



Kerrin Mitchell:

Welcome to the Untapped Philanthropy Podcast.

Tim Sarrantonio:

We're your hosts, Fluxx's Co-founder Kerrin Mitchell and Neon One's, Tim Sarrantonio. We've spent our career learning how to leverage technology and data in the social sector to better connect and serve our collective causes, constituents, and communities.

Kerrin Mitchell:

In this podcast series, we profile leaders, public figures, philanthropists, and industry experts to explore the fascinating intersection of funding, technology, and policy. We're here to analyze the most formative topics and trends that shape the present and future of philanthropy. Welcome to today's episode of Untapped Philanthropy. I'm absolutely thrilled to introduce our next guest, Roland Kennedy, Jr. He's a distinguished leader and an advocate for equity and philanthropy, and with a career largely focused on democracy and economic justice, Roland serves as a Grants Director at the Carnegie Corporation of New York. He's also a board member on PEAK. He is a board chair of the nonprofit Barbershop Books, and he serves on the executive advisory committee at Streetwise Partners. So a quick caveat here. Roland and I have been respected colleagues and friends for a long time, and I just deeply admire his insights and commitment to equity. So in turning to him oftentimes for how to effectively incorporate it inside of my efforts at Fluxx and beyond, we asked him to actually come and speak with you all on some of the stuff that I've actually already heard. But the cool news here is Tim has not heard it. So I'm a massive fan of Roland's journey, his motivations, his principles, the things he champions, and I am so excited to share this with all of you, Tim, and listeners alike. So Roland, welcome.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Great, thank you so much, Kerrin. I'm glad to be here.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Yeah, we're so happy to have you and Tim introductions, my friend. This is your first time meeting him, yeah?

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well I know and I'm annoyed that it's taken and I'd love to hear more about you. I'm honored that you're here with us today, Roland.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Thank you. Tim.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Love to hear about your journey, things that motivate you, what you're proud to stand with, but especially on a personal basis. Barbershop Books intriguing. I used to work with Streetwise when I was in Chicago, for instance. I did a little bit of work there.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I didn't know that, Tim, I learned so much about you today.



Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, my first job was as a grant writer for a day labor organizing agency. So we used to focus on a pretty sensitive population and Streetwise was kind of connected into some of that stuff.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And Tim's also a voracious reader, so he's very all things books.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

And I heard a singer as well.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And a singer.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, okay,

Kerrin Mitchell:

We just learned that one too. That was listener. You might have missed that prior.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, because people are tuning in for Roland, I would rather turn it in on that. We can hear about my terrible arts career another time. But Roland tell because I'm new, the listeners may be new. Give us a little bit of your origin story if you will.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

No, that sounds good. So I've been reflecting on this question a lot this year because I just hit my 10 year mark in philanthropy, and I think of that 10 years. I may have known you Kerrin for 8 of those 10 years. So I've been reflecting a lot on what my journey has been, what my motivations for this work have been and why I still like to do it. So the elevator speech of that is I started my career in government. I have a big heart for policy, government governance, what all those words mean, not just politics, all in legislative government. In my home state of Pennsylvania, I'm a kid from North Philly, so was in Harrisburg, was also in Washington, DC. And as the saying goes, when your boss loses, you have to find another job when you're in legislative government, it's not so simple as just changing departments.

So with that, my college roommate sent me a job description at a corporate foundation that I knew nothing about, didn't know much about philanthropy, did not have it on my radar in terms of what I wanted to do next. I applied for the job, did not get it, but got a call back about two to three weeks later for another role as an analyst that I did get and a division that they called at the time specialized. Basically that meant doing the work that nobody else really wanted to do or knew what to do about. So for me, I didn't realize that that was a good jumping off point for opportunities that I didn't even have an imagination for in terms of informing what my future would look like in this work. So I got to work with individuals, family offices, corporations, foundations, largely in the Silicon Valley, that helped really shape and get a lot of exposure to doing the work that I do today and still leveraging my heart for democracy, both in the US and abroad that continues to motivate me for this work.



