



Founder Mode Unleashed: Minority Resistance to Gatekeeping and Disrupting the Nonprofit Industrial Complex

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Abstract

The nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) has often been criticized for sustaining systemic inequities, particularly within minority-led organizations, by perpetuating power imbalances and funding dependencies that hinder mission-focused innovation. This paper introduces Founder Mode, an alternative framework designed for minority social entrepreneurs to navigate and disrupt the limitations imposed by the NPIC. Founder Mode emphasizes three core elements: mission-driven autonomy, resourcefulness and innovation, and community-centered impact. By operating without reliance on traditional funding streams, minority-led nonprofits can achieve sustainable social impact while remaining aligned with their core values and community needs.

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, incorporating autoethnographic reflection, document analysis, and user feedback from for A Safer Space (FASS) to examine the application and impact of Founder Mode. Thematic analysis is used to identify key patterns related to nonprofit sustainability and mission-driven leadership. This case study of FASS demonstrates how Founder Mode enables self-sustaining, adaptable nonprofit models that prioritize community well-being over external funder expectations. The study proposes Founder Mode as a viable pathway to reframe nonprofit sustainability, offering minority founders a mission-first, founder-driven approach that challenges conventional funding dependencies and inspires systemic change in the nonprofit sector.

Keywords: nonprofit industrial complex, minority founders, founder mode, social entrepreneurship, systemic change

1. Introduction

The nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) critiques how nonprofit organizations, though often seen as neutral entities serving the public good, can inadvertently perpetuate systemic inequities, especially impacting minority-led organizations. This complex is characterized by the bureaucratization and commercialization of social movements, potentially weakening their

transformative potential. For example, in Vancouver, the NPIC enables governments and wealthy individuals to evade accountability for social inequities, redirecting nonprofits' goals toward revenue generation rather than community accountability (Kelsall et al., 2023). Racialization within the sector further complicates this dynamic; Black-led organizations in Madison, Wisconsin, reported encountering systemic barriers in leadership, funding, and collaboration, all essential for operational sustainability (Wilson, 2024). Additionally, the integration of racial justice work within the nonprofit framework often creates competition for limited funding, sidelining BIPOC voices in decision-making and prioritizing short-term solutions over addressing root causes of racism (Apostol-Dooley, 2022). Nonetheless, certain organizations, such as a trans legal organization employing a collective governance model, demonstrate that centering impacted identities and adopting alternative structures can navigate these limitations effectively, advocating for structural change (Mananzala & Spade, 2008). This highlights that, while the NPIC poses significant challenges, intentional strategies can enable minority-led organizations to navigate and potentially transform these constraints.

Minority founders within the conventional nonprofit model encounter various systemic and structural barriers, including gatekeeping, funding dependencies, and institutional biases, which perpetuate racial discrimination and limit access to resources. For instance, Black, African, and Caribbean Diaspora entrepreneurs in the UK face institutionalized racial barriers that restrict opportunities and access to social capital (Brown, 2023). Similarly, female minority founders in Berlin encounter structural constraints that perpetuate inequality, often misaligning their founder identity with the prototypical founder image, which they must reconcile through intersectional identity work (Vongswasdi et al., 2024). Minority founders in community-based organizations face additional challenges in establishing legitimacy and securing resources, particularly in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods where racialized contexts amplify these difficulties (Terrana, 2017). Moreover, financial challenges are prevalent among nonprofits serving people of color (POC), as these organizations encounter greater difficulties in resource development and management than their counterparts, underscoring the financial vulnerability of POC-serving nonprofits (Kim & Li, 2022). The nonprofit startup environment also frequently lacks adequate support for innovation from marginalized groups as they are often influenced by donors or stakeholders who may not fully comprehend the unique challenges faced by these communities, thereby hindering innovative solutions (Kim et al., 2022). These complex challenges emphasize the necessity for more inclusive policies and practices that address the systemic inequities encountered by minority founders in the nonprofit sector.

The nonprofit sector faces additional limitations, which restrict innovation, perpetuate power imbalances, and reinforce existing structures. One primary barrier is the power dynamics within nonprofits, leading to stagnation, lack of change, and failure to adapt or scale. These challenges stem from power imbalances at various innovation stages, where hierarchical structures can hinder continuous improvement (Dover & Lawrence, 2012). In corporate-nonprofit partnerships, power asymmetries can result in manipulation and exploitation, undermining the integrity of corporate social responsibility efforts. As power in these partnerships becomes more balanced, conflicts may increase, complicating collaboration (Mutch, 2009). The sector also reinforces individualistic lifestyles and capitalist structures, which prevent substantial social change and maintain existing hierarchies (Stoner, 2009). Philanthropy's influence on democracy presents another dilemma, as concentrated wealth and power may challenge democratic processes and reinforce the status quo (Hall, 2013). Collectively, these factors illustrate the multifaceted obstacles nonprofits encounter in fostering innovation and addressing power imbalances.

