

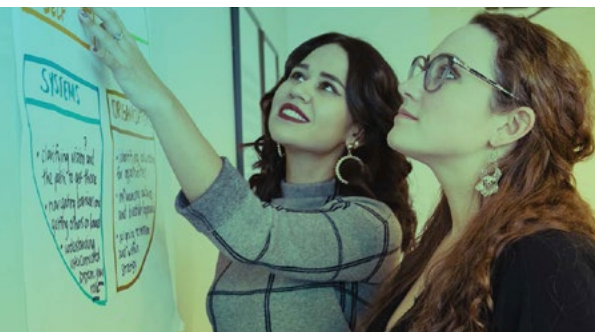
10 YEARS



Prolnspire

Activating Leaders, Accelerating Equity

A DECADE IN THE MAKING: Prolnspire's Lessons on Leadership and Equity Work





From the CEO

2019 marks ten years since I launched ProInspire, and it amazes me how much has happened in that time. In the decade since our founding, ProInspire has had the opportunity to work with more than 5,000 leaders and 500 social impact organizations to advance leadership and equity. While our work is ongoing, our team is using this milestone to reflect on how the organization has evolved over time, where we go from here, and what we have learned along the way. In sharing this, I hope that other individuals and organizations can see themselves in our successes and challenges – and gather ideas to inform their work moving forward.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PROINSPIRE

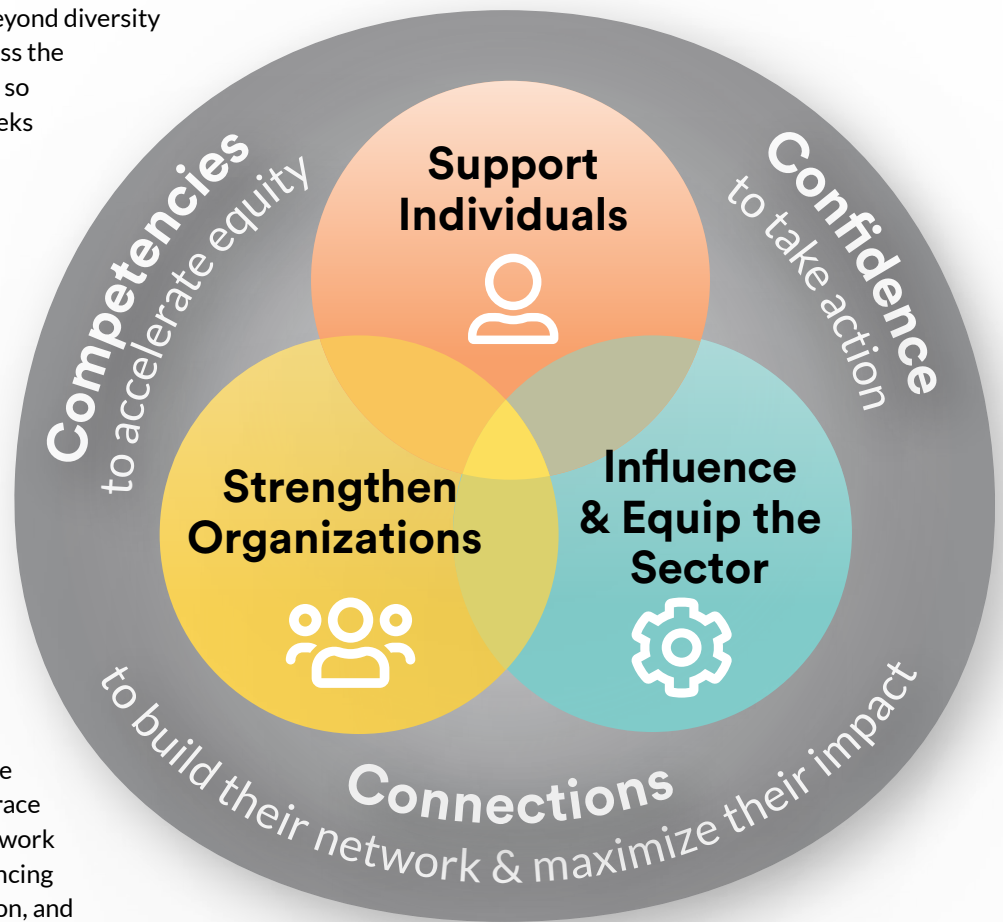
I launched ProInspire in 2009 in response to the challenges I saw facing individuals across the nonprofit sector. By that time, I had worked in multiple nonprofit organizations and private-sector companies. I was struck by the fact that companies like Capital One and Andersen had internal universities dedicated to supporting staff's professional growth and development, while most nonprofit organizations had no mechanism to support people on the inside. I also knew that despite strong interest among my peers to work in the nonprofit sector, structural barriers such as low pay and expectations for prior nonprofit experience kept them out. ProInspire sought to address these barriers by launching a fellowship to expand talent pipelines and recruit young business professionals to the sector.