And another thing I think I've learned 10 years later is that as a Black leader, especially as a young Black male leader in this work, my motivations have largely been for communities that often don't receive the majority of philanthropic capital. I don't say charity, I don't use that word as much because the more I've learned about this work, it really is a capital structure. And so for me, I think about who's not receiving funding, why are they not receiving funding? And what can I do in the seat that I occupy both from a board perspective as well as an institutional perspective to help change that. That's my why, that's my motivations and some of why I'm still doing this.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And you've taken on this mission for equity inclusion, and one of the things I love is you've brought that front and center to a lot of that work that we're seeing obviously in our sector, and you and I work together, but I was so inspired by the lens you bring to it because slightly different than a lot of the stuff that typically can go to a webinar or whatever in here, I felt like you had this personal professional inspiration that really helped to resonate and bring some truth to what better could look like. So when we look at that, tell us a little bit about this lens you're bringing. I want to make sure that the listeners understand how you see the opportunity.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Yeah, like I said, I am a young Black man from North Philadelphia. I did not grow up in a community that was talking about philanthropy. I grew up in a community talking about organizing. I grew up in a community talking about what the needs are of your neighbors, how you impact a network in terms of those that really need food or paying the bills or dinner table conversations focused on what is really good for your city. That's not the typical conversations that you even have in philanthropy yet. I think the sector has changed, but one thing about how I grew up is that I intentionally decide not to forget that and still spend a lot of time in my hometown as a grounding mechanism and as a humbling mechanism for myself working in an ivory tower. And philanthropy, oftentimes many can get caught up in the golden handcuffs of it, free breakfast and lunch and coffee goes a long way when you come from communities where those things are quite expensive.

So for me, it is the grounding and the foundation of who I am that has allowed me to not lose that, especially operating in spaces where that is not always centered, where the community perspective is not always first, where we have now reached a place where we add more grantee voices into many of the conversations and decisions that philanthropy likes to take, but the community voice is still a challenge. And coming from one of those communities where voices need to be elevated more in philanthropic decisions, it's something that I intentionally do and bring to, as some may say, cause a bit of good trouble using the narrative of the great and late Congressman John Lewis. And that's okay. And I'm okay with that narrative and do that intentionally because I think the sector needs that. And I'm also mindful that I represent less than 5% of Black leaders in philanthropy and even less than 1% of Black leaders in the grant management side of philanthropy.

Especially, again, thinking that it's a sector that, and a role that is largely White, it is largely female and it is largely those over 40. And I'm not that. I'm the complete opposite of those things and that is also okay. I fully take two steps into that every day because I do think that it helps with my leadership style. I think it helps me keep a good lens on what it means to stand out but not stand out in a second uncompensated job type of way where I feel like I have to actively work to be who I already am. And I leveraged that. I leveraged that as the ability to be able to bring other conversations into rooms where conversations around racial equity, diversity, and inclusion are not always front and center and not just



from the perspective of employment, but also products, technology, innovation ideas, organizational structures. And that's something that I fully embrace,

Tim Sarrantonio:

Just kind of hearing your story. And I'm so grateful that you really kind of walk through a lot of different threads there too because you kind of hit on something. And I want to pitch it to both of you as a way to think about why maybe people struggle with this. If we step back and look at the broader public, like Roland, you even saying, I don't like using word charity, right? And there's kind of an increasing, I've actually found very similar research when I was talking to different nonprofit leaders that they don't like that word because it has connotations of a handout.

So coming from the organizing world and then going into you're involved with PEAK, you're doing all these great things, what's fascinating is that I think that the public's perception in many ways is driven by the foundation world rightly. Think about the show *Loot* with Maya Rudolph. Think about whenever you hear about a character on a law drama or a movie or something, they talk about philanthropy, they're probably a foundation or maybe it's a bake sale on the opposite side. So to kind of then come in and say, from the organizing world there is such a bigger ability for us to think about that I think is very informative. How much of that did you run into where people in the grant world were resistant to building that truly inclusive and equitable philanthropic sector that you see coming from that world? What do you think are the steps necessary that you've taken to navigate that over the time that you've been here over a decade? And how can that inform where we go? I know it's a bit of a heady question, but...