Presently, no comprehensive business or academic resource details how a nonprofit can be established, managed, and sustained without financial dependency. Traditional nonprofit models often rely on external funding, which can dilute their mission and limit impact. However, my recent LinkedIn article introduces *Founder Mode* as a disruptive strategy for minority founders, providing a framework for self-reliance, agility, and mission-focused innovation that challenges dependency. This article represents a groundbreaking contribution to academia by presenting original theories and insights, as Founder Mode and its applications have yet to be extensively explored. Founder Mode, an innovative approach to nonprofit leadership, is grounded in mission-driven autonomy, resourcefulness, and community-centered impact, enabling founders to operate independently of traditional funding sources. At its core, Founder Mode empowers founders to prioritize their organization's mission, values, and community needs over the expectations imposed by external funders or donors. Rather than conforming to traditional financial agendas, founders in Founder Mode adopt lean operations, creative problem-solving, and direct community engagement to sustain their organizations and deliver impactful, responsive change.

I define that Founder Mode framework comprises three essential elements:

- **Mission-Driven Autonomy:** Founders retain decision-making power rooted in their organization's mission, ensuring alignment with community needs rather than external pressures.
- **Resourcefulness and Innovation:** Operating without reliance on conventional funding streams, founders implement cost-effective strategies, utilizing technology, volunteer support, and community resources to achieve scalable impact.
- **Community-Centered Impact:** By maintaining close engagement with the community, founders adapt programs and services to meet real-time needs, fostering sustained relevance and impact.

In essence, Founder Mode represents a values-based, impact-focused leadership model that challenges the NPIC by demonstrating how organizations can thrive, maintain flexibility, and drive profound social change without dependency on external funding. It emphasizes sustainability through adaptability, empowering founders, particularly those from marginalized communities, to operate autonomously and enact lasting community change. Founder Mode offers minority founders an alternative path to achieve social innovation and impact without relying on traditional fundraising models. It enables founders to build organizations that are self-reliant, agile, and dedicated to mission-centered innovation, reshaping the nonprofit sector and fostering systemic change. In this model, minority founders act as catalysts for transformation, operating independently from conventional funding structures and presenting a pathway for resilience and empowerment. Ultimately, Founder Mode challenges existing paradigms, encourages new possibilities for nonprofit sustainability and inspires others to adopt a mission-first, founder-driven approach to social enterprise.

This paper examines Founder Mode as a strategic and transformative approach that enables minority founders to navigate and dismantle systemic barriers within the NPIC. Founder Mode advocates for a self-sustaining model that departs from conventional funding structures, emphasizing resilience, autonomy, and direct community engagement. By fostering sustainable social impact that transcends traditional frameworks, this approach empowers minority founders to challenge the nonprofit sector's established norms and create meaningful change.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

The nonprofit sector is shaped by a complex interplay of historical and structural forces, as demonstrated through diverse academic perspectives. Historically, the sector's evolution is rooted in varied traditions across the globe, with significant developments occurring in Western Europe and North America, yet other regions have made important contributions as well. These varied contributions emphasize the value of cross-regional exchange in the development of voluntary associations (Saito, 2022). Structurally, the nonprofit sector is often shaped by governmental policies aiming to achieve specific economic and social outcomes. This is illustrated in the Korean context, where legal frameworks are strategically designed to encourage particular economic behaviors (Lamothe et al., 2024). In the United States, the nonprofit sector has expanded significantly, playing a critical role in public health communication and social movements by utilizing emotional storytelling and mobilizing resources through extensive stakeholder networks (McKeever, 2024). Additionally, the development of this sector is influenced by nested institutional pressures, as illustrated by U.S. historic preservation nonprofits, where both national and regional forces impact organizational capacity and advocacy efforts (Velez, 2018). Historical institutionalism further offers insight into how nonprofit organizations navigate crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, by emphasizing the sequence of critical junctures and stable periods that characterize the sector's evolution (Plaček et al., 2022). Collectively, these perspectives reveal the nonprofit sector's multifaceted nature, shaped by historical legacies, government interventions, and institutional dynamics.

Power dynamics and funding dependencies present additional complexities for minority-led nonprofits, often hindering their effectiveness and sustainability. Racial stratification in these organizations results in leadership roles predominantly occupied by white individuals despite a diverse workforce (Adesaogun et al., 2015). This stratification is compounded by power imbalances in philanthropy, where donors wield control over essential resources, frequently without structured guidance to address these dynamics (Capone, 2023). Black-led organizations, in particular, identify racialization as a considerable barrier, affecting leadership opportunities, funding, and collaboration efforts (Wilson, 2024). Minority founders of community-based organizations face unique obstacles in establishing legitimacy and securing resources, often operating in environments where they must strategically navigate racially charged contexts (Terrana, 2017). Financial challenges are notably pronounced for nonprofits serving people of color (POC), as they struggle more in resource development and management compared to other organizations. However, POC-led organizations may not face additional disadvantages when their services primarily benefit POC communities, indicating that leadership composition may affect financial outcomes (Kim & Li, 2022). These dynamics highlight the need for a nuanced understanding of racialization and power within the nonprofit sector to better support minority-led initiatives.

