

Responsive Communications Protocol

Memo to Board of Directors - March 2024

The purpose of this memo is to give the Board insight into the Responsive Communications Protocol recently developed for Philanthropy New York.

Historically, PNY has not actively leveraged its institutional voice through external communications in responding to timely issues within the news cycle. This restraint was due to a realistic assessment of our communications capacity and an organizational perspective that did not prioritize rapid response communications as a core function. However, as our racial equity commitments have become more explicit, we've recognized the need to use our institutional voice with intention in alignment with our values.

This shift was not merely about enhancing our communications capabilities but about fundamentally reimagining our role within the philanthropic ecosystem. It required us to rethink how we engage in public discourse, particularly in moments of crisis, and how we support our members and the broader nonprofit sector in navigating these challenges.

After extensive dialogue, we have concretized our approach in the following protocol. Our protocol provides a structured approach to assess timely and emerging issues and determine if and how PNY should engage through the organization's communications function.

Lines of Inquiry:

The following questions help us decide if and how PNY engages with an issue through our communications function. The lines of inquiry are designed to ensure our response is aligned with our mission and the needs of the PNY community, while also being sensitive to the evolving dynamics of the situation.

- **Is there a relationship between PNY's expertise and the issue at hand?**
 - Geographic Proximity: Did the instance happen in New York City?
 - Relational Proximity: Is PNY in relationship with people and institutions that are doing work on the potential root cause of the issue? Is this something that we/our partners have worked on?
 - Philanthropy Specific: Is this a lightning rod conversation on philanthropic practice (internal practice or external practice) that we have a perspective on? Is it a perspective that would lead to us amplifying our institutional voice?
- **Are members looking for some sort of information/resources on the issue?**
 - If so, what would we be trying to make visible to our members?
- **Acknowledgment** – If the event did not take place in our geographic proximity, is public outrage growing in our region that predicates we acknowledge what is going on in the world?
 - What is the level of protest/public outcry in New York?
 - How are PNY staff and members reacting? What is the impact?

Levels of Response

The following questions help us assess and define the scope and scale of our organization's communications response in various scenarios. It prompts us to consider the necessary resources, such as information, knowledge, and staff capacity, that are essential for timely and effective action.

- **Resource assessment** - What would it require (information/knowledge/staff capacity) to act quickly?
 - **Audience assessment** - If members are looking for information or resources on the issue, how do we meet that need?
 - **Communications strategy/ tactics** - What communication channels and messages will be most effective for this level of response?
 - Level 1 – Language directly attributable to PNY
 - Level 2 – Amplifying the voices of partner organizations (Language not directly attributable to PNY)
 - Level 3 - Sharing resources as a secondary message in a pre-scheduled communication
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Additional Considerations

This section outlines the multifaceted roles our organization can play in the aftermath of a tragic event, establishes guardrails for our content, and ensures that our messages are in alignment with our strategic framework and values.

- **Roles We Can Take Up**
 - Resource: Serve as a curator and trusted source of content, bridging our members with external resources and thought leadership. Aim to facilitate members' understanding of the connection between tragic events and the critical philanthropic practices needed to counteract such occurrences.
 - Opinion: Leverage our expertise to offer insightful perspectives, contributing to broader discussions and providing nuanced understandings of the issues at hand.
 - Acknowledgment: Recognize and validate the significance of events, underscoring the importance of bearing witness and the power of acknowledgment.
- **Guardrails and Guidelines for Sourced or Written Content**
 - Avoidances: Steer clear of generic 'stand in solidarity' statements and superficial 'where to give' recommendations, which lack in-depth analysis of the intersecting systems at play.