By looking outside of traditional recruiting pipelines and processes, we found well-qualified, diverse candidates for the fellowship. Yet we learned from their experiences that this approach alone was not going to change organizations, and many of them left the sector within five years because the barriers still existed. This prompted us to evolve beyond talent pipelines, to support leadership at all levels with the launch of Managing for Success and the ProInspire Leadership Institute.

Our work shifted again in 2014, a year in which we witnessed several public killings of black men that stirred our country. A few weeks after Michael Brown was fatally shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, I joined a fellows training and listened to them share how this event had deeply affected each of them and moved them to action. I asked whose organizations were providing space and openly talking about how this tragic event affected staff or connected to their work in communities, and nobody raised a hand. I was stunned that not a single organization – including large, well-known nonprofits – had connected Michael Brown's killing with the structural racism central to their missions.

This was our wake-up call to move beyond diversity and inclusion and more deeply address the core issue of racial equity underlying so many of the challenges our sector seeks to address. Like many of our partner organizations, we started with a focus on the “fish” but have evolved to think more about influencing organizations and systems, or the “groundwater.”

Our journey of getting clearer on how equity needs to be the result of our work accelerated in 2015, through a year-long program sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation focused on [ResultsCount®](#) and racial equity. Through this, we co-founded Equity in the Center to shift mindsets, practices, and systems in the social impact sector to advance race equity. We have since deepened our internal work around race equity, shifted our external program work toward developing leaders and advancing equity, and updated our vision, mission, and strategies to reflect this sharpened focus. Ultimately, we believe that investing in leadership and equity in the social impact sector will strengthen organizations to advance systems change and accelerate impact for our most critical challenges. These efforts prepare us well for the next phase of our work.



SHARING THE LESSONS

What you’ll find in the following pages isn’t a traditional report of impact with quick facts and quantitative data; it is the story of what we have learned in our first ten years and a record of who we are today. And, we hope, it will provide our community of supporters with valuable perspective and helpful insights as they consider their own role in creating momentum toward equity in this great ecosystem of the social impact sector.

Our work would not be possible without the incredible support of individuals within our community, our partner organizations, and our philanthropic partners. The lessons that follow, and the impact they will continue to have on us, our community, and the sector, arose from your belief in our work. We dedicate this report — and our next 10 years — to all of you.

With gratitude and partnership,

Monisha and the ProInspire Team

10 Years of ProInspire

ProInspire founded




Launched Managing for Success



Launched ProInspire Fellowship in Digital Finance



Celebrated 10 years

Named one of 7 Nonprofits to Watch by the Chronicle of Philanthropy

Hosted the ProInspire Summit

2009-2012
Supporting career pathways into the nonprofit sector

2013-2016
Developing leadership at all levels

2017-Present
Advancing leadership and equity



ProInspire Fellowship launched in Washington, DC



Expansion to SF Bay Area

ProInspire Leadership Institute launched, programming expands to multiple cities

Launched Equity in the Center

Hosted first Impact Fellowships Summit



Impact Fellowships Summit

Updated mission, vision, branding




Hosted first EIC Summit

Launched ProInspire Racial Equity in Leadership program

Lessons on Leadership and Equity Work

In a sector as diverse and dynamic as ours, how do you distill the learnings from 10 years of partnership with individuals, organizations, and funders into a digestible amount of content? We filtered our ideas through the lens of relevance and interest to the sector as it relates to the future of our collective work, and landed on the following five lessons:

- Be intentional about setting the stage for learning and growth
- Get clear on how organizational change happens
- There is power in collaboration
- What it takes to build community
- Making difficult program decisions

1 BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT SETTING THE STAGE FOR LEARNING & GROWTH

Prolnspire programs bring people together to advance leadership and equity. Whether they participate in a one-day convening, a two-day training, a months-long cohort or a year-long fellowship, participants across all of our programs express appreciation for the space to come together, discuss important topics, and learn from each other. Leaders in nonprofits simply aren't given enough time and resources to put aside their daily work and gather for learning, growth, and connection; when given the opportunity, we have to make it count.

“I appreciated how much space we had to hear about the struggles and strategies of other leaders. It made the day more dynamic and engaging to hear such distinct worldviews.”

–Prolnspire Leadership Institute Participant

When we bring leaders together, we think about the arc of learning, creating conditions for connection and change to occur, and how this can lead to action. The following chart highlights some of the key considerations and program elements we have found to spark meaningful connection and learning among leaders at all levels.

