

**An Interview with SCESA**  
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Condencia Brade is the co-founder and executive director of the [National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault](#) (SCESA). SCESA is a Women of Color non-profit dedicated to working with Communities of Color to create a just society in which Women of Color are able to live healthy lives free from violence. SCESA was born out of a desire for Women of Color in the anti-sexual assault movement across the country to reclaim their leadership and ensure inclusion of their experiences in ending sexual assault. One component of SCESA's work is to provide support for culturally specific communities of color organizations that are addressing sexual assault in their communities.

In talking about the importance of ensuring that SASP formula funding is available to culturally specific organizations, Condencia points out that the SASP culturally-specific grants are very small (just over \$2.3 million in 2012), that this year a record-high eight programs were funded across the nation, and that previously around five programs received funding. She notes that this is woefully inadequate to address the need and remarked, "Really? Five programs in the whole nation?"

She frames her best advice for administrators seeking to fund culturally-specific work in their state or territory with SASP formula funding as a "just do it" rather than a "how to." This call to action is simply stated but takes commitment to pull-off: "Administrators really need to be intentional about knowing their communities. You can't spend the funds without deeply understanding who is in your community. Go beyond asking the people in your immediate circle about the need; get out of your office and get into the community. We are all overworked, but that can't be our excuse. We have to find the time."

She worries that if a SASP request for proposal (RFP) is the first contact a culturally-specific group has with the SASP Program in their state that it's already too late for them to succeed. Planning and outreach is needed ahead of time, and it is best if these organizations can also provide input into the designing of the RFP.

Condencia recognizes the need for mainstream services and the funding bind faced by mainstream rape crisis centers, but urges administrators to be visionary in their approach to services: "You have a voice. We have to acknowledge that we have power. And being able to

fund a program is power. Ask yourself, 'What can I do to make a difference?' You can be an agent of change."

Condencia believes finding the organizations that are already deeply rooted in the core cultural context of their communities and helping them grow the capacity to address sexual assault is essential. She points out that, "many of us doing this work learned about sexual assault in a very mainstream context, including people of color, and they are struggling to talk to their communities using words and definitions that do not fit their reality. There are some people of color who are able to utilize mainstream services. But for many, when something devastates us or breaks us, we go back to our core culture to try to understand what happened. Culturally specific organizations that truly get it—that truly understand what it means to provide culturally relevant services—provide services and engagement that is rooted in and encompasses the community's core culture."

She points out that, for communities to want to embrace sexual violence intervention and prevention, the solutions have to come from the inside, "The strategies have to reflect the reality of how sexual assault manifests in that community; taking into consideration the historical trauma that many Communities of Color have endured. Our communities are often told negative things about who we are, and often we are told sexual assault is a part of our culture. We need people within the culture to debunk this myth and shift the context at the same time creating healing strategies that reflect the culture. Funding, support, and resources for Communities of Color organizations that are steeped in their culture and have an understanding of sexual assault is critical to ending this public health issue."

Condencia hopes administrators that have made strides in this area will be ambassadors for others and suggests that administrators look out across state and territory lines to see where they might need to visit or get more information or conversely, where they might need to support their peers. She believes that all administrators can make a difference in this area and that administrators must be, "Willing, Intentional, and brave enough to do it."