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Yeah, I love heady questions.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Great, thanks for letting me go in that journey.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

And also special shout out to Maya Rudolph because her character to your question too is largely based on Mackenzie Scott,

When you really think about the narrative of that show and what that character went through. And I even think that is interesting because Mackenzie Scott is not your typical philanthropist. She actually funds more equitably. She gives general support and works with different partners and is willing to address topics that she does not particularly know well, I think, feel, and believe. So that I think is actually a good thing to have many people's first perhaps introduction to philanthropy be a character like what Maya Rudolph is representing on the show *Loot*. But that is not what most philanthropy methodologies are, especially when you're thinking about legacy philanthropies, even for the living donors in the world. There's still a lot of restrictions. There's still a lot of process, there's still a number of barriers as we talk about equity, which is the number one word I would say that I'm focused on and my work second followed by impact.

Those are the two words that are my North star and my South star in this work. I think. And part of what, to your question, I think as a sector that does not have as much of a clear bottom line as a corporation or a venture capital firm or a clear incentive structure like a government agency or elected official, which their incentive is to be elected, stay in power. The bottom line of a corporation or a VC is to make money and not fail. Philanthropy doesn't have those same incentives or bottom lines. And so



largely the sector I think is driven by personalities, privilege, and power. And so it's harder, I think, to the core of your question, to really think about what the sector could look like without first addressing what it does look like. And yes, philanthropy does a lot of good, it's necessary and it's needed. I'm not one of those people that thinks that it's not. But I also think we have to be truthful. I also think that we have to address issues head on and we don't always again have the incentives to do that because we don't have to. It's a sector that can largely do whatever it wants. And really all you have to do is confirm what type of organization you're giving to verify tax status.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think that people struggle with that. And it reminds me of a conversation I had. I live in upstate New York near Noel's Atomic Center, and we have a lot of people who work for that. My wife actually, that's the reason I moved to upstate New York. So she worked for the federal government. And I was even talking with folks where we were talking about that kind of core question, that core driver like impact. And in the for-profit world that impact regardless of the size VC or small mom and pop, right, your driver is profit. I need to not only pay the bills but then drive it into a different thing. And then on the government side, it's like we don't care how much it costs. We're here to solve this problem.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Yes, especially legislative government executive might be a little different, but legislative, you're absolutely correct.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And so I think it's the fact that it's that kind of third sector, that third part where it sits in the middle. So I would love to have you continue to unpack that as you've journeyed through because it sounds like you've almost seen all three of those different perspectives.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

I absolutely have. And that's part of, to Kerrin's earlier question, what drives my perspective? Because sometimes I think philanthropy can be very jargony where it's not always, again, clear what it's...

Kerrin Mitchell:

I was going to be like sometimes, a lot of the time.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Some are getting better, some are getting better.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I absolutely agree,

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Absolutely. But it's a continued challenge. And I think some of what drives jargon is a lack of clarity in terms of not only, and Kerrin, you know this, even with conversations around data, I think other sectors have largely surpassed that, but that conversation in some ways and are moving on to other things. But we are still stuck at as a sector, what kind of data do we want to collect? And it's less about what kind of



data do we want to collect towards the types of decisions that we think, feel, and believe we want to make .

Kerrin Mitchell:

People use words that they know. And I feel like we have a tendency to repeat ourselves

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Absolutely.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Many times over and people just repeat the same things, which is why, again, having you today was so lovely. I was like, what a lovely new lens for people to have words to start to tell a different story instead of retelling the same thing over and over at conferences.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Absolutely,

Kerrin Mitchell:

Yes. Love it.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

So Tim, did that get to the heart of your question or anything else in there?

