustainable impact.

"We're tired of being asked for our insight with no follow-through. If you want us to stay at the table, show us that our voices actually matter."

Next Steps

1. Integrate insights from this session into the final organizational needs assessment report.
2. Share survey questions and Phase I findings with participants
3. Extend invitations to future Black Caucus meetings and collaborative opportunities