Minority founders encounter numerous challenges, including discrimination, restricted resource access, and cultural biases that significantly influence their entrepreneurial journeys. Discriminatory practices and structural inequalities are widespread; for instance, Black, African, and Caribbean Diaspora entrepreneurs in the UK face systemic constraints that hinder their opportunities and access to resources (Brown, 2023). In the U.S., Black tech entrepreneurs receive less than 1% of venture capital, underscoring the institutionalized racism and implicit biases that limit their progress (Eugene et al., 2020). Female minority founders also face intersecting challenges, navigating structural barriers that perpetuate inequality, often necessitating strategic identity and image work (Vongswasdi et al., 2024). Furthermore, minority entrepreneurs frequently lack access to crucial support, education, and initiatives needed to overcome these barriers and succeed (Carles et al., 2024). Programs like STEEP in

Detroit illustrate the importance of culturally relevant and context-sensitive entrepreneurial training, which facilitates identity transformation and community building, thereby empowering minority entrepreneurs to challenge normative frameworks and cultivate an emancipatory entrepreneurial identity (Frost et al., 2023). These issues emphasize the need for inclusive policies that recognize diversity and support minority entrepreneurs in overcoming systemic barriers.

Traditional funding models impose significant constraints on minority-led organizations, limiting their potential influence and innovation by redirecting them from their core missions and exacerbating financial challenges. Minority-oriented venture capital funds, for example, are often driven to conform to mainstream investment practices due to reliance on institutional investors, leading them to prioritize high-tech fields and nonminority-owned firms, which undermines their initial mission and often yields lower returns (Bates & Bradford, 2009). Additionally, national minority organizations face higher per capita costs for cultural and political activities compared to majority-led groups, yet they often lack adequate public funding to sustain these activities (Rein, 2015). Racial discrimination further complicates funding allocation, with organizations supporting racial minorities receiving less financial support, influenced by persistent, subtle prejudices (Bernard et al., 2014). Nonprofits serving POC experience considerable financial difficulties, particularly in resource development and management, exacerbated by biases within the funding landscape (Kim & Li, 2022). These funding constraints are compounded by a lack of understanding from donors and other external stakeholders, who may not fully comprehend the specific challenges faced by marginalized communities, thereby stifling innovative solutions these organizations could otherwise develop (Kim et al., 2022). Overall, traditional funding models limit minority-led organizations' capacity and hinder their potential for innovative and impactful contributions.

In response to these challenges, I propose the Founder Mode approach as a distinctive model for leadership and organizational management, especially valuable for social entrepreneurs and minority founders. This approach emphasizes self-reliance, values-driven leadership, and innovative agility, making it particularly suitable for ventures that either operate with limited financial resources or deliberately avoid traditional funding sources. Founder Mode focuses on maximizing impact and maintaining independence, guided by a mission often centered on societal benefit.

The first core principle of Founder Mode is self-reliance, where leaders build and sustain their organizations without heavy dependence on external resources. In practice, this requires a high degree of resilience and resourcefulness, as leaders leverage personal skills, relationships, and creative problem-solving to meet organizational needs, achieving impact even with no financial support. Self-reliance in this context does not mean isolation but rather cultivating an adaptive mindset that prioritizes sustainability, enabling founders to focus on mission-driven goals and long-term impact.

The second principle, values-driven leadership, involves the founder's personal ethics and beliefs shaping the organization's mission, culture, and operations. Founders in this mode are deeply committed to their values, viewing the organization as an extension of their mission to create positive change. Decision-making is consistently aligned with these values, with a focus on integrity and prioritizing the needs of the communities served. This leadership approach fosters authenticity and builds trust and loyalty among stakeholders.

Lastly, innovative agility is essential in Founder Mode, allowing leaders to navigate challenges and adapt to change with minimal resources. This principle entails a high level of flexibility, as leaders continually seek unconventional methods to solve problems and drive progress. Such agility enables founders to remain competitive and relevant without relying on

traditional business structures, responding to market or community shifts with creativity and resilience.

Collectively, these principles make Founder Mode a powerful model for social entrepreneurs and minority founders dedicated to advancing their missions without compromising values or depending on traditional funding. It provides a sustainable and impactful alternative to conventional models, allowing founders to make a lasting difference in their industries and communities.

