The National Urban Fellows (NUF), a leadership-development program for people from underrepresented groups offered at Baruch College, set out two years ago to study the career experiences of its alumni, many of whom are leaders in government and nonprofit organizations. The result is NUF's soon-to-be-released research, "Changing the Face of Public Service Leadership," which began with a survey of 391 of its alumni, followed by targeted interviews and in-depth focus groups. The information is offered exclusively to DiversityInc readers.

Who are the respondents?

- 59 percent are men; 41 percent are women
- 54 percent are Black, 33 percent are Latino, 7 percent are white and 6 percent are Asian American
- 20 percent self-identify as executive directors, CEOs or presidents; 21 percent self-identify as directors; 16 percent self-identify as managers
- Three out of four have staff members who report to them
- 70 percent control a budget, with 11 percent overseeing budgets of more than $10 million

What researchers found:

*Discrimination is viewed as a fact of life.* Seventy-two percent of the respondents say they have been targets of some type of workplace discrimination, "one of the largest responses to any question," states the study, while 18 percent report that they had not. More in-depth analysis showed that Black men (80 percent) and Black women (77 percent) say they're more likely than Latino men (66 percent) and Latinas (71 percent) to have felt discriminated against at work.
• **Discrimination is more often attributed to race than gender.** Thirty-eight percent of the respondents said the discrimination they faced was related to race; 22 percent said it was based on gender. But when questioned further, researchers found that the "perceived discrimination experienced by respondents was often a function of two intersecting group identities," with some pointing to both race and gender. "[I've] been asked if I was the 'cleaning lady' … by a white colleague," notes one participant. Age discrimination and sexual harassment were cited least often, at 8 percent and 7 percent, respectively.

• **Lack of advancement is the most common manifestation.** Blocked promotions were cited by 20 percent of the respondents, followed by biased remarks (15 percent), lack of professional opportunities (13 percent) and unequal pay (8 percent). This marks "a shift in the focus of fighting discrimination from gaining access to organizations to being promoted up the organizational hierarchy to positions of power," states the study.

• **Resignation is inevitable.** In response to discrimination in the workplace, 26 percent of respondents took action or filed a formal complaint, 19 percent did nothing and 12 percent resigned.

What has been effective in reducing on-the-job discrimination?

"Changing the culture of the organization was the most-often cited [at 30 percent]—a response that was particularly prominent among [recent NUF grads]," states the study. Other suggested tools to limit workplace bias include visionary leadership (18 percent), discrimination laws/policies (16 percent), exercising interpersonal skills (15 percent) and diversity training (12 percent).

Interestingly, survey takers who are in executive roles are more likely (25 percent) than non-executives (13 percent) to attribute visionary leadership as a useful strategy to reduce discrimination.

"If you are about leadership, you are about change," stresses one participant. "If I am going to allow that behavior, then how do I make change? ... When you see it from the leadership, those who make executive decisions, then the buck stops there. You can follow formal procedures [to file] lawsuits and bring it to the next level. I can sue the organization and it is a win for me, but not necessarily for the organization."