Tim Sarrantonio:

I mean with the whole time, we can unpack things. This is very top of mind because on Friday we're recording this in October, early October. So pre-election also.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Yes.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And so on Friday, I was formally voted in as or designated chair of the Fundraising Effectiveness Project, which is the largest analysis of individual giving.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Congratulations, friend.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Well, thank you. Again, we're not talking about me, but I get it. But the reason I'm bringing that up is we actually had Shannon McCracken of the Nonprofit Alliance join us. We had National Council of Nonprofits join us, their legislative contact. I think even going into the individual giving, as I like to call it, the sweaty world of individual giving, there's more intentional conversations on not just data but its impact in the larger society. The Generosity Commission just came out with a stellar report on



Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Yes, they did.

Tim Sarrantonio:

The impact of that. So...

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

I agree.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Where I would say I'd love continue the conversation is definitely on the data side, but also a constant theme throughout all of our conversations this year is how can you democratize that, not in a jargony democratized data type way, but actually truly do it? Because there are certain populations who are like, there is no way in hell I am giving you my data. I don't know what you're going to do with it. I'm not going to answer you.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Well, I think what you're asking about is trust and equity. And I think in order to, there are a number of communities that not only unfortunately, especially a number of Black communities struggle with trust with government, with philanthropic entities because there is historical precedent that informs that lack of trust. So the foundation of trust, of course, has to start with trustworthiness. You could even use the analogy from the Tuskegee experiments down in Alabama as one of many stories that informed why a number of African-Americans did not want to get a Covid vaccine in 2020 or 2021, I believe it was. So there's always a story and a narrative connected to why a community, individual or entity does not trust another human individual or entity. And I think philanthropically, when you're talking about democratizing anything, whether it's data, whether it's equity, whether it's process, whether it's product, I think it is critically important to start with trust, especially in a sector that is so grounded in a word, connected to love.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Trust though. I mean, is that something, how have you seen that built? I think that's the thing that's like is it just adding context or contextualizing the use of the data? Is it saying we're using this data as a tool to understand inequities and look at resource distribution? How do you actually? How have you seen that trust be built? The problem I've noticed, I haven't heard any really great theories on other than just like, please trust me, I promise said trustworthy.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

The sad part is I don't think I have. And I think that's the elevating that conversation is I think part of the challenge of building trust is moving philanthropy away from this narrative that we are equal partners in this work. We are not equal. When your organization has millions and billions of dollars and you're going to nonprofits and communities that don't. That is not equal. That's not even equitable. So I think in order to give trust, especially even in a sector that still funds less than 1% of Black led nonprofits about the same for Hispanic led nonprofits, I think that less for Native led nonprofits, that's not an indicator of trust. Especially if you put more restrictions and more due diligence and lens on scrutinizing those organizations and the people that run them even more than White led nonprofits and fellows and



whatnot. That's not an indicator of trust. And that has largely remained unchanged for a long time now. So I think in order to show trust, funding practices have to align with trustworthiness.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think it also comes down to space. Like literal, the spaces that we operate and we interact with. And the very nature and fabric obviously change during Covid in a few ways. And we love to pretend because it's convenient and everything is back to normal. It's very much not. One of the things that I remember coming through Covid, I have a friend of mine who at time she was working for the city of Chicago and working with the Biden administration on once they got into office, how can we accelerate getting Covid shots to communities for folks in south side Chicago and stuff like that. And one of the biggest things that they identified is let's go to the leaders in those communities. Let's go and go to the barbershops and go to the churches and go to the restaurants where people would actually hang out and talk to them there. I think that that organizing element is sorely lacking in philanthropy where there is a fear of going down there because, and it's under the guise of, well, we want to stay objective.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Well, it's creating a safe space for dialogue and feedback in a place that feels familiar and understanding. So people aren't going to go sit in a foundation where the power dynamic is present in the building itself or it's getting out there. I've seen a couple folks do this, but it's still so early and I don't know that anyone's solved it, but I do think Jeff Jimenez and the guys over at Surdna, have tried to do a lot with this, but I think it was like you said, that safe space, going to them, working with them, making sure contextualization is there is all part of it, but it has to build and be threaded not just in that conversation, but with the action of like, Hey, here's this collaborative work that we're doing together and we're over communicating and we're building collective ownership of this data and we're trying to figure it out together. And I think it takes a certain level of releasing some of the typical practices that foundations do. And I'm so appreciative Roland in that you're highlighting this to everyone because I do think people think typically if they just say they're not going to use it for nefarious reasons or concerning reasons or anything like that, they think that's enough. And truth is, like you said, you have to go out into the community to where they are and have a conversation about why this can help. But also what are your fears? Tell us about that.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Sorry, Roland, just one question for you actually on that is can you point what's a good example that you've seen where that vulnerability has been protected and people have opened up? And sorry if I was, I cut you off on a more important point so you can totally throw it off.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Not even, I can thread the two. So I think to your question, but also in response to Kerrin, I think that philanthropy also doesn't have a high tolerance for failure.

