

DON'T WIN ALONE

SEVENLESSONS FROM THE ENDEAVOR FUND

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ON THE COVER

ENDEAVOR FUND GRANTEES AND WALTER & ELISE HAAS FUND STAFF AT THEIR ANNUAL GATHERING

PHOTO BY JOYCE XI



In March of 2023, the Walter & Elise Haas Fund (W&EHF) launched its most significant grantmaking initiative: \$24.5M over seven years to the Endeavor Fund. The Endeavor Fund aims to close the racial and gender wealth gap and promote nonprofit worker well-being. The seven grantees — East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE), East Bay Community Law Center, La Cocina, Oakland Kids First, Oakland Promise, Young Women's Freedom Center, and Youth Organize! California (YO! Cali) — each receive multi-year general operating funds totaling \$3.5M over the seven-year life of the grant.

By providing seven-year grants, W&EHF is offering long-term, impactful support, a bold commitment to promote systemic change. Through the Endeavor Fund (EF), W&EHF has deepened its approach to trust-based philanthropy and learning. Our aim is to *learn with and from* EF grantees. Recognizing that there is more than one way to close the race and gender wealth gap, we know that we need to learn more about how organizations approach this work — what strategies are effective, what conditions they need to succeed, and the barriers they face — so we can better support their goals.

The report that follows distills what we are learning about the internal conditions nonprofits need, and the funder practices and partnerships that strengthen them, offering a clearer view of what truly enables mission-driven organizations to succeed -- learnings that extend well beyond economic well-being and are relevant to nearly any nonprofit working toward lasting, systemic change.

Our aim is to learn with and from grantees in ways that are relevant to any nonprofit working toward lasting, systemic change

Trust-based Philanthropy

The Endeavor Fund is one of W&EHF's three anchor grantmaking strategies that operationalize trust-based philanthropy. It pairs long-term and substantive general operating grants with customized supports to each grantee organization. Key tenets of the Endeavor Fund:

- Support closing the race and gender wealth gap
- Increase nonprofit worker well-being
- Fund nonprofits to win

This last bullet point means giving in such a way that allows these organizations to pursue their respective missions on their own terms. The Fund seeks to shine a light on what is possible when philanthropy takes bold bets focused on nonprofit and community self-determination.

W&EHF shows up as a learning partner to support grantees' success, gain valuable insights in real time about the model and cohort, and, ultimately, better serve the community. Once a year, each EF organization meets with members of W&EHF's learning team for a three-hour learning conversation that tracks a codeveloped learning agenda. By the end of the seven-year grant, each EF grantee will have held seven such learning conversations, reflecting on accomplishments, challenges, and lessons.

A TIME FOR MEANINGFUL REFLECTION

Three-Year Endeavor Fund Update

2025 marks the third year of the Endeavor Fund's annual learning conversations. This document shares three years of cumulative learning and reflection from the seven grantees, totaling 63 hours of discussion, plus two all-day cohort gatherings, multiple surveys, ongoing engagement, and relationship-building.

An Unpredictable Environment

Our longitudinal learning to date exists alongside the immediate moment, so to set the stage, we describe the unpredictable conditions facing the nonprofit sector this year, and later in this update we describe how Endeavor Fund grantees are navigating — and shaping — the path forward.

This year's learning conversations were held in February and March of 2025. The first half of 2025 was a volatile time for the nonprofit sector, marked by a barrage of White House executive orders. divisive political rhetoric, and federal budget cuts that target and threaten nonprofits, their work, and the communities they serve. This year, social change nonprofits, diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and many of our neighbors have come under deliberate attack from the federal administration. At the same time, the costs of doing business continue to rise, while funding for nonprofits and equity work decelerated or dried up, just as the need for services and justice grows. This is especially true among the communities that EF grantees serve: systems-impacted girls and women, immigrant entrepreneurs, tenants and



IN AN UNPREDICTABLE ENVIRONMENT

workers, youth aspiring for college and a brighter future, and women of color who, as heads of their multigeneration households, seek to ensure stability for their families.