The concept of Founder Mode can be further examined through theories in social entrepreneurship, self-determination, and transformative leadership. Social entrepreneurship aligns closely with transformative leadership, as both seek to drive social change and development. Transformational leaders, integral to sustainable organizations, can emerge from social entrepreneurial ventures, which offer practical experience in leading change and fostering innovation (Bhutiani et al., 2012). This is consistent with transformative entrepreneurship, where leaders in under-resourced communities are empowered to fulfill their self-determination needs, becoming agents of change and promoting economic growth and well-being (Rayburn & Ochieng, 2022). Founder identity is also pivotal in this context, involving a transition to a role that integrates new skills and networks. The centrality of this identity influences the founder's resilience in navigating challenges, such as negative feedback, during the founding process (Hoang & Gimeno, 2007). Social entrepreneurial leadership further emphasizes the significance of innovative ventures that promote social change, necessitating leaders who can manage risks, form partnerships, and effect societal impact (Prabhu, 1999). Authentic leadership, responding to social entrepreneurs' unique challenges, highlights the importance of behaviorally focused development and effective learning environments that equip leaders with skills to tackle complex social issues (Knox et al., 2021). Together, these theories offer a comprehensive framework for understanding Founder Mode as an interplay of identity, leadership, and social innovation.

Resilience and empowerment are foundational to minority-led social innovation, enabling marginalized groups to navigate and transform societal challenges. Resilience, as illustrated in the experiences of sexual and gender minority (SGM) older adults, involves building social resources to combat social isolation and loneliness resulting from systemic marginalization (Kim, 2022). In Portugal, public policies have promoted resilience through innovative initiatives aimed at sustainable development, showcasing resilience as a basis for social innovation (Rodrigues, 2023). Empowerment, meanwhile, is essential for altering power dynamics within social innovation processes. It entails challenging and transforming existing power relations, thus enabling marginalized actors to gain agency and drive societal change (Avelino et al., 2023). Digital platforms further enhance empowerment, with marginalized groups, particularly women, using technology to resist and innovate against gender-based violence and other forms of oppression (Henshaw, 2023). The notion of trans local empowerment, highlighting transformative social innovation networks, demonstrates how empowerment can foster collective capacity for change across different locales (Avelino et al., 2019). Ultimately, resilience and empowerment not only address immediate social challenges but also set the foundation for enduring societal transformation, making them essential to minority-led social innovation.

3. Methodology and Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the effectiveness of Founder Mode as an alternative model for nonprofit sustainability, particularly among minority-led organizations. A case study methodology is appropriate for this research as it allows an in-depth exploration of a real-world phenomenon within its contextual framework

(Yin, 2014). By focusing on the case of *for A Safer Space* (FASS), this study aims to provide empirical insights into how Founder Mode enables nonprofit founders to navigate systemic barriers while maintaining mission integrity, resourcefulness, and community-centered impact. This study is exploratory and interpretive, grounded in constructivist epistemology. Given that the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC) is a socially constructed system shaped by power dynamics, a constructivist approach allows for an examination of how nonprofit leaders actively negotiate and redefine their roles within this structure. The study incorporates elements of autoethnography as the researcher is the founder of FASS and provides direct insights into the decision-making processes, challenges, and strategies employed.

Data collection will employ multiple qualitative methods to ensure a comprehensive analysis. First, autoethnographic reflection will serve as a primary data source, as the researcher's firsthand experiences as the founder of FASS will be documented through reflective narratives, memos, and decision-making logs. This method provides a deep, insider perspective on the application of Founder Mode. Second, document analysis will be conducted by reviewing organizational records, internal communications, program impact reports, and media coverage related to FASS's activities. This analysis will help contextualize the nonprofit's development and impact. Lastly, a comparative review of minority-led nonprofits will be conducted to situate FASS within the broader nonprofit landscape. This review will involve secondary research examining other minority-led organizations navigating NPIC constraints, identifying common challenges and alternative strategies.

A thematic analysis approach will be applied to interpret the data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework. The process will begin with familiarization, where all collected materials will be reviewed to gain a holistic understanding of the narratives and themes. This will be followed by coding, identifying recurring patterns related to Founder Mode principles—Mission-Driven Autonomy, Resourcefulness & Innovation, and Community-Centered Impact. Subsequently, theme development will involve refining key themes that emerge from the coding process, ensuring alignment with the research objectives. Finally, interpretation and synthesis will link these themes to the broader discourse on nonprofit sustainability, racial equity, and power structures in the NPIC.

Given the autoethnographic nature of this study, self-reflexivity will be maintained to address potential biases. The research will adhere to ethical guidelines by ensuring transparency in the presentation of data and acknowledging the positionality of the researcher. For user feedback data, anonymization will be applied to protect identities, and only publicly shared testimonials will be included in the analysis. One limitation of this study is subjectivity, as the researcher is the founder of FASS, creating potential for bias. However, this is mitigated through the use of external data sources and a transparent self-reflective approach. Another limitation is lack of generalizability, as findings from FASS may not be directly transferable to all minority-led nonprofits, given the unique constraints each organization faces. Nonetheless, the study aims to offer conceptual insights that may be applicable across similar contexts. Additionally, limited comparative data presents a challenge, as the study will examine other minority-led nonprofits through secondary research rather than direct interviews or case studies with other organizations.