Even though we keep asking the very communities that we're all talking about right now for impact. I don't know how you have an equation for impact without having a higher tolerance for failure and a lower tolerance for fear. And so I think it's not a aligned equation, it's a very privileged type of methodology to then I think have to think about going into communities that Tim, you were just describing, and also community leaders and partners that are, again, not just individuals, but also institutions like a barbershop, like a library, like a church perhaps even, or other religious institution. So I



think that's another thing to think about. And even the term "safe space", that's not language I've heard in any other sector, but philanthropy.

That's not language I hear in Philly. That's not language I hear in DC. That's not language I hear in corporate or government because, and I'm not one of those believers that there's a such thing as a safe space, perhaps safer, perhaps there are familiar spaces. Especially as unambiguous Black person from one of those cities I just named. So I also think that, Tim, to your question, where I've seen that modeled somewhat better are funders that are not the large institutional funders. I think it's community foundations. I think it's some smaller foundations where a family or individual has brought in the type of person, perhaps an equity consultant or whatever it may be, or a new staff person where they've actually given some actual teeth and institutional power to make change and have allowed themselves to be pushed and prodded on their own power and privilege and get out of the way. Where they have acknowledged fully or as close to full as they can get to move out of the way and fund equitably to allow community partners to utilize funds in the way that they know their community best without heavier restrictions, without a myriad of reports that may or may not even matter.

Even you as a funder may not know that, but yet you're asking other people for that type of information. And also trusting that communities know what they need, that heavily resourced communities know how to use capital to advance their people. And it's not done in a scarcity model, which many nonprofits are unfortunately still victims of from the sector. And so I think that's where I've seen the better examples. I know some of the Minnesota foundations are doing that well. Some of the Southern California foundations are doing that. Well, I think even to globalize it, some of the foundations and philanthropists that are doing work in Kenya, also the Netherlands, also Singapore now, which is a whole different model with what some family offices are doing with innovation, technology and creativity, very different. So I think that there are global models for that, but it still has not hit the sector in a scalable way yet because I think power does not concede easily. And so there's some aspect that we still need to confront about that in the sector and we need more leaders to speak to that.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And how do you see that, again, agreed on all of that in the sense that there is a movement afoot that needs to push that out, educate people on what it is, what it isn't even the words like you said to relay, but how are you seeing that that move forward? Is it something where you're, are you taking a mentorship type approach where you're trying to help folks understand, Hey, here's what we need to be thinking about? Where have you seen this sort of movement grow and how we start getting that structure out to folks so that you do have a group of people, a group of folks even in the foundation space that are starting to speak that language?

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

I think you've seen glimpses of it in philanthropy, but most of my example is Kerrin are not from philanthropy. I think...

Kerrin Mitchell:

Why make sense to me? Because it's actually the opposite of philanthropy. Yeah, that's great.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Yeah, they're not.

Kerrin Mitchell:



What can we all do?

Tim Sarrantonio:

I don't know if that's encouraging or depressing.