EF grantees recognize the difficulty of this moment to move their work forward. Times are challenging, the future is uncertain, and many of their communities are extremely and rightfully scared. But as one EF grantee shared with us, "Our [program participants] are optimistic. This has always been their reality," so they remain ever steady in their commitment to their work. They are using longterm strategic plans to stay focused on their missions, leveraging the flexibility of the EF grant to put themselves in better financial and funding positions, and leaning on the EF cohort to inspire each other and develop a multitude

of approaches towards nonprofit worker well-being.

The Endeavor Fund organizations inspire. They focus on the long road ahead, a horizon where a better and more just world may be inhabited by workers, youth, families — all people — in Oakland, San Francisco, and beyond. They remain mindful of, and attentive to, their internal organizational culture and their own staff even as they provide essential services for community members. They find ways to do more with diminishing resources, including funding that continues to vanish from governmental and philanthropic sources.

The following section contains an update on W&EHF's Endeavor Fund, summarizing key learning from the cohort. The learning is cumulative, demonstrating impact as we continue our cohort engagement.

Finding ways to
do more with
diminishing
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Key Findings from Learning Conversations

Several critical insights emerged from our in-depth learning conversations with the cohort. These findings reveal how organizations are adapting their strategies, strengthening their infrastructure, and building collective power to create lasting change. The discussions highlighted the interconnected nature of this work, and the unique approaches organizations are taking to address systemic challenges and build sustainable capacity for the future. Learning also touched upon effective grantmaking and organizational development, as well as how deliberate attention to workforce sustainability, comprehensive support systems, and field-wide influence create multiplier effects that extend far beyond individual grants.

BUILDING TRUST IS EARNING TRUST

W&EHF's consistency and accountability to the Endeavor Fund cohort is what generates trust with grantees, and what allows them to be vulnerable, share critical insights, and ask for support.

INFRASTRUCTURE MATTERS

Organizations are collaborating and leveraging collective strengths through backbone support systems and shared infrastructure, recognizing the greater impact of multiple organizations working on concurrent solutions.

COMMUNITY OVER COMPETITION

The Endeavor Fund cohort creates a rare, non-competitive space where grantees wit long-term support from the same funder can build authentic community with one another.

MARATHONS NOT SPRINTS

Grantees are building community-informed, long-term strategies, committing themselves to the long-haul work of closing the racial and gender wealth gap.

FLEXIBILITY FUELS RESILIANCE

Grantees describe these flexible grants as anchor funding that enables innovation, pivots, and organizational stability while leveraging general operating support with other funders.

ORGANIZATIONS NEED ALLIES TO SUPPORT WORKER WELL-BEING

All Endeavor Fund organizations raised wages, expanded benefits, and iterated organizational culture and practices for worker well-being, yet nonprofit leaders remain stymied in their efforts by restrictive funding conditions.

7

5

BEYOND-THE-GRANT SUPPORT WORKS BEST WHEN IT'S GRANTEE-DIRECTED

W&EHF can provide meaningful, tailored, and systemic support by listening and directing additional resources to grantees.

Building Trust Is Earning Trust

An essential precursor to learning with and from Endeavor Fund grantees is earning their trust through consistent accountability and commitment to right relationship.

Understanding the historically uneven power dynamic between grantmaker and grantee, W&EHF staff has earned EF grantee trust over time. We did so by regularly asking about their experience, actively listening, and acting on what they told us. This trust has been mutual, producing open and candid conversations, allowing grantees to share what they would not otherwise. Through our dialogues with EF grantees, we've come to understand the importance of funding long-term strategy to advance closing the race and gender wealth gap, the crucial significance of flexible grants in strengthening an organization, and how building

community with others, especially amid stressors and challenges, validates and inspires them to stay the course.

During our 2025 learning conversations, many EF organizations remarked that W&EHF is their most transparent funder relationship, allowing them to speak to W&EHF staff candidly, sharing their challenges and asking us for help. Even though W&EHF has used trust-based practices with the cohort since the start, it took time to develop authentic relationships. W&EHF staff have noted the change in tone of each in-person meeting from the first one, initially marked by questions like, "What's the catch? What do you really want us to do? Will you take this grant away?" to our third-year meetings, where one EF grantee opened our dialogue by sharing, "We really appreciate that you haven't wavered from day one, which has allowed us to trust you. You kept your word."

