



Staying on Mission and Staying in Business: Strategic Planning in the Education Nonprofit Sector

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Staying on Mission *and* Staying in Business:
Strategic Planning in the Education Nonprofit Sector

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by
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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This capstone explores a strategic planning process I carried out at the NYC Leadership Academy (NYCLA), a nonprofit organization. Through the development and launch of a strategic plan for the NYCLA alumni network, I learned that nonprofit organizations face strategic planning considerations distinct from those of private-sector organizations. In an effort to reconcile the tension between what I see as organizational solvency and mission fulfillment in the alumni network strategic planning process, I explore the merits and limitations of Mark Moore's strategic triangle framework and determine how a nonprofit might make best use of the framework in strategic planning. Ultimately, I conclude that the NYCLA alumni network and similarly-situated nonprofit organizations can manage the tension between mission fulfillment and organizational solvency by strategizing for public value.

I also reflect on the success of Marshall Ganz's community organizing practices in engaging and mobilizing the NYCLA alumni network. I argue that nonprofits should leverage community organizing practices to build authentic stakeholder involvement and authorship in the strategic planning process.

Introduction

At a recent NYC Leadership Academy (NYCLA) equity committee meeting, a colleague posed the following hypothetical question: “What if we had a potential client who was clearly racist? For instance, what if the person said that they did not want to see any more minority candidates for administrative-level positions in their district? Should we work with them? On one hand, this potential client is the kind of person that would really benefit from our equity-focused work. On the other hand, where do you draw the line?” Various iterations of this possible problem have been used to test the boundaries of NYCLA’s new emphasis on racial equity. Is racial equity a necessary component of all of our work, and to what extent? What if certain clients are not ready for this type of work? Where do we draw the line with our clients? Where do we draw the line with our racial equity work?

While this particular example speaks to NYCLA’s racial equity work, the tension between staying on mission and staying in business applies to all aspects of the organization. As a nonprofit, NYCLA’s vision and mission must exist in tandem with the reality of its business model. As NYCLA's Executive Vice President Kathy Nadurak points out, “NYCLA has to consider its reason for existence, *and then* consider what it must do to exist” (K. Nadurak, personal communication, February 23, 2016). This was not always the case for NYCLA, though. When NYCLA was founded in 2003 in partnership with former New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) Chancellor Joel Klein, a business model was not necessary. Funding was abundant, came from a single source, and was intended to last for just three years: NYCLA was not designed to live beyond its three-year charge. The organization was created to drastically change

learning outcomes for New York City's most vulnerable students through high-quality, purpose-driven leadership. Chancellor Klein believed that graduates of NYCLA's Aspiring Principal's Program (APP) would be the force for change needed to ensure that all students had access to a high-quality education in NYC public schools (New York City Department of Education, 2003).

Now in its thirteenth year, NYCLA has lived long beyond its projected three-year charge. Chancellors have changed, funding has shifted, and NYCLA can no longer survive on business from the NYCDOE alone. With more than 500 APP graduates, 900 former NYCDOE-coached principals, 150 current NYCDOE-coached principals, and 180 national and international client contracts, it is clear that NYCLA is working to transition from a fully funded arm of the NYCDOE to an independent nonprofit. The shift in funding has brought a renewed examination of identity, purpose, and organizational structures. This is the story of a nonprofit organization navigating the tension between ideal impact and organizational solvency. *Ideal impact* means the unrestricted designs and decisions of an organization acting independently of financial constraints, and *organizational solvency* represents the decisions that must be made to keep the organization alive and thriving. In this capstone, I explore the tension between ideal impact and organizational solvency, and the implications of this tension for strategic planning through my experience with NYCLA's alumni network initiative.

