

Supporting Leadership within our Communities of Color

Karen Lee Spaulding, Vice President of Philanthropic Support

SITUATION OVERVIEW

The Oishei Office of Philanthropic Support believes that building a strong geology of leadership of both executive directors and trustees is essential to the wellbeing of any nonprofit organization. Consistent with national research and our own observations, locally there is a compelling need to develop nonprofit leadership, especially diverse nonprofit leadership, particularly in organizations that serve people of color.

BoardSource's 2021 *Leading with Intent: BoardSource Index of Nonprofit Board Practices* and their companion report, *Leading with Intent: Reviewing the State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on Nonprofit Boards* has noted:

- Boards may be getting slightly more diverse, but they are far from representing the communities they serve
- Board recruitment practices are not aligned with diversity goals
- Boards that include people of color are more likely to have adopted DEI practices than boards that do not include people of color



KAREN LEE SPAULDING OISHEI FELLOWSHIP FOR LEADERS OF COLOR

Initiated in 2019 in partnership with Rockwood Leadership Institute, the Karen Lee Spaulding Oishei Fellowship for Leaders of Color is part of the Oishei Foundation's commitment to racial equity and is strategically aligned with the Foundation's focus on providing resources and supports to local nonprofits beyond grantmaking in the areas of leadership development and network building. It is named for Karen Lee Spaulding, the Foundation's first Vice President of Philanthropic Support, who served in the role from 2013 to 2021 and pushed the boundaries as a visionary leader, recognizing the inherent need and value in creating BIPOC-only spaces for learning, resource sharing and long-term community building.



WHAT DID WE HEAR AND OBSERVE?

In our work as one of the largest WNY private foundations, we heard from nonprofit leaders and their Board Chairs that diversity at the Board table was a goal. Many organizations, however, did not know where or how to begin to identify interested individuals of color who would bring relevant professional and lived experience as well as expertise to governance work.

We observed that a few higher profile individuals were repeatedly asked to serve on boards, straining their own personal capacity as well as limiting the number of perspectives present on Boards throughout the region.

HOW DID WE LEARN MORE TO BETTER INFORM OUR WORK?

- We tapped into our national professional network to learn more about leadership programs and initiatives for BIPOC individuals and did research and reading about the

value and benefit of learning in a BIPOC-only space

- We attended conferences and engaged in field research in New York, Rochester, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh to connect with philanthropic colleagues who were spearheading Fellowship programs for community leaders and programs specific to BIPOC leaders
- We researched and experienced national leadership programs to determine which held rigor and promise for our community
- We continually convene Community Conversations for Leaders of Color, in person and virtually, to listen carefully to thoughts, frustrations, and aspirations about leadership challenges and opportunities. Providing safe space, small group conversations, and brainstorming has led to insight and initiatives.

HOW DID WE RESPOND?

At our Community Conversations for Leaders of Color...

- We tested the idea of a BIPOC-only leadership program and heard a resounding YES! The inaugural cohort of the Oishei Fellowship for Leaders of Color was launched in 2019, in partnership with Rockwood Leadership Institute (RLI). We continued the Fellowship program in 2020 and 2021 in a virtual format, with the rigorous Rockwood curriculum adapted to the constraints of remote learning.
- We heard from those in our communities of color that they deeply valued being together and wanted to build networks, forge connections, and strengthen professional development and mentoring opportunities. In response, we worked with the community to research and select Mobilize, an online platform known for its commitment to building community and its understanding of DEI work. An Oversight Committee of five



BIPOC leaders, with Foundation support, worked for more than a year to develop community guidelines, craft online strategy, and build infrastructure for a robust online platform that will connect and cohere nonprofit BIPOC leaders one to another.



- Understanding that a BIPOC-only space was powerful and the desire for professional development was strong, we organized a Professional Development series for BIPOC leaders in 2021, covering topics including Financial Practice through a Social Justice Lens, Good Governance, Fund Development, and Graphic Recording.