Kerrin Mitchell:

I know.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

It's a little both, but I, that's the gray area of working in philanthropy, Tim. It is always a little bit of depressing and also full of opportunity because of what these organizations can do, not necessarily what they are doing.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And honestly, we've learned, bless their heart, people, once they have new words and vocabulary, they will help be a part of that change. But we almost need to do a little bit more to feed information their way. So tell us a little bit about your theory, whether it's mentorship, structure, communication, where are you approaching it and what's your personal and professional play here.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Yeah, I mean it's cross sector learning. I am a big proponent of that. I mean, we're just off the heels of climate week here in New York and just about every event that I accepted an invitation to was not philanthropy related. I wanted to be in the room where you had advocates that were talking about decisions and actions. I wanted to be in the rooms with certain people that were working with policymakers. I wanted to hear what the corporates were talking about. And not that these sectors always get it right, we know that they don't, but it offers a different perspective and a different urgency that philanthropy doesn't always bring. There's someone once said one time, and I've heard this quote many times, that there aren't any emergencies in philanthropy. And I do not agree with that at all. And I think that there is this narrative that's tied to, well, this doesn't have to be done today.

That's more of a process sense of urgency. But I think narratives matter because how you frame a thing is how you treat a thing, to me. If there are narratives in this sector that philanthropy doesn't have any emergencies or that there are no fires, but yet even some data points that I just shared with you all earlier, that there are a number of Black, Brown and Native led nonprofits that need resourcing, that is available in this sector that aren't receiving it for reasons that are tied to historical inequities. That sounds like an emergency to me, that sounds like a sense of urgency, especially since we just named that we are in a pivotal election year where even the sector does not fund electoral democracy more than 2%. So how can we even say that there aren't any emergencies when you have data points like that?

And so for me, I go to different mentors and different leaders. I have coffees, I go to different seminars. I go to different events that are intentionally not philanthropic to get a different perspective, to have direct eye level conversations and ask very hard questions. How do you lead this type of change initiative when you have X amount of pressure? How do you go about instilling change for a process like this when you have half of your executives that don't want to do it just because they don't have to, and you have the other half that are somewhat interested. How do you get buy in, how do you build consensus? How do you build and get to yes, from those type of pressures? Where you have



stakeholders that have a clearer reason for why they may not want to do something that is either tied to financing that's either tied to an election that's either tied to something else that is not just because we don't want to. That's the difference.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Which of those conversations are you most excited of on how it led to something so much bigger than you thought it would eventually become?

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

That's like asking my favorite ice cream flavor. I don't have one particular...

Tim Sarrantonio:

It depends on the weather, right?

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Absolutely. And it depends on the stakes, and I think it also depends on your own organization's tolerance for change, especially change that's tied to equity. Because again, equity what moves, equity is power. That's it. Equity is for those that will be listening to this podcast, the shorthand version, unfortunately because a much broader conversation. It is about the moving and removing intentional and deliberate barriers out of the way of those that really need that. That is equity 101. And so I think any conversation in terms of which ones resonate with me the most, Tim, or which ones might be a favorite, it's anything that's going to get that equity quotient to have its highest level of manifestation, meaning as many barriers as possible are moved. That's what that looks like to me.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And one of the things I thought was really compelling is you're thinking not just about things that are happening amongst the communities, but you're even looking at the systemic issues that could be blind to folks. For example, one of the things you brought up at 2024 PEAK was this idea of honestly, GMS systems like Fluxx. So grants management systems who are working with, in our case, 23 billion went through Fluxx last year. That's insane.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

It's wild.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And it's anything that we need to be doing at a practice level for 400 plus clients, ways that we can sort of call to action our lens of expanding it there. I thought that was a really important, honestly, avenue that a lot of people aren't thinking of. So for example, we had Roland come and speak with our executive leadership team. There was a call to action obviously that you brought to us, but you're asking of the broader GMS community. Do you mind diving into this one example as sort of one of the ways that we can start to look at things and manifest change instead of just one-off, but doing it at a larger level?

Roland Kennedy Jr.:



Of course. No, I love this question because it's something that has been on my heart and mind since 2020. Earlier Tim referenced the Covid pandemic, but there were two pandemics in 2020. One was Covid, the other one was the most recent racial awakening, not just in this country, but globally. With the murder of George Floyd that I've shared with many people was not a starting point. It was a tipping point after a number of other murders of Black bodies, including Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. So I say that because one of the things I was looking for in many of the funders and nonprofits and others in the sector that were making public statements, I didn't see any public statements from GMS companies in 2020. And so I started thinking, I said, well, I wonder why that might be given that they are key actors in this work too.