The tension between staying in business and staying on mission is an extremely common phenomenon in the world of nonprofits. Through narrating and analyzing my strategic planning process for the NYLCA alumni network in this capstone, I hope to contribute to the existing discussion about the unique strategy considerations for public-

sector organizations. With an increasing number of education nonprofits moving toward fee-for-service and client-based models, it is important to understand the benefits and limitations of private-sector strategy development. In this capstone, I argue that education nonprofits should consider public value above anything else, and make all strategy decisions with public value in mind. Prioritizing public value does not mean failing to address organizational solvency. Rather, solvency decisions made in service of public value ensure that an organization stays on mission *and* in business.

I begin my capstone with an overview of context related to my strategic project. I then present a Review of Knowledge for Action (RKA), which explores literature relevant to my strategic project and informs the development of my theory of action. In the description, results, and analysis section of this capstone, I document and analyze the implementation and outcomes of my strategic project. I end with implications for NYCLA, implications for other nonprofits working in education, and implications for my leadership.

Relevant Context

NYCLA's shifting relationship with the NYCDOE. Although the NYC Aspiring Principals Program (APP) was NYCLA's flagship program and is still a major component of NYCLA's organizational identity, graduates of the NYC APP program have steadily declined through the years. Only 15 principals will graduate from cohort thirteen, compared to 78 in APP cohort one. One explanation for the shift in numbers is the shift in administration at the NYCDOE. Current NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio appointed education veteran Carmen Fariña to the office of NYCDOE chancellor in January 2014.

Many see Chancellor Fariña as a major departure from the chancellors appointed under Mayor Bloomberg's administration. A 2014 *Education Week* article noted:

Her appointment is widely viewed as the clearest signal yet that Mayor de Blasio, a Democrat elected in November, will shift from the hallmarks of Mr. Bloomberg's education agenda: rapid expansion of charter schools, the closing of underperforming schools, and an increased use of student test scores for high-stakes decisions, such as assigning letter grades to schools. Mr. de Blasio's education platform during the campaign focused on modifying or undoing those policies and ushering in more prekindergarten and early-childhood programs for the youngest children. (Maxwell, 2014)

Chancellor Fariña executed many system-level changes upon her entry into the NYCDOE, but the most notable for NYCLA included slowing school closures, instituting new requirements for principals, and creating the NYCDOE Leaders in Education Apprenticeship Program (LEAP). LEAP is a twelve-month, school-based, principal and school leadership development program. The LEAP model closely resembles many aspects of the APP training program, and NYC principal candidates now have the option of applying to LEAP instead of APP. Furthermore, educators are now required to have at least seven years of full-time pedagogic experience before taking on the role of principal in a NYCDOE public school (New York City Department of Education, 2014). Previously, principal candidates needed only two years of teaching experience. My analysis of the effect of these changes is that the new requirement has decreased the number of principal candidates, and the slowing of school closures has reduced the need for new principals. Ultimately, the NYCDOE has drastically scaled back its partnership with NYCLA. The NYCDOE is no longer NYCLA's biggest client, and NYCLA must diversify its portfolio of clients to survive as an organization.

NYCLA's reorganization and focus on equity. When I arrived at the organization in July 2015, NYCLA was in the midst of implementing a new

organizational structure and launching an equity workgroup that would define NYCLA's equity stance and agenda.

NYCLA's reorganization grew out of a need to combine the national and NYCDOE arms of the organization. NYCLA began investing in working with clients on a national level in 2007. Initially, the national work was seen as the "innovation" arm of the organization and operated largely in isolation from the NYCDOE initiatives. As the national work expanded and the NYCDOE work became more uncertain, NYCLA made plans to house national and NYC clients under the same division. Now there are three major divisions within NYCLA: Administration and Operations, Innovation and Organizational Development, and Client Services and Engagement.

