

Philanthropy New York – Membership and Member Engagement

The purpose of this memo is to provide Board members with foundational information about Philanthropy New York as a membership organization and report on 2025.

What does it mean to be a “membership organization”?

Philanthropy New York as a “membership organization” is more than our legal structure and our business model – it refers to our community orientation and theory of change.

Community Orientation & Theory of Change

- We are an interdependent community that learns from each other and actively contributes to one another’s learning. PNY is a space to share, exchange, iterate, inform and influence.
- Members derive value and contribute value. Membership is not meant to be transactional. We strive to create relational strength across the community.
- We believe that our missions are best achieved by leveraging our collective strengths and the membership structure provides scaffolding for this.
- PNY’s role is to build and facilitate community and to encourage spaces that allow for and inspire transformative relationships.
- We believe that change happens through peer-to-peer accountability and peer-to-peer practice.

Business Model

- Members contribute the financial and human capital resources to ensure we have the capacity to carry out our mission.
- Values of community and equity drive our membership dues philosophy: organizations contribute to PNY’s capacity according to their ability to contribute (sliding scale based on annual grantmaking).
- Membership dues cover the vast majority of a member’s participation in all of PNY’s networks, working groups, programs and events

Legal Structure

- Members vote on new board members.
- Board members and certain committee members must be current PNY members.

Who are Philanthropy New York members?

We are a network of 250+ grantmaking institutions dedicated to effective philanthropic practice that supports a more democratic, equitable and sustainable society.

The Philanthropy New York community currently includes 253 member organizations, comprised of about 5,000 individual staff and trustees of those organizations. The member community includes a broad base of philanthropic institutions: private independent foundations (about 32%), private family foundations (about 27%), corporate funders (about 12%), and public foundations/grantmaking public charities (about 11%). The rest are comprised of a mix of philanthropic advisors, faith-based funders, federated funds and a few donor-advised funds.

Our niche is staffed philanthropic organizations committed to continuous learning and improvement in their grantmaking and operational practices. PNY is a space to share, iterate, inform and influence. We have the deepest engagement with and impact on foundations with a staff size of 3 – 14.

As a regional philanthropy infrastructure organization, we focus on New York – building community among funders who fund here or call New York home. About one-third of our member community are exclusively locally focused; two-thirds have some combination of local, national, and/or international focus. More than 85% of member organizations are located in NYC – making grants across a wide range of issue areas and geographic locations.

Members join – and return – for learning, relationship building and collaboration opportunities. The majority of new memberships are the result of peer-to-peer referrals, lapsed member organizations re-joining or individuals changing jobs and encouraging their new organization to connect with the community.

What did we notice about member engagement in 2025?

Annually, we look at data points that help us understand member engagement trends and Philanthropy New York's reach across all member organizations and individuals within member organizations.

Ecosystem Context and Impacts

At the end of 2024, most in the philanthropic sector expected some level of uncertainty in 2025 based on the policy priorities of the incoming federal administration, but few foresaw the level and pace of turmoil that would impact the sector – and all communities PNY members fund. Federal actions were expected to target the nonprofit sector, but the intentional, yet haphazard manner in which they were deployed caused confusion, funding dilemmas, wholesale transformations of entire fields, and general unease.

The impact of the turmoil in 2025 on member engagement was twofold. We saw high engagement with timely, responsive programming that focused on supporting members to make sense of the operating environment and take action internally and externally. We also saw high engagement within our established communities of peer support (networks, working groups), where folks brought real time leadership challenges to the table for peer counsel and organizing. At the same time, we also experienced challenges with engagement related to sustaining attention during an overwhelming time. For example, some programs had higher than average attendance drop-off day of and we noticed that we needed to deploy more high-touch outreach to get engagement.

Despite the tumult, Philanthropy New York has been weathering the storm. In late 2024 and early 2025, board and staff prioritized engagement activities and reviewed a number of membership scenarios. While there has been some further contraction of membership, it was within expected parameters.

Overall engagement remained consistent in 2025. The spectrum of engagement we noted above (some folks leaning in more and some being harder to reach in 2025) didn't significantly change the aggregate picture of engagement Year over year, we have seen relatively consistent organizational reach (~85% of member organizations have a touch point with PNY) and individual reach (~20 – 25% of individuals attend a program).