WHAT WERE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES?

At our first Community Conversation for Leaders of Color, the Foundation's motivation and intent were

questioned by the participating BIPOC community leaders.

It was only over time and through an unwavering focus and commitment to relationship before task that we were able to be worthy of trust.



When we presented the hypothesis that Rockwood's leadership training would only be possible for our community leaders if presented in a BIPOC-only space — because of the risk and vulnerability required — we engaged in robust and worthy internal discussions around mixed versus BIPOC-only cohorts. The initiative moved forward because of its alignment to the Foundation's mission and a shared commitment of both Board and staff to the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

WHAT WENT WELL AND WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER?

We are heartened by the evaluations from our Fellows, who consistently evaluated their Rockwood Leadership Institute training as having exceeded expectations, 100%.

Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart for having this fellowship. For giving a brown Latina like myself the courage to continue fighting for those people that society may consider less than. Thank you for helping me find confidence in my voice and for trusting my skills.

We are gratified that our initiatives have enriched our community partners of color.

Thank you...for the Oishei Leaders of Color, Community Conversations for Leaders of Color, professional development workshops, and cohort events. I always look forward to seeing [Oishei] in my inbox because it means that there is an upcoming Oishei event! I've really enjoyed attending these events and the lessons learned from

these opportunities are those that I will take with me throughout my career.

We are inspired by the strides our Fellows have made in their personal and professional journeys.

Going through the program was truly one of the most uniquely authentic experiences I have ever done. I am determined to do my part in removing the roadblocks of systemic inequities from our community and to uplift and empower the next generation of leaders.

We are humbled by the complexity of the work of DEI.

We originally convened the Community Conversations in a spacious, hospitable room, at a centrally located site with ample parking and bus access. When it was noted that we were meeting in a building dedicated to an historical figure who held racist views, we realized that we had not connected an important and critical dot, which reflected an insensitivity to our community partners of color and



reminded us to stay ever alert to the lessons of history.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Listening to, learning from, and responding to the community's need and wisdom are at the core of our commitment to capacity-building services. We're honored to be considered a partner in the work and will continue in this spirit to develop, design, and implement ways to strengthen nonprofit practices.



BEYOND GRANTMAKING AT THE JOHN R. OISHEI FOUNDATION

The John R. Oishei Foundation is the most comprehensive private foundation in Western New York, with a mission to enhance the economic vitality and quality of life for the Buffalo Niagara region through grantmaking, leadership and networking building.

Recognizing that our community faces numerous challenges and opportunities, we do much more than provide financial support. Our Office of Philanthropic Support provides support to strengthen nonprofits and build their own capacity in the areas of leadership development, board governance, strategic planning, research, marketing and communications, and other services.



JOHN R. OISHEI FOUNDATION

Want to know more?

We'd love to share more!
Visit www.oishei.org or contact
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RESOURCES

Kelsey Blackwell. "Why People of Color Need Spaces Without White People." *Arrow Journal*: <https://arrow-journal.org/why-people-of-color-need-spaces-without-white-people/>

Leading With Intent: BoardSource Index of Nonprofit Board Practices, 2021: <https://leadingwithintent.org/>

Leading with Intent: Reviewing the State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on Nonprofit Boards, 2021: <https://leadingwithintent.org/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-findings/?hsCtaTracking=65cc7ee2-ab2b-49ca-a3ab-7d466a3cf6d6%7C3b183ff6-9350-43e9-8e9g-407e47368f93>

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Cover and page 2 top: Oishei Fellows, Cohort 1, at their Reflections Breakfast, November 2019

Page 2 bottom: Graphic recorder Yen Azzaro and Facilitator Franchelle Parker at a Community Conversation for Leaders of Color

Pages 4-5: Graphic Recording by Yen Azzaro of the July 29, 2020, Community Conversation for Leaders of Color