By employing a case study design, thematic analysis, and autoethnographic reflection, this research will provide a nuanced understanding of how minority-led nonprofits can operate independently of traditional funding constraints while fostering sustainable, community-centered impact. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on racial equity, nonprofit sustainability, and social entrepreneurship, offering a transformative framework for future minority founders navigating systemic barriers.

4. Case Study of for A Safer Space

For A Safer Space (FASS), founded by this author, a minority entrepreneur with a multifaceted intersectional identity (female, Asian, immigrant, moral scrupulosity OCD, asexual/demisexual), is a federally registered nonprofit in Canada. Driven by a mission to provide compassionate and accessible support worldwide, FASS operates without financial transactions, donations, or conventional funding models. This distinctive approach, known as Founder Mode, reflects my commitment to community empowerment and altruism, ensuring that support remains entirely free and accessible to those in need. I also approached this as an exploratory journey into what I now call the Founder Mode Entrepreneurial Experience (FMEE) (Zhu, 2024). The following information was extracted from my recently published book, *Founder Mode: A Self-Help Guide for Mission-Driven Leaders: Breaking Free From Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC)* (Zhu, 2025a).

FASS made history in 2019 as Canada's first Chinese-Speaking Mental Health Practitioner Directory, providing a free listing of over 100 mental health professionals. However, I soon realized that unlimited free referrals alone were not enough to dismantle deeper barriers such as stigma, shame, and financial constraints. In response, I formally established FASS as a nonprofit in 2020, at the height of the global mental health crisis. It became the world's first organization to offer unlimited, free mental health counseling, psychotherapy, emotional support, and coaching sessions on a global scale, removing both financial and geographic barriers to care. Remarkably, through Founder Mode, this was achieved entirely without monetary transactions, funding, or donations. Instead, FASS pioneered a barter-based model, the oldest form of exchange, allowing it to operate beyond the constraints of the nonprofit industrial complex.

Under my authentic, servant, and transformative leadership, I led a team of over 350 people while working full-time at a publicly listed company in Canada and pursuing a full-time master's degree at New York University (NYU). From 2020–2023, FASS partnered with nearly 20 universities across the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Australia and collaborated with over 70 organizations to expand its reach. From 2020–2023, I personally supervised more than 150 clinical interns, guiding them in compassionate care and practical experience. Together, we delivered over 8,000 free sessions, with volunteers contributing more than 30,000 service hours. FASS also incubated seven social innovation projects, each supported with free, unlimited leadership coaching, ensuring their sustainability beyond their time with FASS. Recognized for my leadership in the mental health sector and groundbreaking innovations in the nonprofit space, I was invited to serve as both the psychology section panel moderator and the social innovation panel speaker at the China Psychology Forum at Columbia University in 2021 and 2023 (Zhu, 2025a).

Beyond mental health advocacy, I played a pivotal role in organizing Canada's largest Stop Asian Hate rally, serving as one of the MCs to unite the community against discrimination. I also launched a petition urging the Government of Ontario to include mental health care in the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP), garnering nearly 10,000 signatures in a very short period of time and receiving official recognition in the Ontario Legislative Assembly in the same year. Additionally, FASS provided unlimited resource referrals through its website, ensuring individuals could access essential services to support their well-being (Zhu, 2025a).

Guided by the principle "For people, not profit," FASS has redefined nonprofit leadership by proving that a minority founder could build and sustain a multimillion-dollar nonprofit, without funding, grants, or personal financial gain. I successfully dismantled systemic barriers and pioneered a workable solution to the NPIC. The success story was documented in my capstone project at NYU.

In 2024, FASS transitioned into the world's first fully AI-driven nonprofit, with all services now delivered through FASSLING.AI, the world's first comprehensive, one-stop human care service AI platform. FASS also became the world's first social justice resource hub with permanent open access. With this shift, FASS became the world's first nonprofit that runs entirely by AI, with me as its only remaining human volunteer. More details about the philosophy of making FASS fully AI-driven are in another book of mine, *Boundless Compassion in the Digital Age: The Intersection of Solo-Founder AI-Driven Nonprofit Mode (SFADNM) and Buddhist Dāna* (Zhu, 2025b).

