

To: Philanthropy New York Board

From: Pam Foster and Kathryn O’Neal-Dunham

Re: PNY Strategic Direction and Future Opportunities

Date: June 4, 2021

On June 10th, we begin the first of several conversations to inform Philanthropy New York’s strategic direction over the coming years. This memo is meant to provide some context and inform our thinking so that we can best use our time together on June 10th. Together, we will be examining how Philanthropy New York can live into and embody our values, particularly our value of equity, and fully embrace our vision of philanthropic institutions working together to create a more equitable, sustainable and democratic society.

Current Context: Building on our Strengths

Since 2014, Philanthropy New York’s Strategic Planning has focused on key priorities that continue to be at the heart of our work: **learning, network building, and amplifying the voice of the philanthropic field**. As our current 5 year strategic plan comes to a close, PNY is in a strong position to continue providing its well-regarded programming, network engagement and policy work. Staff and members support the ongoing development of new forms of learning and community-building with a constant supply of innovative ideas and suggestions. This is the result of building an ambitious slate of programming, deepening and expanding networks, and amplifying our issue-based working groups.

In the past five years, we have:

- Developed new program curricula, such as Philanthropy 101, Leading with Race Equity, Measuring What Matters and Program Officers as Champions
- Deepened our work with issue-based working groups, including the creation of the Justice Reform Working Group and the launch of our popular Food for Thought Series
- Expanded our peer networks so that we reach almost every role within foundations – engaging Trustees and General Counsels, HR Directors, and COOs
- Advocated for policies that support a robust nonprofit sector
- Invested deeply in the communications and knowledge management infrastructure needed to connect with members and track member engagement

Fundamental to our last plan was an aspiration to help the field imagine new ways of working that confront the U.S. historical context of philanthropy and the practices and policies that perpetuate systemic inequity. As we move forward, it is critical that we align our organizational work, and our leadership within the ecosystem, to pursue these aspirations and lead with our values. We must continue to build intentional frameworks to shift **our own culture**, and that of **our ecosystem**.

We have ample opportunity to do so. Our members have recently underscored in the [CEP member perception survey](#) that that the work we do is meaningful, impactful and influences the ways they think and act. Members praised Philanthropy New York’s role in elevating and connecting the field through individual skill-building, knowledge sharing and networking. The findings underscore the ways that

Philanthropy New York's own shifts in both *what we provide* and *how we provide it* matter to our membership. We will explore the key findings from this survey in more detail at our September board meeting. And, below are some important highlights:

- **The work PNY did in the past five years to build curriculum for cohort-based programming and other strategic leadership programs is widely recognized and appreciated by our members.** Respondents rate the importance of philanthropic strategy programs (Measuring What Matters, Leading with Race Equity, Reframing Philanthropy) most positively. In fact, the only statistically significant increase in members' ratings from 2016 to 2021 was on the perceived importance of this measure.
- **PNY's work is catalyzing change in our members' practices.** The majority of members, and a slightly larger portion than in 2016, indicate that they have made changes in their work as a result of PNY's programs and services. Eighty percent report that they have made at least one change in the way they do their own work, and at least 70% indicate that they have proposed a change in their foundation's work, implemented a best practice into their work, and explored questions that they had not previously thought to ask.
- **PNY has multiple ways to affect members' practices.** When asked to describe the impact that PNY has had on their practices and culture, the top two categories were the knowledge and best practices provided by PNY and the opportunities for networking, peer learning and peer collaborations.
- **PNY's networks and working groups are seen as the paramount benefit that members receive from being a part of PNY.** These professional peer networking groups are critical for facilitating connections and building skills. They offer fertile ground for building peer to peer leadership and accountability within the sector.

Our organizational journey

Our last Strategic Plan contained a discussion of the context in which PNY was working in 2016, using language as accurate today as it was then:

... the country as a whole is confronting our history of systemic inequity. As a result of these trends, it is critically important that PNY, as a regional association of grant makers, redouble our focus on the development of the individual, institutional and collaborative leadership necessary to create meaningful societal change.