W&EHF has been consistent: we told EF grantees we wanted them to win on their own terms, based on their own goals. From 2023 through today, we have not pushed any foundationspecific goals upon the cohort, we don't ask them to change who they are, and we recognize that we learn from them more than they may learn from us. We trust them to know the way forward and to tell us how and when they might want us to play an additional role towards their organizations' success. They have told us that this is markedly different from other funders, including those who might also claim they are practicing trust-based philanthropy.

The most meaningful way we have earned trust is through our accountability to the cohort. Each time we meet, we ask EF grantees what more we can do to support their organizations. We ask what they want us to communicate to our philanthropic peers, what type of support beyond the grant would be most useful, what they want out of

"When other funders say they are doing trust-based philanthropy I know they are not. Thank you for modeling it. Now, I know what it looks like."

Building Trust Is Earning Trust

the cohort, and to tell us what we are doing that isn't useful. We listen carefully and act on their feedback. That may mean providing resources and connections, co-writing conference proposals, or hosting an event or gathering. Each year, we report back to Endeavor Fund grantees on our priorities — what we're able to pursue, what we're not, and what may need to be postponed. Essentially, W&EHF staff and EF grantees co-created a report card they told us which of our priorities mattered to them and helped generate some new ones for us to consider. This kind of follow-up is still uncommon in philanthropy,

but we believe it's essential. Practicing accountability in this way strengthens our relationships, deepens our shared learning, and ultimately enhances our impact.

In turn, learning from the Endeavor Fund served as inspiration for aspects of W&EHF's 2025 strategic refresh: the interconnectedness of social well-being and economic well-being, the importance of policy and research in their work, the identification of key factors contributing to leader burnout, and the design of W&EHF's 2025 Beyond the Grant program.

"[This is] my
first time seeing
a funder that
cares about us,
cares about
nonprofit worker
well-being,
trust-based
philanthropy,
and moving our
work forward."



Marathons, Not Sprints

Closing the race and gender wealth gap is inherently long-term work, and as such, Endeavor Fund grantees are implementing community-informed, long-term plans to affect systemic change.

The very design of the Endeavor Fund — a seven-year commitment — reflects the Fund's recognition that closing the race and gender wealth gap is generational work.

When we discuss the racial and gender wealth gap, we are referring to the facts that nationally white families have six times the average wealth of Black families and Hispanic families,¹ that the per capita median income for White Bay Area residents is nearly two times higher than median incomes for Hispanic/Latinx, Indigenous, and Black residents,² that Black women households with a college degree are twice as likely as their white male counterparts to live from paycheck

to paycheck,³ and that it is estimated the racial wage gap grew in the Bay Area by \$3.4B during the pandemic.⁴

According to the Urban Institute, these disparities have taken decades⁵ to reach the level of wealth inequality we see today. It follows that the structural change needed to affect the systemic inequities that persist will be long-term work and should be funded over many years. We're learning from EF grantees what that work looks like year to year, who they're centering in their strategies, and how they're looking at collective impact.

Most EF grantees have recently completed or are currently engaged in creating and refining long-term agendas, platforms, or strategic plans. As part of these plans, and even preceding them, many grantees explicitly used community-designed charters and agreements to inform their long-term objectives. Community involvement in organizational direction is essential for creating authentic, representative

plans. When organizations engage their communities in decision-making, they can develop programming, strategies, and policy priorities that address issues people truly care about. This approach ensures that community members have ownership and agency over their own futures, leading to more effective and sustainable initiatives that reflect what families actually want for themselves.

Organizations have spent time naming and documenting their frameworks and approaches, evaluating the alignment of current programming and campaigns with the new or revised plans, and often making changes to better serve their mission and objectives. These plans have stepping stones, or multi-faceted parts, to empower community towards effecting structural change. For some EF grantees this means entering the policy arena for the first time, or educating and building civic engagement knowledge and skills in

"Our goal is to reinvest local dollars and resources into communities.

But our ultimate goal is to win life-affirming policies that validate the livelihood and dignity of people we work with: working class folks."

Marathons, Not Sprints

young people, or recognizing which small but effective levers need to be built into local policies now — but in all cases it's with an eye to realizing a future of collective prosperity for all.