The success of FASSLING led me to develop a groundbreaking management model, Solo-Founder AI-Driven Nonprofit Mode (SFADNM). SFADNM is an operational model that enables a single founder to sustainably run and scale a nonprofit without relying on traditional financial resources such as donations, grants, or investments. By leveraging AI automation, SFADNM handles service delivery, community engagement, and administrative tasks, drastically reducing operational costs and human resource dependencies. This model, rooted in Founder Mode, ensures mission integrity by prioritizing impact over funding, directly challenging the NPIC (Zhu, 2025b). The success of the FASSLING platform, used as a case study for SFADNM, emphasizes FASS's commitment to making unlimited free humanitarian support accessible anytime, anywhere, fulfilling my vision of compassionate, barrier-free support for all.

FASS was created to address unmet needs in the mental health and social services support landscape. Guided by a mission of unconditional, accessible support, FASS has adopted a unique model that purposefully rejects conventional funding sources like donations, grants, and investments. Instead, FASS pursues a self-sustaining, community-centric approach, confronting the challenges of the nonprofit industrial complex, where reliance on financial contributions can at times hinder the pursuit of mission-driven objectives. Inspired by the founder's background in social services and charity work, FASS challenges the notion that emotional and life coaching support should be restricted by financial boundaries, providing resources to anyone in need, without gatekeeping.

FASS's independence from traditional funding is not only a unique organizational trait but also an exemplary model for nonprofit sustainability. Operating without grants or donations allows FASS to avoid common challenges, such as shifting priorities to appease funders or dedicating excessive resources to grant writing. Instead, FASS channels all efforts into community-driven initiatives and technological solutions that meet user needs cost-effectively. For instance, FASSLING provides accessible, non-therapy support globally, without requiring users to pay, making it available to individuals regardless of location or economic status.

Leveraging technology and digital tools, FASS maintains no operational costs, ensuring scalability and broad accessibility. By automating services using FASSLING Product Line, FASS minimizes the need for human labor, thereby reaching a wide audience without incurring additional overhead. This technological emphasis enables FASS to deliver round-the-clock support while staying true to its mission of not charging users or depending on external donations.

FASS's community-oriented approach emphasizes mutual support and resilience, encouraging users to engage with and provide feedback to strengthen the platform. This feedback loop is critical to FASS's continual refinement and enhancement of services based on user needs rather than funder demands. FASS exemplifies that a nonprofit can thrive and expand independently of financial dependency, offering an innovative model that challenges conventional assumptions about nonprofit sustainability. By adopting Founder Mode, the founder has implemented a visionary, resilient strategy prioritizing mission alignment and

adaptability, navigating challenges without reliance on traditional funding avenues. This strategic flexibility, supported by technological and community-based initiatives, has enabled FASS to develop independently and sustainably, embodying a new paradigm in nonprofit work.

To foster resilience, FASS operates on a lean, cost-effective model by integrating technology to maximize reach while maintaining minimal expenses. For instance, FASSLING operates as a fully automated AI companion, offering free, global support around the clock. This reliance on digital operations emphasizes FASS's ability to deliver high-impact services with minimal overhead, while continuous user feedback allows the organization to respond dynamically to evolving needs. By centering on its mission rather than financial pressures, FASS remains steadfast in its commitment to sustainable, impactful service.

A fundamental aspect of FASS's sustainability is its values-driven decision-making, allowing it to operate without financial motivations. The founder's commitment to prioritizing user well-being over profit has fostered trust and community loyalty. Initiatives like FASSLING reinforce this trust by providing valuable, mission-aligned support free of financial incentives. This independence from financial interests empowers FASS to stay true to its mission of inclusivity and accessibility.

Operating under Founder Mode, FASS's leadership remains agile and adaptive, responding swiftly to challenges and user needs without the constraints of donor expectations or rigid funding timelines. This adaptability is evident in the founder's continual refinement of FASSLING based on user feedback, ensuring real-time responsiveness that is fully aligned with the organization's mission.

Programs such as FASSLING illustrate FASS's values-driven approach, offering accessible support guided solely by user needs. Similarly, the FASSTRAW and FASSREAD podcast aligns with FASS's mission, sharing messages of resilience, transformation, balance and hope with a global audience, all without sponsorship or financial backing.

In addressing challenges typical to organizations without traditional funding, FASS emphasizes community-centered impact, resourcefulness, and strategic agility. The organization's iterative approach to improvement, as seen in FASSLING, reflects its capacity to adapt to changing needs while maintaining a strong community connection. By applying Founder Mode, FASS exemplifies how resilience, mission focus, and community engagement can sustain an organization in the nonprofit sector's financial dependency landscape.

FASS's experience with Founder Mode offers a powerful illustration of the potential for values-centered, resilient strategies in nonprofit sustainability. Through lean, technology-driven operations and community feedback, FASS remains mission-focused and impactful, challenging traditional nonprofit funding models. This journey reveals how community needs can drive a nonprofit's mission, even amid systemic challenges, providing a model for organizations seeking independence and alignment with their foundational goals.