High-touch outreach works – and more is needed. At the beginning of 2025, the Board affirmed the need to put energy into ambassadorship and proactively reaching out to members who are less engaged. PNY Board, staff, and Committee on Members prioritized outreach to under-engaged and new members. We saw how time-intensive and slow going this work is but we are starting to see the results of that outreach:

- Referrals matter – when members of PNY speak to others about the benefits of being engaged in the community, the impact is real. Most prospective members come to PNY as a result of speaking to someone in the community, be that staff or members.
- Engagement matters (invitations to attend programs together, inviting to networks, etc.) – one of the strategies deployed in 2025 encouraged Board, staff and committee members to invite 3 peers to an event or program. The connections made, even in the outreach, have provided information and further opportunities for relationship building.
- Ambassadorship matters – Board and Committee members of PNY have a high profile in the sector, and with that knowledge, we have encouraged targeted, individualized outreach and relationship building. From reports received so far, those interactions have yielded data for further member engagement, as well as increased deepening of the community.

Member connectivity within the PNY community creates longer term connectivity. When engaged members leave their organizations or when their organizations drop their membership, we see those members consistently work to find a pathway to return to PNY. More than 50% of new members were either staff members from former member organizations or organizations that had lapsed in 2024 (or earlier) but decided to rejoin. This underscores the lasting impact of PNY—members recognize our value and return over time.

Challenges in engaging a broad community – We put significant member engagement energy this year into keeping a broad, diverse coalition together through challenging conversations about PNY's strategic commitment to racial equity and addressing antisemitism. Half of the member organizations who raised concerns about PNY's direction and activities have remained members and engaged in the community and half decided to drop their membership.

Engagement over time – In 2024, we noted that longer term members had dropped at an increased level. We believe that drop was the result of a number of factors, including, but not limited to, changes in organizational norms as a result of COVID, geographical misalignment and a shift to more virtual programming. 2025 saw a significant decrease of dropped longer term members, signifying a potential “tail end” of that trend.

Commented [KR1]: Do you mean shift to in-person programming?

Who joined in 2025?

In 2025, we acquired 24 new members, consistent with our trend of 15 – 25 new members joining each year.

Organization or staff member was previously a member of PNY

- HSBC Bank USA
- Hope for New York
- Ideas in Philanthropy
- Rockefeller Archive Center
- The Hadassah Foundation
- Episcopal Charities
- The Eric and Wendy Schmidt Fund for Strategic Innovation
- Schmidt Futures
- Schmidt Sciences
- Florence V. Burden Foundation
- May and Samuel Rudin Family Foundation
- 1:1 Advisory LLC
- Norman Foundation
- UBS Optimus Foundation US
- Sompo Foundation

Member/Partner Referral

- RTW Charitable Foundation
- Watson Foundation
- Felicity House
- Sumitomo Corporation of Americas
- Women Building Up
- The Gerard Fund

Existing Staff Relationships

- GV Advisory
- Common Future

Seeking Community

- Edward and Sandra Meyer Foundation

Who dropped in 2025?

We experienced some additional contraction, with 33 members dropping in 2025 (with two rejoining within the year, but their membership cycle is officially in 2026). This was anticipated and previewed with the board earlier in 2025.

Most of the dropped members left for reasons that are consistent year over year. However, a few cancellations were due to impacts of the external operating environment.

Structural Changes

- The Sirius Fund (closing)
- Daphne (closing)
- HealthFirst Foundation (program on pause due to federal funding environment)
- Open Society Foundations
 - Soros – subsidiary of OSF
- Arabella Advisors (undergoing full restructure due to federal targeting)

Executive Leadership Transition & Staffing Changes

- Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City
- Laureus Sport for Good Foundation USA
- The Tiffany & Co. Foundation
- Grassy Creek Foundation

Little to No Engagement

- Elluminate
- William Randolph Hearst Foundation
- Unboxed Philanthropies

Budgetary Constraints

- Groundswell Fund
- Sills Family Foundation
- Hope for New York
- HSBC Bank USA

Different community needs

- Single/unstaffed family foundations
 - Envizen
 - Melkus Family Foundation
 - Krupp Foundation
- Not in NYC
 - W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation
 - The END Fund
 - William Talbott Hillman Foundation / Hillman Family Foundations

Oversight – Will be rejoining in 2026

- Ralph E. Ogden Foundation

Board and staff also anticipated losing certain members due to their concerns about PNY's strategic direction:

- The Heckscher Foundation for Children
- The Tepper Foundation
- The Starr Foundation
- The Jeffrey H. and Shari L. Aronson Family Foundation

Finally, there was a handle of members who dropped this year that had disparate engagement with PNY – e.g., staff present but not the executive leadership or one person getting deeply involved but not enough touch points across the organization. In our current work plans, we are continuing to focus on CEO engagement and deploying Board and Committee members for high-touch outreach to extend the reach of staff.

- Porticus North America Foundation
- Apollo Global Management
- The Burke Foundation
- Major League Baseball Players Trust
- The Asian American Foundation