	DESIGN FOR INTERACTIONS	INCREASE SELF-AWARENESS	VARY THE MODES OF LEARNING	CREATE COMMUNITY	COMMIT TO ACTION
GOAL	Define program goals and the arc of learning, ideally with participant input	Emphasize self-awareness as a core element of advancing leadership and equity	Design the program so that all voices can contribute, and knowledge of the room is uplifted	Create space for people to build relationships, which is frequently the most valuable aspect of any program	Ensure individuals make and share action commitments to support them in moving from learning to action
APPROACH	Consider how trainings, assessments, retreats, and coaching can support goals	Include time for individuals to explore and share their identities, values, and personal mission	Vary activities with individual reflection, small group discussions, and interactive activities	Create the conditions for a group to form a community through check-ins, shared agreements, and informal interactions	Build in time to reflect, set goals, and define timelines
WHERE WE WANT TO GROW	Bring more opportunities for heart and body into the learning process	Create a self-assessment based on the Prolnspire Leadership Model (in development)	Identify tools and frameworks that are not based on white dominant culture norms for leadership	Support communities to self-organize for continued engagement	Create more opportunities for coaching to support follow-through

SETTING THE STAGE FOR LEARNING & GROWTH: PROGRAM EXAMPLES

ProInspire Leadership Institute

We launched the ProInspire Leadership Institute (PLI) in partnership with The Kresge Foundation, which engaged us to support rising leaders within its grantee network with the personal awareness, practical skills, and relationships to scale impact through their teams and stakeholders. Since 2016, ProInspire has conducted two-day workshops in multiple cities, reaching over 300 leaders from 160 organizations across Kresge’s grantee network.

We leveraged learnings from the Managing for Success program in the design of PLI, and we incorporated key elements (designing for interaction, varying the modes of learning, creating conditions for community and action) that set the stage for growth towards the program objectives.

Despite initial concerns that the two-day, back-to-back program structure might impact participant learning relative to longer programs, evaluations conducted by Sharp Insight LLC demonstrated the new model’s effectiveness through strong results. Across all measures of PLI objectives — including building trust-based relationships, giving clear and actionable feedback, and increasing awareness of implicit biases — mean scores significantly* increased in the desired direction from pre (3.78) to post (5.22).

We continue to refine PLI by incorporating a stronger focus on identities, how biases impact trust, and equity considerations when managing people, and will continue to leverage these program elements in future offerings.



Day 1 Lead Self
Increased self awareness/regulation

- Welcome/Introduction
- Personal Mission
- Emotional Intelligence
- Implicit Bias
- Informal Networking



Day 2 Lead Others
Applied management skills and tools

- Trust
- Delegation
- Coaching
- Feedback
- Action Planning/Closing

* $p < 0.001$. Survey tool was a 5-point Likert scale with prompt 'I understand how to effectively...'

ProInspire Fellowship

Our first program was the ProInspire Fellowship in Washington DC, which we launched to help address talent challenges in the nonprofit sector — particularly nonprofits wanting a larger talent pool, increased diversity, and access to analytical skill sets. The fellowship focused on young business professionals in search of a meaningful career who may have overlooked nonprofit jobs because of expectations for unpaid internships or low entry-level pay. In 2012, we expanded the ProInspire Fellowship to the Bay Area and ran 2-3 cohorts of fellows per year. The ProInspire Fellowship focused on:

- Recruiting and matching fellows and partner organizations
- Conducting a rigorous selection process to identify a pool of finalists
- Providing a robust professional development program to support the fellows’ transition into the social sector



The program was beloved by fellows, who found it to be a life-changing experience, and nonprofits, who relied on it as a source for new and diverse candidate pools. While we sunset this program in 2018 (see lesson 5), learnings from the fellowship continue to inform many aspects of our work, particularly issue-focused fellowships (like the [ProInspire Fellowship in Digital Finance](#)), cohorts, and building community.



2 GET CLEAR ON HOW ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE HAPPENS

Through an ongoing process of learning and adapting, we have gained insight on how our work can and cannot support organizational change. Change at this level will not happen solely by bringing in new people (as was our approach with the ProInspire Fellowship), or through trainings (which continue to be an important aspect of our work). While new talent and ongoing training can support change, a deeper commitment from multiple stakeholders and across functions is necessary to create lasting systemic change.



We have supported leaders and organizations through several types of change, from creating a shared work culture to adopting new strategic plans to advancing race equity. Across these efforts, our work has surfaced the following insights about how to effect change:



CULTURE IS KEY. A strong organizational culture builds trust that can carry an organization and its members through even the most difficult change processes. Creating the conditions for strong culture, including a shared sense of purpose, collective investment in organizational outcomes, and respect for all voices and perspectives, requires an intentional approach. With that understanding, over time we have expanded our work supporting teams and organizations with retreats and custom trainings focused on building shared language, tools, and culture.