5. Discussion and Future Directions

The expansion of Founder Mode as a model for minority-led nonprofits introduces an empowering framework that enables organizations led by marginalized communities to navigate systemic challenges, enhance their autonomy, and sustain mission-driven work without depending on traditional funding sources. This model, grounded in principles of mission alignment, resourcefulness, and adaptability, provides a blueprint for minority-led nonprofits to maintain independence and operate effectively in a sector often restricted by limited opportunities and systemic barriers. By embracing values-driven leadership, community-centered engagement, and creative problem-solving, minority-led nonprofits can

not only survive but also deepen their impact, challenging existing structures within the nonprofit sector.

A core recommendation for minority-led nonprofits adopting Founder Mode is to prioritize mission alignment over funding. This approach emphasizes putting community needs at the forefront rather than altering goals to fit funder or donor criteria. Rather than reshaping their mission to secure grants, minority-led nonprofits can concentrate on developing community-driven programs that directly address the populations they serve. This mission alignment fosters trust within the community, reassuring members that the organization is genuinely committed to their well-being rather than external funder expectations. By focusing on mission-aligned activities, these organizations build a strong foundation that attracts dedicated volunteers, partners, and supporters who resonate with the nonprofit's core values, reinforcing its long-term commitment to its vision.

Technology and lean operations are also integral to Founder Mode, especially for organizations with limited access to funding. By utilizing free digital tools, minority-led nonprofits can maximize reach and impact while minimizing expenses. For example, AI-driven or automated solutions can streamline outreach, manage engagement, and deliver resources to community members in real time, as demonstrated by FASS's AI-powered emotional companion, FASSLING. Integrating such cost-effective technology enables minority-led nonprofits to grow sustainably, expanding their support without the financial strain commonly associated with traditional nonprofit models.

Another fundamental principle of Founder Mode is resilience through community engagement. Minority-led nonprofits can embody this by actively involving their communities through feedback loops, surveys, and open discussions to gain insights into evolving needs and tailor programs accordingly. This approach ensures that the organization remains adaptable while fostering a sense of ownership within the community, as members feel that their voices help shape the organization's direction. Collaborative efforts like these build a loyal supporter base, contributing to organizational stability and longevity by encouraging community investment in the nonprofit's success.

Beyond these strategies, minority-led nonprofits can benefit from partnerships that extend beyond traditional nonprofit circles. Collaborations with local businesses, social enterprises, or community organizations open up resources and expertise outside of typical grant structures. For instance, partnerships with tech companies to support digital outreach initiatives or local businesses to foster shared community goals provide valuable support, enabling these organizations to grow sustainably while staying mission-aligned.

The adoption of Founder Mode has the potential to prompt policy shifts within the sector, challenging current funding paradigms and advocating for inclusive practices. One shift could involve advocating for flexible funding options within the sector, as grant funding often comes with strict reporting requirements and spending limitations that hinder a nonprofit's ability to dynamically address community needs. Minority-led nonprofits using Founder Mode could push for more community-driven funding models, such as unrestricted grants or participatory funding that includes community input in resource allocation. This flexibility allows nonprofits to more effectively serve their communities without the constraints imposed by traditional funding models.

In addition, Founder Mode promotes equity-based funding policies. By prioritizing equitable funding for minority-led nonprofits, the sector can address systemic disparities and ensure that these organizations have the resources necessary to thrive. Such policies could

support funding based on the organization's impact on its community, focusing on mission alignment and effectiveness rather than traditional metrics like financial stability.

Supporting innovation in nonprofit sustainability is another area where Founder Mode can influence policy. Policies that promote training in digital tools and infrastructure could empower minority-led nonprofits to implement sustainable, technology-driven solutions. For instance, incentives for partnerships between tech companies and nonprofits would enable organizations to maintain low-cost operations, scale efficiently, and provide responsive services to meet community needs directly. Such policies would support a shift toward sustainability in the sector, helping organizations build resilience without financial dependency.

Founder Mode also advocates for a reframing of success metrics in the nonprofit sector, shifting from a focus on financial stability to one that values mission impact, social equity, and community engagement. Traditional success metrics, which prioritize financial stability, can hinder nonprofits operating outside conventional funding models. Through advocacy, minority-led nonprofits can promote impact-centered evaluation policies that emphasize social impact and alignment with mission objectives. This redefined approach to measuring success could empower minority-led organizations to thrive and achieve significant community impact without being judged solely on financial metrics, encouraging a more inclusive and diverse nonprofit ecosystem.

In essence, expanding Founder Mode as a model for minority-led nonprofits empowers these organizations to establish success and sustainability on their own terms. By centering mission alignment, resourcefulness, and community-focused engagement, minority-led nonprofits can cultivate resilience and independence, enabling them to overcome systemic barriers and effect meaningful change. As this approach gains traction, it holds the potential to influence the broader nonprofit sector, fostering a shift toward policies that prioritize inclusivity, impact, and adaptability and ultimately creating a more diverse and equitable nonprofit landscape.