Having this clarity of purpose gives organizations the ability to focus on the work ahead instead of responding to every new crisis — they have a screen to help determine what to engage in next. They must weigh the short-term needs with the long-term change, since achieving any systemic-level policy win requires years

of tenacity and commitment. We heard from EF grantees about the work of identifying and naming the most pressing issues; supporting community to come forward to name the changes they want to see; building and participating in coalitions for five to ten years; negotiating with unions, school districts, investors, and city officials; and the years of planning and campaigning that are behind every policy win. But what comes after is just as difficult; EF organizations often shift to ensuring that the hardfought policy wins materialize for

community. They may experience expected and unexpected challenges to local policies, government delays in implementing new laws, and sometimes entities ignore or defy orders. One grantee told us, "We won in 2020, but what we won was four more years of work." Organizations must monitor, champion, hold accountable, and evaluate their wins years later to ensure these policies — the policies they fought for — are instituted, and that they have the intended effect and impact.

"When it comes to the race and gender wealth gap, we think about the systemic inequities that lead to this. What are the resources and opportunities that young people need right now — but also how can we better position them for their futures?"

Infrastructure Matters

Long-term, effective change requires better infrastructure. Endeavor Fund grantees are creating new structures that sustain their organizations while also strengthening others.

The commitment to the long haul—long-term sustained planning at multiple levels and across organizations—means that EF grantees are looking at how they can collaborate and leverage their strengths for collective impact. It is not just one organization that has a solution, but many organizations working together on multiple solutions that has true impact. The term "backbone organizations" or

"backbone support" has come up multiple times over the last three years. Three EF organizations are evolving their structures to better support other organizations, their community, and themselves. One grantee now sees itself as a backbone organization that is moving from providing direct services to partnering with and funding other organizations to do the direct service work, allowing them to focus on growing their policy work and using their size and reputation to secure federal grants, which in turn brings in additional resources to more local organizations and thus their community. Another grantee that was previously fiscally sponsored applied and received their own 501(c)3 designation with the explicit

purpose of being able to fiscally sponsor small organizations in their network. This operating model will bring in a new revenue stream, but more importantly it will provide backend support (a backbone) with an emphasis on organizational development for the other organizations, extending impact across their network. Similarly, a third grantee created an umbrella organization to take over their backend support, such as human resources and communications. This umbrella organization is providing infrastructure to multiple, interrelated organizations that are collectively working towards equity and justice and who are now free to concentrate on their strengths and remain focused on their mission.

"The infrastructure we've built is designed to carry our movement forward. It's more than just backend operations — it's the backbone of a future rooted in equity, justice, and liberation."

ENDEAVOR FUND GRANTEE

THREE EF GRANTEES CREATED AN INFRASTRUCTURE WHERE THEY SERVE AS "BACKBONE" ORGANIZATIONS THAT WORK TOWARDS COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Flexibility Fuels Resilience

The flexibility of the Endeavor Fund grant itself is what helps EF grantees strengthen their organizations. EF grantees describe these grants as "anchor funding" that allows for innovation, pivots, and staying the course, leveraging the general operating nature of the grant with other funders to further secure their stability.

EF grantees are leveraging the longevity and flexibility of the Endeavor Fund in creative ways. Many have used the EF model itself to start conversations with other funders about longer, bigger, unrestricted grants, to discuss nonprofit worker well-being, or to introduce new possibilities for how a funder may operate. Opening the door for these discussions with funders resulted in EF grantees successfully negotiating for grants with better terms, including:

- changing a project grant to a general operating grant;
- changing single-year grants to multi-year grants; and

• securing a final exit grant where previously none was awarded.

Grantees have also used their EF grants to unlock government matching grants, and as a strategic lever when pitching to other funders. They point to their EF grant as evidence of commitment and confidence from W&EHF; other funders learn that EF grantees are investing in and strengthening all parts of their organizations, allowing EF grantees to advocate for the type of grant that makes the most sense for them in that moment. This might mean asking for general operating support funds, or it might mean asking for a project grant or capacitybuilding support. The flexibility and stability provided by the Endeavor Fund give grantees the confidence to innovate, make long-term plans, and strategically engage and negotiate with other funders.