In addition to a reorganizational rollout, NYCLA was also working on developing and implementing an equity agenda when I arrived at the organization. NYCLA's 2015–2016 four-part strategy to address issues of equity and social justice follows:

1. Create a coherent plan and structures for addressing issues of equity and social justice throughout our internal and external work
2. Incorporate strategies for addressing issues of equity and social justice into our recruitment, training, and management of NYCLA staff
3. Incorporate strategies for addressing issues of equity and social justice into the content of our client programs, products, services, and tools
4. Incorporate strategies for addressing issues of equity and social justice through our external thought leadership
(J. Carlisle, personal communication, November 13, 2015)

To support the third part of this strategy, NYCLA applied for and received funding from the Booth Ferris Foundation to create programming for the APP alumni network around strategies that close the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color in NYC. Soon after receiving the grant, NYCLA decided to target programming to both APP alumni and NYCLA-coached principals, in the hopes of reaching more principals and increasing participation. NYCLA-coached principals include all sitting principals in

NYC that are coached by NYCLA staff; coached principals may or may not have graduated from APP. I was charged with building and launching the comprehensive engagement strategy that would support APP alumni as well as current and past coached principals in closing the opportunity gap for boys of color. For ease of reference, I will refer to the combination of APP alumni and coached principals as the alumni and/or alumni network.

Preview of Strategic Project

The 2015 Booth Ferris Foundation grant supports a two-year initiative to enable NYCLA to build an alumni network with a focus on improved educational outcomes for boys and young men of color. Funding from this grant allowed NYCLA to (1) hire a full-time employee to focus on the development of the alumni network; (2) expand the reach of alumni programming to include coached principals, not just APP alumni; (3) develop a mini-grant program that supports alumni/coached principal initiatives that serve boys of color; and (4) dedicate funds to alumni network programming. As mentioned above, my charge as a doctoral resident was to build and launch a comprehensive two-year engagement strategy for the alumni network.

History of the Alumni Network

NYCLA launched the alumni network initiative in the fall of 2015 after receiving funding from the Booth Ferris Foundation to create a network of APP alumni and NYCLA-coached principals that focus on improving education for boys and young men of color in NYC. The organization was not new to alumni initiatives; in fact, NYCLA

had launched alumni networks at least twice before. In its first iteration, alumni programming included APP alumni only. Starting in 2006, alumni gathered annually for overnight retreats. The main purposes of the annual retreat were to reconnect with colleagues, discuss common school based initiatives, and further develop principal leadership skills. The cost for this type of overnight retreat was high, and in 2008 the retreats ended due to a lack of funding. While there are no artifacts that track the existence of these retreats, anecdotal evidence from NYCLA staff who attended the retreats points to high attendance, high engagement, and high investment by alumni.

In 2012, the former executive vice president of NYCLA began to plan for a re-launch of the APP alumni network. With a mayoral shift on the horizon, the former executive vice president saw the alumni network as a way to improve public perception of NYCLA in NYC and beyond. She believed that alumni could serve as NYCLA's greatest advocates. Furthermore, the former executive vice president, who was deeply invested in equity, launched the network with a focus on equity. NYCLA received a two-year grant from the Wallace Foundation to support this work. The funding was used to host a handful of equity-themed events that reached about 15% of APP alumni in 2013. With six alumni events executed in the spring of 2013, the best-attended event attracted approximately 50 people, and the least-attended event reached only four people (see appendix A for details). Alumni programming was informed by a planning team made up of a core group of NYCLA staff members. It is noteworthy that after the former executive vice president left NYCLA in late fall of 2013, alumni programming ceased to exist.¹

¹ Alumni were invited to a welcome reception for Chancellor Fariña in winter of 2014. No record of attendance exists for this event, but one NYCLA staff member stated that approximately 60 to 65 APP alumni attended the event.

Guiding Questions for Review of Knowledge for Action

As I approached this project, I noted the multiple purposes outlined in the grant application. NYCLA had requested funding to:

- 1) Create a network of APP alumni and coached principals that collaborate on a single problem of practice,
- 2) Facilitate the implementation of strategies that will close the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color in NYC, and
- 3) Reinforce APP alumni and coached principal connections to NYCLA.