And then I started going on a little bit of a deep dive in terms of, well, I have some other questions about why have we not engaged? We as the philanthropic sector engaged GMS companies on conversations around equity. Why are they not at the table? And I'm like, so if you keep bringing the same people to the same table for the same conversations and expect a different outcome, that's not likely to happen. So I said, I wonder then how we get GMS companies to the table to discuss diversity, equity, and inclusion, but particularly equity, which is the real power of those three acronyms, how they work collectively and also individually. So that then led to the call to action during the PEAK convening in Seattle this year where it wasn't about calling out GMS companies. It was more so about calling in and bringing in to this conversation where I thought and felt that you all were missing and that you all needed a seat at this table around the conversation about equity.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Thank you for that. I agree. And I think part of it was that we hadn't been invited in. I mean, there is a vendor relationship that a lot of people hold just kind of hostage for bless their heart. And it really does. We just sit there being like, well, we can't have an opinion because we piss off so many people if we get too far. But we also do have an opinion, but we just don't know when to speak up or what to make sense of sometimes. So it was a really welcome opportunity to thank you for calling that.

Tim Sarrantonio:

That opinion in practical reality. Also, if not invited in, would then simply be pawned off on the marketing department. To figure out, write the least offensive way to show support, but not really.

Kerrin Mitchell:

And that's why we didn't do it. We do represent, I mean, we have everyone from the far left to the far right is customers. We have people in the middle. We have to sort of hold structure for it. But of course we have a DEI council. We have a huge amount of effort that's put into that in our practices, our structure. And if you ask about it, we'll give you the info. But what's so interesting, Roland, is nobody was asking only, I'd say, We do a lot of RFPs, bless everyone still does that for some reason. But we only had one or two. I know that's like my eye roll. You can't see me, but my eyes are in the back of my head. But we still have to do a lot of those things and only one or two of them ask us, what are your equity inclusion practices that you do? And we have a ready to rock answer that is important. It's a huge part of who we are and how we hire and what we do, but nobody asks. And I think that's an interesting thing, and I'm so pleased that you brought this forward.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

And I think it's a broader sector issue that nobody has asked, especially given that GMS companies aren't just about how we make grants anymore. You all are key to how we do business. And so if funders



and grantee partners and all in between who use any GMS system, whether it's Fluxx or anyone else is not asking that question, then I don't think that that is broadening the voice of how we move equity capital forward, whether we're talking racial equity, disability, gender equity, all the equities, all of them. And that's part of the challenge.

Tim Sarrantonio:

There's a conversation that also it extends beyond the grant management platform.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Well, that's what going to ask you, Tim, is like where does that...

Tim Sarrantonio:

Yeah, I am. I'm on the sweaty world of individual giving.

Kerrin Mitchell:

But you guys typically are a bit more open than I think some of I've seen. Do you see that? Or how are you?

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think I see a lot more performativity.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Sure.

Tim Sarrantonio:

I see a handful of consultants who have positioned themselves as experts on that, that especially came after George Floyd that got a lot of speaking engagements. Good. But why did it take that? And the reality is that if you look at the undercurrent, because one of the initiatives that we supported is the Back Black movement that was founded by Floyd Jones, who's a friend of mine, and awesome. I was going to wait to see if that would make sense to ask after the podcast because it's like I don't, it's a completely different part of the sector in many ways, but it's the same conversation.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell:

So what's frustrating, I think that I see on the CRM and the digital fundraising side and all of those types of things, these kind of public facing elements, is that they take a performative stance if they do it. And then you get into where the funding's going, where the infrastructure, what the procurement processes are like, and there's nothing. And one of the things that I learned pretty early on that I was able to do is to say, okay, let's focus on the infrastructure. Are we paying our speakers, we choosing speakers of color at our conferences? Are we involving folks in the conversation and even designing some of the programs that we want to do or the things that we think are important to equity? We've prioritized that at us, but unfortunately, I think there's a long way to go. A long way to go there.