6. Conclusion

Founder Mode embodies a transformative approach tailored for minority founders, enabling the establishment of mission-driven organizations rooted in autonomy, resilience, and deep alignment with their communities. By emphasizing values-based leadership, robust community engagement, and independence from traditional funding streams, Founder Mode empowers minority-led nonprofits to meet the distinct challenges of marginalized communities without the constraints imposed by the nonprofit industrial complex. This model permits founders to maintain a sharp focus on mission and impact, aligning organizational priorities with community needs rather than the expectations of donors or funders who may lack lived experience within these communities.

The disruptive influence of Founder Mode on the NPIC lies in its fundamental departure from financial dependency. By minimizing funders' roles in shaping organizational goals and strategies, Founder Mode dismantles traditional power dynamics, fostering a nonprofit sector where organizations authentically respond to community needs. This independence challenges the conventional gatekeeping and hierarchies that dictate access to resources and influence within the nonprofit landscape. Instead, Founder Mode promotes a more equitable approach to social impact, placing the needs and aspirations of marginalized communities at the forefront.

Through technology-driven solutions, streamlined operations, and a strong emphasis on community feedback, minority founders in Founder Mode are empowered to build resilient, adaptable organizations that weather challenges without relying on traditional financial sources.

This approach not only enhances sustainability but also opens avenues for collaboration and innovation, positioning mission alignment and community impact as central metrics of success. In doing so, Founder Mode redefines nonprofit success, advancing a model that is inclusive, community-centered, and capable of driving meaningful change from the ground up.

Ultimately, Founder Mode offers a potent alternative for minority-led nonprofits to operate autonomously, fostering systemic change and empowerment within marginalized communities. Its adoption heralds a nonprofit sector that is more inclusive, agile, and focused on dismantling root causes of inequality rather than addressing symptoms. As minority founders increasingly embrace this model, Founder Mode has the potential to reshape the sector, inspiring a future defined by resilience, authenticity, and a commitment to transformative change.

Reflecting on the empowerment of minority founders, it is crucial to acknowledge the courage, vision, and resilience that each founder brings. For these founders, embracing resilience, autonomy, and mission-centered leadership in social entrepreneurship is both a profound act of self-empowerment and a transformative pathway for lasting community change. Establishing a nonprofit without traditional financial backing may appear daunting, but it offers a unique freedom to prioritize community needs and shape an organization's trajectory based on deeply held values and lived experiences.

Resilience is central to this journey, as founders confront challenges, limited resources, and systemic obstacles that could dissuade even the most determined leaders. For minority founders, resilience is more than overcoming barriers, it is about transforming obstacles into opportunities for growth, innovation, and deeper community connection. By prioritizing resilience, minority founders sustain their vision and inspire others, demonstrating that impactful work is achievable even with financial constraints.

Autonomy, too, is essential in this model, granting minority founders the freedom to make decisions grounded in community needs, untethered by funder expectations. This independence enables a flexible, authentic approach to social impact, empowering founders to develop initiatives, programs, and support systems that are both meaningful and responsive. Through autonomy, founders create a legacy of service that reflects their values and elevates their communities' unique voices.

Finally, mission-centered leadership reminds minority founders of the passion and purpose guiding their work. In an era where financial goals often shape priorities, maintaining mission alignment is a powerful act of leadership. Mission-centered leadership extends beyond service delivery, forging a path that honors the histories, cultures, and aspirations of the communities served. For minority founders, this form of leadership embodies a commitment to a higher purpose, fostering belonging and uplifting communities that may otherwise feel marginalized.

For minority founders, nonprofit leaders, and the broader social impact community, Founder Mode presents an empowering and transformative path forward. Grounded in mission-driven autonomy, resourcefulness, and community-centered impact, this model offers a novel approach to social entrepreneurship that surpasses traditional funding constraints. Founder Mode is not just an alternative; it is a viable path toward a more inclusive and sustainable nonprofit sector where diverse voices and communities thrive without compromising unique values.

For nonprofit leaders, Founder Mode offers insights into sustainable growth and meaningful impact. By adopting principles of lean operations, innovation, and feedback-driven development, organizations can expand their reach and resilience, remaining responsive to evolving needs. The nonprofit sector has an opportunity to reimagine its practices and embrace Founder Mode principles, such as financial independence and community-centered decision-

making, to bolster resilience and adaptability. In advocating for Founder Mode, leaders can collectively shift toward a more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable nonprofit ecosystem. Through this model, the nonprofit sector can uplift diverse voices, drive meaningful change, and cultivate a resilient landscape for those committed to social impact.

Acknowledgment

I am very grateful for the academic tools and research that have inspired this study. My profound gratitude extends to my family for their steadfast support and encouragement during this journey. Your confidence in my work has been a wellspring of strength and motivation.

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