These multiple purposes caused me to question the degree to which they were competing or compatible. I questioned whether it was possible to value equally the development of leaders in service of improving education for boys and young men of color *and* to make alumni and coached principals feel connected to NYCLA. Mostly, I questioned *why* we wanted alumni and coached principals to feel connected to NYCLA. Was it to strengthen the network to benefit the growth and development of NYCLA or was it to strengthen the network to better serve boys and young men of color? While organizational growth and development and serving boys and young men of color are not mutually exclusive, I felt that the purpose, or prioritization of purposes, of the reinforced alumni connection to NYCLA had implications for strategic planning.

To make the potentially dichotomous purposes even more pronounced, the project management structure reflected both ends of the spectrum. The account owner for the project, responsible for managing the client relationship, was the vice president of External Affairs. The engagement owner for the project, responsible for ensuring that the quality of work meets client needs, was the senior director of leadership development.

The external affairs and leadership development departments have distinct interests and approaches to project management by nature of their roles in the organization. I questioned whether the external affairs approach and leadership development approach could live in harmony.

To explore the possibility for compatibility, I crafted the following guiding question: *How can NYCLA marry the qualities of a strong alumni network with the qualities of a strong professional learning community?* NYCLA's ultimate goal is to build an alumni network that lives beyond the two-year term of the grant. Therefore, my second guiding question focused on strategy development: *What type of strategic plan is needed for NYCLA to successfully launch and sustain a NYCLA alumni network in New York City?*

It is worth noting that I had a clear personal bias throughout the development of the guiding questions and implementation of this strategic project. A small internal alarm went off for me any time something resembling business development influenced the strategic planning process. For reasons I explore later in this paper, I feared that business considerations would undermine our ideals of improving learning outcomes for boys and young men of color—indeed, that those ideals were incompatible with business development. Understanding the relationship between business development and mission fulfillment has been my greatest area of learning yet. It is possible to stay on mission *and* in business through a strategic planning process unique to public-sector organizations.

The development of my guiding questions led me to explore the literature on strategy and strategic planning. Conceptualizations of strategic planning vary across sectors; therefore, in the RKA that follows, I evaluated themes across the education

sector, community organizing sector, and business sector. I then narrowed the scope of the strategic planning literature to focus on creating, maintaining, and expanding networks. I considered how network theories can inform the development of an alumni network focused on closing the opportunity gap. Finally, I explored how Networked Improvement Communities (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011) can serve as a model for a strong professional learning community.

Ultimately, I used the research from my RKA to develop a theory of action I believed would meet the purposes outlined in the Booth Ferris grant application and sustain the network beyond the two-year term of the grant. After implementing and assessing the efficacy of my theory of action, I realized that my theory of action was not actually a causal theory, which is a common mistake in all sectors of organizations. To better understand the flaws in my theory of action, I explored literature on strategic planning specific to public sector organizations and revised my theory of action accordingly.

Review of Knowledge for Action

I present this RKA as an artifact that captures my thinking at the beginning of the strategic planning process. In the analysis section of this paper, I explain how I came to perceive limitations in the literature I had explored, and review additional sources to inform my revised theory of action.

Effective Strategy and Strategic Planning

The label "strategic planning" has been applied to all kinds of activities, such as going off to an informal retreat in the mountains to talk about strategy, but call that activity "planning," let conventional planners organize it, and watch how quickly the event becomes formalized (mission statements in the morning, assessment of corporate strengths in the afternoon, strategies carefully articulated by 5pm). —Mintzberg, 1994, p.108

Definition of terms. *Strategy* and *strategic planning* are often used interchangeably to describe the process that leaders undertake to manage change within their communities or organizations. These terms, however similar, have distinct meanings that complement each other when understood, and dilute each other when confused. Community organizing expert Marshall Ganz begins every strategy lecture by defining the origins of the term *strategy*. The word comes from the Greek name for general, *strategos*. Ganz (2014) says, “A good *strategos* not only had a good overview of the [battle]field. He also had intimate knowledge of the capacities of his men and those of his opponent, details of the streams and bridges, and mastery of both the forest and the trees” (p. 76). A *strategos* weighs options, adjusts course based on existing and new information, and makes decisions. While strategy inherently involves some type of

decision-making, Ganz (2014) describes strategy as a way of imagining, and Henry Mintzberg (1994) describes strategy as a vision, not a plan.