In addition to using the grant as leverage to secure more favorable terms for funds, grantees are also directly strengthening their organizations by investing in their staff, infrastructure, and program quality. Many of the new positions that grantees have filled

in recent years have been roles like communications, evaluation, and HR, which tie directly to their strategic goals. Communications staff strengthen their storytelling skills so that they can communicate effectively with program participants and the community, but also to attract new funders and donors by clearly describing the impact of their work. One EF grantee created a five-person evaluation team to inform their future work and collect more evidence-based results about the effectiveness of their programs. Many EF grantees are modifying their staffing pattern overall to better align with recent refinements in their strategies (as discussed in the "Marathons, Not Sprints" section) and to better deliver on their missions, while additions in operations and human resources staff aim to standardize procedures and policies and to provide more support to staff. The work of grantees moves forward when each possesses the flexibility to invest in necessary staff to support their strategic goals.

"[The EF grant is] flexibility to work at our own pace, to figure out what's needed ... look at the long-term, to approve a [staff] step-up process. It makes for stronger, happier staff."

Community over Competition

The Endeavor Fund brings together organizations that are already supported with long-term grants from the same funder, resulting in a rare non-competitive space for grantees to build community with one another.

When we launched the cohort in 2023, we told EF grantees that the final shape of the cohort would be up to them. Comprised of executive directors, associate directors, and key leaders responsible for programs, human resources, communications, development, and finance, what EF grantees created is a space to build relationships, share practices, and to talk candidly about their challenges. W&EHF primarily facilitates this space through a yearly day-long gathering attended by multiple staff from each organization. We also support the cohort by attending

grantee-led community events and purchasing tickets for EF grantees to attend another organization's gala. We often share what we hear and learn from each organization back to the cohort itself.

EF grantees celebrate the rarity and value of a non-competitive space due to W&EHF's long-term grant cycle. People can be more transparent with each other about what is happening inside their organization and are eager to learn best practices from one another. The last two annual gatherings have focused on nonprofit worker well-being; understanding what it means to each organization, hearing about practices, and identifying the challenges and tensions inherent in trying to meet staff needs while also leading financially stable and programmatically excellent organizations. EF grantees tell us it makes them feel less alone to discuss shared struggles, hear

their challenges validated, co-build and lean on the cohort, and draw inspiration for actions they might try next.

The EF model integrated former W&EHF program areas, previously siloed issue areas of education and economic justice, which meant many of the organizations were new to one another. Members of the cohort have been able to expand their networks or strengthen existing connections. Some organizations work together as part of larger coalitions, while others have partnered for specific projects. One leader reached out to another to seek advice through the difficulty of their staff layoff processes; they have learned they have each other while they navigate tough processes. There is a community and a camaraderie within the cohort. People can reach out for help but also celebrate and root for one another.

"These are people I am rooting for."

Organizations Need Allies to Support Worker Well-being

Endeavor Fund grantees are advancing worker well-being within their organizations, but more funding and resources are needed to support their efforts.

From the start of the Endeavor Fund, W&EHF has been clear that we would explore explicitly supporting nonprofit worker wellbeing and its many elements. W&EHF's grants to EF grantees are general operating support, so W&EHF does not direct how funds should be used, nor what well-being practices each organization should undertake. Instead, the topic occurs in yearly learning conversations and in cohort gatherings. Grantees share their own learning from enacting their commitment to their workers'

well-being, as well as the challenges they encounter. Three years into the Endeavor Fund. we've seen:

- Every organization raise their lowest wages;
- The expansion of benefit offerings for full-time and/or part-time staff; and
- How organizational culture and practices play a significant role in worker well-being (explore EF cohort practices on the next page).

EF grantees balance care with rigor, thoughtfully navigating the distinction between being a healthy workplace but not necessarily the place to seek healing. Accordingly, many are rightsizing their workloads, organizations, and staff count.

But the resources to advance worker well-being, like salaries, benefits, and other supports are hard to secure. Funding is increasingly difficult to obtain in a shifting funder landscape, especially the unrestricted funds that allow organizations to invest in the infrastructure and people needed for organizations to fulfill their missions and take care of their people. Organizations and individuals are trying to do more than they have the resources for. Yet, no matter the added well-being practices, no matter the compensation, workers are heading to burnout. The question that rises to the top for the cohort, and for W&EHF staff, is how might the issue of workload be addressed by a sector that is grappling with and being crushed by the nonprofit starvation cycle?