CHANGE IS A JOURNEY. Training can be a catalyst, but real, lasting change requires aligning on new ways of working, shifting norms, and holding accountability. That's why ProInspire's Race Equity and Leadership program incorporates multiple elements to support change processes that shift culture and advance race equity. The program builds awareness and knowledge on the four levels on which racism operates, provides tools, fosters opportunities for collaboration and courageous conversation, and identifies meaningful next steps with action plans. While the in-program element includes a series of workshops and retreats, the substantive work of shifting culture happens over time through coaching, action plans, and follow-up.

“We need to acknowledge that dismantling centuries-old systems of oppression is not going to happen overnight. It's not going to happen in one day, or one month, or one year. This is work that we are committed to for our entire lives.”

—Megan Grimaldi, Member of The ProInspire Network



YOUNG LEADERS ARE PUSHING FOR CHANGE. A consistent piece of feedback we hear across our leadership programs is from young leaders who feel their senior teams need the same training. We have responded to this trend in a few ways. For example, we added leadership programs on trust, influencing others, and courageous conversations to equip young leaders with the skills required to work with senior leaders to promote change. In our learning communities to advance race equity, we focus on teams that cut across levels so that young leaders have a bigger voice in this work.



SENIOR LEADERS MUST CHAMPION CHANGE. While we believe that individuals can lead and create impact at all levels, advocacy and action from senior leaders are critical for organizational change, particularly around race equity. Senior leaders must articulate the “why,” acknowledge the work they need to do individually, gain buy-in from staff, and hold accountability for action, both personally and among the staff. Senior leaders are a key lever in the Race Equity Cycle, reflecting the importance of their role.

3 THERE IS POWER IN COLLABORATION



We have deepened our work in collaborations over the past five years, based on our experience in the Casey Learning Lab which gave us a better understanding of the [theory of aligned contributions](#) and where we could push for systems change through collaborations. We see collaboration as a powerful tool for broader change, however it requires an honest assessment of the purpose, time, and fiscal resources required to do it well, and a commitment from funders and organizations to support it. Over time, we have engaged in collaborations for various purposes including knowledge sharing, co-creating programs, and field building.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING. Our collaborations with like-minded organizations to share knowledge and explore areas for partnership include the Nonprofit Workforce Coalition, White House Summit on Talent and Leadership, Fund the People, and informal communities of practice. Equity in the Center's knowledge partnerships include Building Movement Project, CHANGE Philanthropy, and Borealis Philanthropy's Race Equity in Philanthropy Fund cohort. In some cases, knowledge sharing has led to deeper partnership around programs and field building.

CO-CREATING PROGRAMS. Our collaborations with other organizations to build programs together were time- and labor-intensive, but they led to the launch of new programs that would not be possible had we worked independently. For example, through a convening of capacity builders that support Kresge Foundation, we partnered with Change Elemental and Crossroads Anti-Racism to create a learning community of board and staff to advance race equity. In another case, we partnered with Building For Mission, Walker & Associates Consulting, and BoardSource to co-design a race equity cohort program for grantees of the Meyer Foundation.

FIELD BUILDING. Working at the field level has led to the launch of two of our biggest collaborations: Equity in the Center and the Impact Fellowships Summit. Both of these initiatives involved collaboration with multiple partners, evolution over time, and support for the work to continue beyond ProInspire (see next page for more background).

As we think about future collaborations, we will stay mindful of the following actions that can lead to better outcomes:

- Invest time to build relationships at the individual and organizational levels
- Align on a shared result with partners and get clear on whether we can invest resources (time, funding, expertise) towards that result
- Maintain transparency and authenticity to build trust, especially with equity work



COLLABORATION SPOTLIGHT

Equity in the Center

In 2015, ProInspire participated in the Casey Foundation's [Social Sector Talent Pipelines Strategy & Learning Lab](#). This program supported our team's capacity building around [Results Count®](#) and tools to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. Together with the other groups in this program, we aligned on a shared result to shift mindsets, practices, and systems in the social impact sector to advance race equity. In 2016, ProInspire, Public Allies and AmeriCorps Alums launched [Equity in the Center](#) to advance this field-level work. The first year, the Launch Team focused on aligning strategies to move the work forward and on fundraising to support it. In 2017, the project hired a Director and Associate Director to lead the effort, and began convening advisors in Dialogue & Design sessions to shape research on building a Race Equity Culture. Equity in the Center then became a project of ProInspire, which felt appropriate given the amount of fundraising and staff time allocated to the body of work.