In 2018, the Board reflected on the urgency of PNY adopting a racial equity lens in our work. The Board observed:

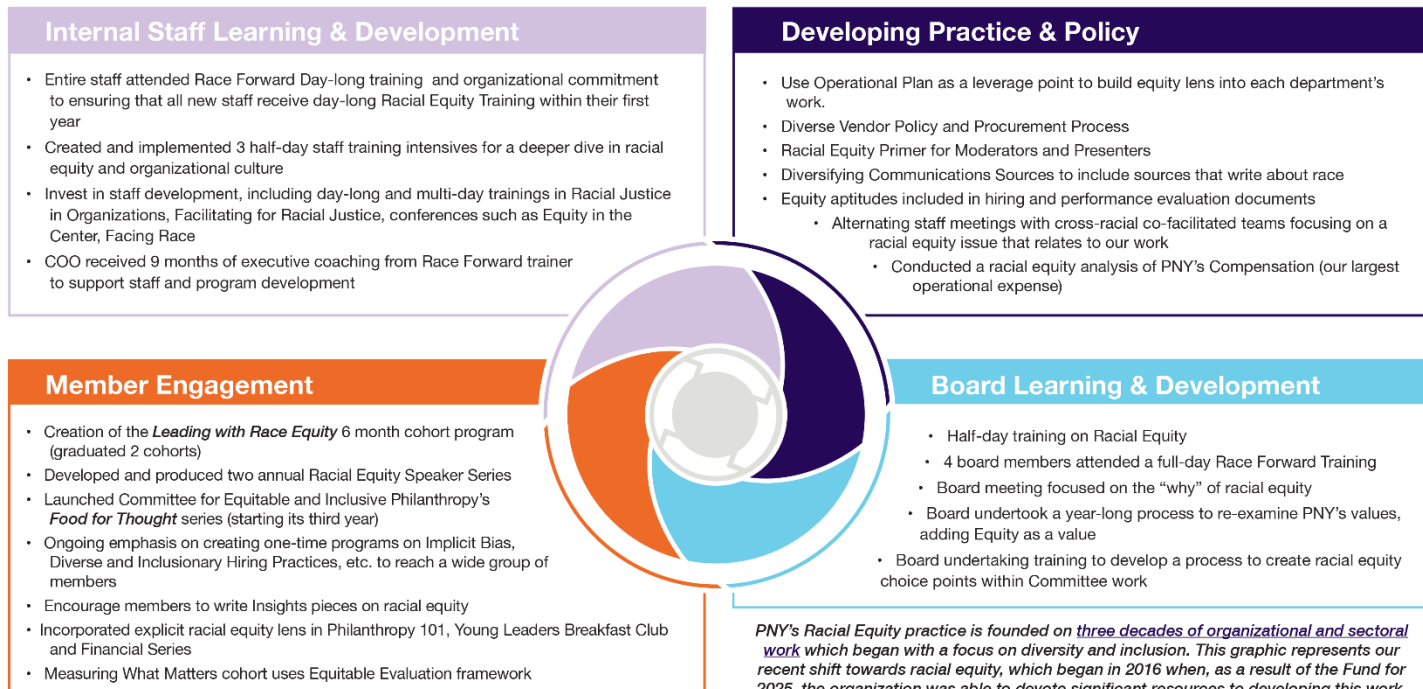
Prioritizing racial equity is an opportunity to rally philanthropy around a fundamental issue core to societal sustainability; and

If PNY and the sector do not embrace racial equity as a core value, we are essentially supporting institutional racism.

Guided by the Strategic Plan and our understanding that this work is urgent and requires considerable reimagining, PNY has answered the call "to support the changes needed to develop a more equitable, sustainable and democratic society" by prioritizing a deep commitment to racial equity in the philanthropic sector. Our ongoing work to operationalize this commitment has included internal staff

learning and development, adapting organizational policies and operating practices, programming and capacity building for members, and board and committee learning and action-planning.