Nonprofit Worker Well-being Staff & Culture Practices



providing education on how to use employee benefits, like explaining how to use health insurance and clear examples and encouragement of what qualifies as professional development (PD) (3 orgs)



creating pathways from program participant to org staff member, and from staff to leadership (these orgs primarily serve youth and have youth organizing as part of their programming) (3 orgs)



including expectation of receiving **mentorship and teaching** when new staff are hired (2 orgs)



centering Black staff and Black liberation within the organization (3 orgs)



providing coaching funds to new leaders (2 orgs)



creating **internal committees** to institute org- wide wellness (4 orgs)







creating space for staff to give **feedback** around their needs (pay and benefits) and their experiences at the org (onboarding and org structure) (4 orgs)



increasing level of org transparency, especially around budgets and financial sustainability (4 orgs)



reducing silos, creating intentional spaces for **cross-programmatic** conversations and teams (4 orgs)



increasing and opening up benefits to more staff, including part-time staff (3 orgs)



clarifying org and team
decision making structures
(3 orgs)



adopting **somatic practice** as part of internal org development (2 orgs)

Beyond-The-Grant Support Works Best When It's Grantee-Directed

Beyond-the-grant offerings were more likely to be used and recognized as impactful by the Endeavor Fund cohort when W&EHF listened to and acted on the cohort's requests and feedback.

The philanthropic sector understands that grantees have needs beyond the cash award, and many grantmakers sponsor opportunities for grantee partners to connect to technical assistance, organizational development support, and professional coaching. Prior to the Endeavor Fund, W&EHF provided similar opportunities to grantees in an episodic fashion. W&EHF's practice has evolved and formalized with the launch of the

Endeavor Fund through dedicated resources, staff coordination, and strategic alignment with the Fund's values and operational pillars. In its first iteration, W&EHF beyond-the-grant support to the EF cohort included access to online technical assistance and capacity platforms that saw limited uptake from grantees. Following that observation, Fund staff asked EF grantees what would serve them, aligning those requests with the Fund staff's own capacity.

W&EHF has since provided more tailored, meaningful, and systemic support, including high-quality video profiles for each organization, multiple funder introductions, opportunities to speak in the field, radical rest retreats, and cash

reimbursements of up to \$7,000 per organization for grantee-directed professional and organizational development activities. What began as a pilot effort in 2023 to support the Endeavor Fund cohort, beyond-the-grant support has since evolved into a formal program. This program streamlines requests, allocates resources more effectively, and now extends support to all current grantees. The feedback we've received from W&EHF grantees on our 2025 program was overwhelmingly positive, and as we continue to refine our approach, we are appreciative of the candid relationships we've fostered that allow us to hear what beyond-thegrant efforts are and aren't most beneficial to organizations.

Moving at the Speed of Trust

Together, W&EHF staff and EF grantees have taken time and effort to build robust relationships. This initial building phase has served us well. We now have more clarity and a better understanding of our shared goals.

W&EHF staff and EF grantees envision a transformed sector, where organizations working on structural change — like closing the race and gender wealth gap — have the funds and flexibility they need to achieve their mission, and where philanthropy operates with practices that center community, nonprofits, and nonprofit workers.

In the current era — marked by relentless crises and the rolling back of freedoms — acting to protect all people and to advance a just future is imperative.

The Endeavor Fund is in an incredible position: under most

circumstances, a typical multiyear grant of two to three years would be ending right now, and W&EHF would be winding down relationships or asking grantees to justify a renewal. But the design of a seven-year grant provides us genuine and earned possibility. We are not slowing but ready to accelerate: this is an example of moving at the speed of trust.

NOTES

- "Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America," April 2024, Urban Institute
- "Racial Equity in the Bay Area: How closing racial gaps can result in broad economic gain for the region."
 April 2024, Bay Area Council Economic Institute
- 3. "Living on the Brink: the True Cost of Being Californian," August 2024, The Maven Collaborative
- 4. "Racial Equity in the Bay Area: How closing racial gaps can result in broad economic gain for the region."

 April 2024, Bay Area Council Economic Institute
- "Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America," April 2024, Urban Institute

Resources

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Author Anna Hernandez, Strategist for Justice, Equity, and Learning

EDITOR Anthem Salgado, Strategist for Communications

RESEARCH Pui Ling Tam, Relationship Manager, Economic Well-being

PHOTOGRAPHY Joyce Xi

DESIGN Suki O'Kane, Administrator

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