2018 was a year of outreach and insight-sharing for Equity in the Center as it published [Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture](#) and hosted its first public summit in Baltimore. Nearly 70% of people who came to that Summit had not engaged with Equity in the Center before, but were eager for a space to learn about advancing race equity in their organizations. Equity in the Center also launched the [Woke@Work site](#) to share engaging content, such as blogs and videos about building a Race Equity Culture, and continued to expand field-level work through partnerships and collaborations.

In 2019, we retained consultants, both to evaluate Equity in the Center's impact to date and to engage stakeholders about potential next steps for the project. Their inquiry found that Equity in the Center had developed a uniquely valuable framework, as well as a strong network of stakeholders across nonprofits and philanthropy, philanthropy-serving organizations, and race equity consultants. This effort sought to clarify the project's role in the ecosystem, define key stakeholders, and identify a business model to fund the work. A key finding was that the project is at a strategic inflection point, and that there is a high level of variance in perceptions of the appropriate role and value of the work going forward. At the same time, ProInspire's expanded race equity programming challenged Equity in the Center's role as a neutral intermediary, which is key to the initiative's effectiveness.

Impact Fellowships Summit

In 2015, we published [Social Impact Fellowships: Building Talent in the Social Impact Sector](#) to share results from our fellowship programs benchmarking survey – including the finding that nearly 100% of survey respondents wanted more opportunities to collaborate with other fellowship programs. In response, we partnered with Atlas Corps and Public Allies to launch the Impact Fellowships Summit, a forum for leaders and managers of fellowship programs to learn, share, and network in their quest to drive social impact. Each of our organizations brought different strengths to the collaboration: ProInspire focused on overall planning, Atlas Corps on logistics, and Public Allies on day-of programming. For most participants, the Summit was their first opportunity to gather with peers who share their role and scope at other organizations. We co-hosted the Impact Fellowships Summit in 2016 and 2017, building out a community of fellowship practitioners and identifying a number of opportunities to further support this community. By 2017, however, we realized that our capacity to lead this field-level work was limited and that it was time to spin off the Summit to a new home (see page 11 for more details).



We began the process of exploring a new organizational home that would better support the work and resourcing needed for field building, including financial and operational investment and access to a national network that could accelerate awareness and action on building a Race Equity Culture. In order to center equity in the process to determine the future of Equity in the Center, the ProInspire Board approved a participatory decision-making process. Advisors and partners who have been most engaged in the project will approve next steps for its development in 2020. We look forward to seeing this project spin off and expand its work in a new home.



4 WHAT IT TAKES TO BUILD COMMUNITY

We often hear from our partners and program participants that *community* is the benefit they most value from their engagement with ProInspire. In our work, community relates to a sense of belonging and connection with others who share interests, values, and goals. We are still learning in this area, and a key question for us as we move into our second decade is how we more intentionally build and support our community to advance the work of leadership and equity.

As we grow and improve in this area, we will build on these important lessons about strong communities:



TRUST IS ESSENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY TO THRIVE. Trust is built through a process rooted in shared interests and respect for individual identities, strengths, and lived experiences. When there is deep trust among members of a community, growth and progress can occur even among those who don't often work side by side. For example, Equity in the Center brings together race equity consultants, funders, and individuals charged with advancing race equity within their organizations to help shift mindsets, practices, and systems within the social impact sector to increase race equity.

Another example is from the ProInspire Fellowship in Digital Finance, a cohort program that placed technical experts in digital finance as fellows in US government (USG) agencies for 1-2 years. By engaging in activities that built trust, respect, and collaboration within the fellows cohort early on, these individuals were able to coordinate at an interagency level on cross-cutting issues that affected all of their agencies. In turn, they established a coordinating committee around digital finance, which includes USG employees beyond the original five agencies. This committee will continue to operate after the end of the fellowship.



GOAL-SETTING SHOULD BE A SHARED AND TRANSPARENT EXERCISE. The strongest communities make goal-setting a shared process.

What's more, there is a reciprocal relationship between trust and goal setting: established trust among the group helps facilitate the process of defining shared goals, and the vulnerability and compromise required in establishing shared goals helps build trust. For example, last year we brought together leaders of DEI and HR work from across ProInspire partners to advise us on our programs. A clear request from these advisors was for more opportunities to come together so they could continue to learn from each other in their work to operationalize equity. In 2019, we created a learning community based on the shared goals identified by this group. We have facilitated quarterly meetings of this community, and the agendas are driven by the members based on their defined goals.



COMMUNITY CANNOT THRIVE WITHOUT RESOURCES. Community is often considered an organic entity that takes shape and endures with the right commitment and actions from its members.

In practice, however, we have learned that sustained community requires staffing and funding resources. In the work to advance leadership and equity, it is unfair to ask leaders with a full plate of priorities to assume the extra (and often unpaid) role of community builder. Community should not be a byproduct; it should be considered an explicit goal in order to staff and fund it properly. Staffing and funding is the 'glue' that will help communities stay engaged and identify areas for alignment and action.