Roland Kennedy Jr.:

And I agree with you, Tim, because I think some of the things, I had a 30 second shot clock that was in front of me on the PEAK stage, and I hope on the recording, hopefully I navigated that well, and nobody could tell, but in some of what you're naming are not just call to actions, but now you're naming specific steps. And I think that's where you get into how you do it,

Which is important because some of the things I had been thinking about too, in addition to what you just named, was also how do you start to diversify the C-suite at GMS companies? I still don't think that there is one Black, Hispanic or Native person that is in a C-suite at any of the top six GMS companies in this country. And I think that's something that also does need to change. I think about even equity statements on website, even if the company does not want to name without losing the bottom line. I think JP Morgan, MasterCard and Proctor and Gamble gave us some great examples just over the last week on how you have an executive that champions DEI, without losing your bottom line, and as a corporation, which is making a profit, cool. But how do you do that too with equity statements on your website to make it very clear what you represent?

That also says something internally. I also think it is one of the ideas that I would love to see implemented, and even with Fluxx, because out of the 8 of the 10 years that I've worked in this sector, I've worked with Fluxx and even thinking about a tech equity fellow in partnership with an exclusive HBCU to bring in those ideas, that is something that nobody is doing. And thinking about the benefits to not just the company, but the sector to bring in those perspectives, given the burden of brilliance that is often found in philanthropy that if you didn't go to an Ivy League school or Tier one university, which thankfully I went to both, but that is still part of the challenge of the amount of extra steps that you have to take to even be heard in this space. And I don't think that GMS companies are separate from that in terms of funders and certain of the larger nonprofits that receive most philanthropic capital. So those are also some of the actions I think that GMS companies can take. I think it would benefit the sector, and I do think that those are the types of conversations that also funders and nonprofits still need to be having.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And I just want to add to that and let's extend that out into the other tech nonprofit technology.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Absolutely.

Tim Sarrantonio:

This conversation needs to be had in the CRM companies, the digital fundraising companies.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Absolutely.

Tim Sarrantonio:

The event auction platforms, the video delivery systems, all of it. Because there is a power that also gets centralized within how that data is structured, what it's prioritized, how it, even little things like there's a bunch of fields that won't track gender beyond male and female in CRM systems that they're not going to change.



Kerrin Mitchell:

Right? Yeah. It's so insane.

Tim Sarrantonio:

And so there's so many conversations that go deep here, but..

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

Airline companies as well. I think Delta is the only one that offers that.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Yeah, I never thought of that. Yeah. Oh my goodness.

Tim Sarrantonio:

So obviously we could talk a lot, Kerrin, on this beyond, but I do think we ...

Kerrin Mitchell:

Should, we have Roland back. I think we talked about the,

Tim Sarrantonio:

I think we should have rolling back.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

I would love to come back.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Because think about, we recorded this in October. The elections are coming up in whatever form that takes in November, and gosh, only knows what the outcomes, and I don't even want to think about it.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

And November through January now.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Exactly. You're thinking February. Right? Roland.

Tim Sarrantonio:

We can't take that's for granted anymore, so yeah.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Right. So this will be interesting because we'll have the conversation now and then we'll be able to look back at the last three months come February.

Roland Kennedy Jr.:

That's a good timing.



Kerrin Mitchell:

Potentially, I'm sure. Some brilliance, but also continuing this conversation that I think, unfortunately, I feel like we're already held you so much time, Roland. Are you? Oh my gosh. You've been a champion here.

Tim Sarrantonio:

Yeah. Well, luckily our last segment is some fun hearted questions.

Kerrin Mitchell:

Roland, thank you so much for joining us today. We appreciate you just deeply, deeply for all the insights you brought. Obviously our listeners can learn more about your work through carnegie.org, but also at the Black Voices and Grants management journal at peakgrantmaking.org/journal.