Developing a Racial Equity Practice: Snapshot of Philanthropy New York's Ongoing Journey, 2016 - 2020



Meeting this moment and positioning ourselves for the future

As noted above, Philanthropy New York holds aspirations to help the field imagine new ways of working that confront the U.S. historical context of philanthropy and the practices and policies that perpetuate systemic inequity. In the past five years, as we grappled with that work, the Promising Practices Task Force and PNY staff recognized that all practices, including our own, had to be rooted in values. After an inclusive year-long process, the organization adopted a set of values at the beginning of 2020: **Equity, Learning, Leadership and Community.**

As we move forward, it is critical that we align our **organizational work**, and **our leadership within the ecosystem**, to live into our newly reimagined values. We enter into our next planning phase at a liminal moment for both the sector and PNY. We must continue to build intentional frameworks to shift our own culture, and that of our ecosystem, to become anti-racist. Some of that work is internal. And, some of that work involves a shift in orientation -- from that of solely a member "service" organization to [catalytic "organizers" for the sector](#). This idea is well articulated in the article, "*Beyond Low-Hanging Fruit: Shifting Power, Changing Systems, and Organizing in Our Own Sector.*" Please take a moment to read the article in its entirety. And, we want to emphasize Farhad Ebrahimi's framing here:

...we use the word “organizing” to describe a process of developing both leadership and relationships to shift power for structural change. The goal of funder organizing, then, is to do much more than simply move the money; it’s to shift structures — and cultures! — within philanthropy itself. And we believe it’s critical that we do this in a way that’s both informed by and accountable to the transformative organizing efforts already happening at the community level.

As we think about the moment we are in, both as an organization and as a sector, the goal of our Strategic Direction process must be to move us closer to achieving our vision of philanthropic institutions working together to create a more equitable, sustainable and democratic society.

The board committed PNY to this path when it affirmed equity as an organizational value. Now, our Strategic Direction will frame a process for reorganizing our organizational priorities to be accountable to our equity journey and to build the leadership necessary to center this work.

Crafting a compass for the work ahead

When Philanthropy New York began our equity journey, we often viewed the work as an “add in” or an “add on” to our organizational priorities and goals. Equity was a new set of activities, *rather than a reorientation of the organization*. We now realize that equity is, and must be, our organizing principle and throughline. Equity work exists along a [continuum of organizational change](#). It is dynamic and evolving. It requires that we toggle between internal and external strategies, learning and action, planning and iterating.

The goals we craft through this process will act as a compass. They will guide the ways that we think about the fundamental work that Philanthropy New York does in service to our vision: learning, community building, and amplifying voice. This framework will support the board’s accountability and shape the ways that staff interact with members. PNY possesses great strength in “what” we do. Now we have an opportunity to examine the ways we can shift “how” we think about and to what end we craft these activities. We want to emerge from this strategic process with a framework that supports staff and board in thinking and acting strategically in support of our vision. We are looking forward to crafting a framework that supports us to build our capacity to restructure our organizational life in service to mission and vision.

What to expect

Our last Strategic Planning process was conducted by a small committee of board and volunteer members who met on a short timeline. This time, we are crafting a more inclusive and iterative process, similar to the one we used to reimagine our values. This process will ensure wider input: from staff, from members, from the Board. It will allow for learning as we go and will incorporate new voices. The work we will undertake at the Board retreat will build off of the work already done by the Strategic Direction Committee, staff, and the Committee on Members. All three groups have helped us to open this process, to test for what is possible, what opportunities exist, and where there may be tensions to examine and navigate.

On June 10th, we will begin to open this conversation and explore possibilities. We will think about what it means for Philanthropy New York to fully embody our values and live into a process of organizational change management. We will examine the anti-racist continuum and identify opportunities for ourselves and our work within the sector. We will discuss the ways that our orientation as a “service”

organization can position us for catalytic “organizing” within the philanthropic sector. And, we will make space for the process that we will undertake in the year ahead to create a roadmap for our future together. We look forward to this work with you!