“What ProInspire has really gifted to me and to a number of us is another place to build community that we really believe in, and hope in many ways is a bit of a microcosm of the community that we hope to expand on more broadly in society.”

–Isabelle Moses, ProInspire Board Chair

ProInspire Network

The [ProInspire Network](#) started as a small and tight-knit group of alumni from our Fellowship program and has evolved over time to include over 700 individuals who have participated in one of several ProInspire programs. The Network has always been a self-organizing body, with rotating leadership and various areas of focus; it is currently led by a group of 15 individuals who serve the community for a 12-month tenure as part of the ProInspire Network Leadership Council.

As we seek to make the most of the Network's engagement for both the members and our organization, some key areas we are exploring include:

- How to build community among alumni who have had different experiences
- ProInspire's role in supporting the Network
- How the Network influences our strategies and work



5 SUNSETS, SHIFTS & SPINOFFS: MAKING DIFFICULT PROGRAM DECISIONS

We have faced some difficult decisions about our programs over the past decade, including elimination of beloved programs. Deep affinity for a program like the ProInspire Fellowship is understandable, since it was the program that launched our organization and was our primary focus for the first five years. Emotional attachment, however, cannot sustain a program if it no longer serves the needs of participants or the sector. About every two years, we ask a few critical questions as we conduct strategic planning and evaluate our activities and programs:

- *What is the program's impact?*
- *Does it still meet the needs of participants and the sector?*
- *Does it align with our strategic focus and move us towards our vision?*
- *Are we able to generate enough revenue to support it through grants and fees?*

At a high-level, some of the more difficult program decisions we have made over the past ten years include:



SUNSET OF THE PROINSPIRE FELLOWSHIP. After placing over 150 Fellows with 65 nonprofit organizations in the nine-year program duration, we made the difficult decision to sunset the program in 2017 because it was no longer able to meet impact and sustainability goals. From an impact perspective, the fellowship was not addressing the core challenges to developing leaders in the sector. 70% of alumni who were five years post-Fellowship had returned to the private sector due to lack of leadership development, clear career pathways, and compensation in the social sector. From a sustainability perspective, we recognized that the fellowship model was no longer as relevant, and we faced an enduring gap between program revenue and cost to place a fellow. While we stopped recruiting and placing Fellows, we retained core elements of the program through other activities including alumni engagement and leadership development opportunities.



SHIFT IN MANAGING FOR SUCCESS. Launched in 2013 with support from American Express, this program to support new managers was based on our learnings from the Fellowship and expanded quickly to three cohorts per year. Five years in, challenges such as high program costs and requests for a condensed program led us to revisit the program design. During that time period, we had created the ProInspire Leadership Institute (PLI), a modified version of Managing for Success, for Kresge Foundation grantees. The streamlined program, with similar content delivered in a two-day workshop, proved effective in meeting program and participant goals. With continued support from American Express, we shifted Managing for Success to the PLI model and plan to expand the offering as an open enrollment program in 2020.



SPINOFF OF THE IMPACT FELLOWSHIPS SUMMIT. After hosting the Impact Fellowships Summit for two years, we realized we lacked the capacity to continue as the project home and organizer. We also felt that a field-wide initiative should live with the field and that other interested organizations should take a leadership role in facilitating this gathering. We engaged a consultant after the 2017 Summit to lead the effort to find a new home for the project. Based on input from key stakeholders and defined criteria for the project's future home, IREX surfaced as the best successor to take over the project as it had strong capacity and interest to serve as Summit host. IREX has done an impressive job of hosting and expanding the Summit, and we are pleased to participate in this ongoing field-wide initiative. This experience highlighted the importance of field building and knowing when it is time to pass the torch — a lesson we are currently applying as we consider next steps for Equity in the Center.

Based on these experiences, we have a few suggestions for how to manage program changes:

STAY FLEXIBLE, OPEN, AND OBJECTIVE. Sentimental attachment to a program is understandable, but it can cloud judgment as you consider options. Be flexible in your thinking, open to possibilities you haven't considered, and objective about the path forward that is best for participants, partners, and the organization.

ACKNOWLEDGE TRANSITIONS AND CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS. Chances are, you aren't the only one with mixed emotions about a program change. Take time to mark the change and celebrate program and participant achievements. Such rituals can ease the transition process for those invested in and impacted by the change.

INVOLVE THOSE MOST IMPACTED IN THE DECISION. At different points, our strategic planning processes have involved alumni, advisors, partners, staff, and Board members. The process that led to the sunset of the ProInspire Fellowship involved staff and Board members, but it would have been better to involve alumni and partners throughout the process. We are using a participatory decision-making process as we determine the future of Equity in the Center, and the advisors who have been most engaged in that project will approve next steps for the project.

PROGRAMS CAN, AND OFTEN DO, FAIL. We tried several programs and initiatives along our journey that didn't work out: licensing our curriculum, trying to acquire another fellowship program, and piloting a two-day program to support career transitions are a few examples. We focused on capturing the learnings from each experience to inform future endeavors.

Conclusion

As we look to the next decade, we need to reimagine the social impact sector to move beyond the traditional paradigm and truly work towards a better world.

We need leaders to center their work in equity. We know that structural racism is deeply embedded in our society — you can't go far without seeing these injustices in our criminal justice system, in our schools, with children at the borders, and in indicators around health, wealth, and education. Band-aid solutions don't work when systems perpetuate the same problems. We need to change the systems, and that type of change can only be driven by leaders who have the courage to push organizations from a charity to a justice mindset.

We need to reimagine leadership and ways of working. This means going beyond diversity and pushing back on traditional expectations for leadership that are based on white dominant culture. We know that leaders of color and younger leaders are bringing more collaborative ways of working, which will ultimately lead to better outcomes. We would like to see a real shift so that formal leadership reflects the communities most impacted by our work, and individuals at all levels in organizations have the ability to lead.

We have to transform how nonprofit and philanthropic organizations work. We believe there is much more to learn and explore in rethinking how current hierarchical organizations replicate the systems we are trying to dismantle. Internally at ProInspire we hope to learn more from movements, cooperatives, and self-managed organizations that are pushing the boundaries for how to operate differently.

We hope that these reflections on our past decade will help other organizations think more critically about how they can evolve their work. At ProInspire, we will continue to learn and adapt in how we can best work towards our vision of an equitable and just society. Thank you for being part of this journey with us.

In Memoriam

KIARA WALTERS (1986-2018)

Kiara was a valued member of the ProInspire community. She was a 2013 Fellow at College Summit in DC, served on ProInspire's Alumni Council and Strategy Planning Committee, and supported our organization as a Network Manager. She forever touched those who knew her in the ProInspire community.



Appendices

ABOUT PROINSPIRE

ProInspire envisions an equitable and just society — free of systemic oppression where all people thrive. Rooted in the belief that leadership and equity are key to the systems change needed to realize this vision, we activate leaders at all levels to accelerate equity in their work, within their organizations, and across the social impact sector. We design and deliver programming and resources to support these leaders, strengthen organizations, and influence and equip the sector — so that leaders at all levels have the competencies to accelerate equity, confidence to take action, and connections to build their network and maximize their impact.

Founded in 2009 and based in Washington, DC, ProInspire runs programs in multiple cities across the United States. We partner with leading local, national, and international nonprofits, including Accion, America's Promise Alliance, Communities in Schools, Share Our Strength, and more. ProInspire's funders include Annie E. Casey Foundation, American Express, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Borealis Philanthropy, Hewlett Foundation, and Kresge Foundation. Over 5,000 individuals have participated in ProInspire's open enrollment and custom programs to-date. ProInspire was named by the Chronicle of Philanthropy as one of 7 Nonprofits to Watch in 2015, and as a Top-Rated Nonprofit from 2015 to 2018.

ProInspire has three strategies to advance our work:



INDIVIDUAL STRATEGY. Programming and resources to support individuals focused on accelerating equity and leadership. This includes programs such as ProInspire Leadership Institute, Managing for Success, Coaching for Impact, alumni engagement, and virtual programs.



ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY. Programming and resources customized to strengthen organizations focused on accelerating equity and leadership. These leverage our curriculums focused on leadership, management, and race equity. It also includes partnerships with foundations to build capacity of organizations, including the ProInspire Leadership Institute and cohort programs for staff and Board members to advance race equity.



SECTOR STRATEGY. Programming and resources to influence the social impact sector to accelerate equity and leadership. This includes the launch of Equity in the Center to provide resources and convenings around building a Race Equity Culture. We also create and curate research, write, and speak on topics related to equity and leadership, including development of a Leadership Model for Social Impact with an equity lens (forthcoming in 2020) and creation of the Independent Sector Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resource Hub in 2016.

OUR VALUES

The work to define our values showed us that what we know in our hearts isn't always easy to put into words. The process of developing our organizational values, which unfolded over three years, was less linear and more time-consuming than we expected. In hindsight, we should have defined a process upfront and clarified how the decision would be made. Our current values, which we finalized in 2018 and plan to revisit every few years, include:

EQUITY. In order to change systems and maximize social impact, we need leadership at all levels to champion equity first. We are committed to building an equity culture internally and aspire to make equity a non-negotiable core value of the social impact sector through our work.

AUTHENTICITY. The best work happens when individuals can be their whole selves and operate at their learning edge. We work to build a culture that supports authenticity and growth. We hold ourselves accountable to our stakeholders, embrace wins and challenges in full transparency.

COLLABORATION. We deliver the most progress towards our mission when we collaborate with each other and with our partners. We seek out diverse perspectives and incorporate them into our practice and decisions. We strive to be a respectful and fair partner to our stakeholders.

COURAGE. It takes courage to reimagine leadership at all levels and disrupt systems that perpetuate inequity. We ask questions to challenge the status quo and engage with our stakeholders. We acknowledge our limitations with humility, and we fail forward through a process of continuous learning.

PROINSPIRE'S RACE EQUITY JOURNEY

Our organization's [race equity journey](#) started in 2015 and continues today. A key learning for us has been that the deeper you get in race equity work, the further you realize you have to go. We expect our racial equity transformation will continue over the next decade and will push us even further in shaping our team, our values, and our work. Here are some of the key milestones in this journey.

- 2015** ProInspire participated in the Casey Foundation's [Social Sector Talent Pipelines Strategy & Learning Lab](#). This program supported our team's capacity building around [Results Count®](#) and tools to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.
- 2016** We engaged Ericka Hines to serve as Senior Advisor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, supporting our internal and external work around equity. We began to disaggregate internal data to better understand the impact of our programs on leaders of color. We published op-eds in the Chronicle of Philanthropy on [What Nonprofits Can Learn from #OscarsSoWhite](#) and [How Nonprofit Workers and Leaders Can Make a Difference as Racial Tensions Flare](#). With support from the Kresge Foundation, we incorporated training on implicit bias into the ProInspire Leadership Institute. We also recognized that implicit bias focuses only on the individual level, and we needed to provide more support around race equity at the organizational level as part of our trainings. ProInspire, Public Allies, and AmeriCorps Alums launched [Equity in the Center](#) following the Casey Lab to shift mindsets, practices, and systems in the social impact sector to center race equity.
- 2017** We hired two full-time staff to focus on Equity in the Center, and expanded Ericka's role to serve as lead researcher on the Equity in the Center publication. Equity in the Center convened four working sessions with advisors to build out research for the Race Equity Cycle. We held a one-day training with [Race Forward](#) for our staff, consultants, and some Board members to deepen knowledge around structural racism. We also curated a set of resources for [Independent Sector's DEI Resource Hub](#).
- 2018** Equity in the Center published [Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture](#) and hosted its first public convening in Baltimore. With support from the Newman's Own Foundation, ProInspire engaged Ericka Hines to co-design the Race Equity and Leadership program to support our staff in advancing race equity. It was piloted internally during four full-day sessions, and included a staff survey and follow-up equity coaching for staff. Staff assessed ProInspire to be at the "Woke" stage of the Race Equity Cycle, highlighting that our culture reflects two characteristics of white dominant culture: a sense of urgency and a fear of open conflict. As a result of this internal work, we made a number of changes:
- Updated our vision, mission, and theory of change to clearly address equity
 - Defined our organizational values (see previous page)
 - Made program shifts to Managing for Success to more clearly incorporate equity
 - Developed staff job levels with compensation ranges
 - Updated our staff benefits
 - Conducted our first Board demographic survey and identified gaps on the Board
 - Engaged the Board in a full-day retreat focused on race equity. The Board also assessed ProInspire overall at the "Woke" stage of the Race Equity Cycle. However when we looked at specific Board practices, we identified some of them at the "Awake" stage.
- 2019** Internally, we deepened our knowledge and analytical frame around structural racism through staff participation in trainings with Crossroads Anti-Racism and Racial Equity Institute. We recognized the need for more team members with expertise facilitating workshops around race equity, and began restructuring the team. Other changes include:
- Updating our programming
 - Updating our hiring process
 - Launching new cohort programs focused on staff and Board teams advancing race equity together
 - Testing our leadership competency model with a race equity lens
 - Initiating a Board-approved, participatory decision-making process to determine next steps for Equity in the Center

OUR SUPPORTERS

We have been incredibly fortunate to have a large, diverse, and talented community supporting our work over the course of our first ten years, and we are truly humbled by your belief in us and in our mission. To the...

- > Individuals who participated in our programs
- > Organizations that engaged us as a partner
- > Advisory committee members, Board members, and Prolnspire Network Leadership Council members who dedicated time to advise us
- > Guest speakers who inspired us at our trainings, convenings, and programs
- > Foundations and individuals who provided funding to support our work
- > Current and former staff and consultants who contributed to our work

...and anyone else who has been a champion of our work in different ways, we thank you for your unwavering support.



OUR TEAM

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Ashlynn Polanco	Kate Loving	Martha Searby
Elizabeth Burden	Kerrien Suarez	Monisha Kapila

10 YEARS



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