The term *strategic planning* reached the mainstream in the mid-1960s and was embraced by many businesses as “the one best way” to enhance the competitiveness of each business unit (Mintzberg, 1994). Mintzberg warns that planning should not be mistaken for strategy; simply combining the words *strategic* and *planning* does not ensure that both strategy and planning happen. He describes planning as “breaking down a goal or set of intentions into steps, formalizing those steps so they can be implemented almost automatically, and articulating the anticipated consequences or results of each step” (p. 108). Essentially, planning systems are the vehicles used to deliver strategies. And while planning is a necessary complement to strategy development, strategy must maintain its function as a creative, imaginative, and visionary process.

Rachel Curtis and Elizabeth City warn of a similar collision between strategy and planning in school districts across the nation: “Too often, strategic planning is about creating a laundry list of goals and discrete tasks and repackaging programs to which the system has become attached or is already committed” (2009, p. 21). In an era of accountability, school districts have become quite adept at producing planning documentation while leaving strategy as something to be desired. Curtis and City define strategic planning as “an exercise of setting direction and prioritizing work that systems undertake every three to five years or with the arrival of each new superintendent” (2009, p. 21). Like Ganz and Mintzberg, Curtis and City define “strategic work” as that of setting a direction for the organization. In an effort to orient district work in a common direction, Curtis and City ask district leaders to answer three questions: (1) What are we

doing? (2) Why are we doing it? (3) How are we doing it? Answering these three simple questions causes complex practices, behaviors, and belief systems to emerge from within the district. The questions also force district leaders to reckon with inconsistencies between a stated purpose and practice.

Critical components of strategic planning: defining purpose. The question of purpose is critical in strategic planning. For institutions of higher education, one purpose is to remain competitive and relevant (Delprino, 2013). Faced with falling enrollment, rising costs, online competition, and depleted funding opportunities, higher education institutions need a sound strategic planning process to maneuver through an evolving educational landscape (Hughes & White, 2006; Delprino, 2013). Although it is not a formal, accredited institution of higher education, NYCLA does educate and train adults. Because NYCLA depends on enrollment, client contracts, and grants for funding opportunities, it must stay relevant to survive amidst changing economic and political conditions. Positioning NYCLA as an organization akin to that of a higher education institution helps to clarify that one driving purpose may be to remain competitive and relevant.

Simon Sinek does not, however, view drivers like relevancy and profit as a legitimate purpose for businesses and organizations. Profit is a result, while purpose is “your reason for getting out of bed in the morning” (2009). Sinek asks the same three questions as City and Curtis, but he is particular about the order of the questions: (1) Why are we doing it? (2) How are we doing it? (3) What are we doing? The order of these three questions, Sinek states, explains why some organizations and leaders are able to inspire while others aren't. Inspired leaders start by asking why (2009). He goes on to

say, “Every single person or organization on the planet knows *what* they do. Some know *how* they do it. Very few people or organizations know *why* they do what they do. . . . The inspired leaders and organizations all think, act, and communicate from the inside out” (2009).

Critical components of strategic planning: engaging stakeholders. In addition to defining, clarifying, and communicating a purpose, strategic planning involves authentically engaging stakeholders in the strategic planning process. Delprino states that the most important factor in strategic planning is the human side of things.

When it comes to strategic planning, an overemphasis can be placed on getting the plan, the mission, and the vision worded just right or identifying the appropriate analytics to measure success. These are all greatly important and can be very impressive and useful. However, the bottom line is that beneficial strategic planning, the kind that will bring about sustainable change, is about the people involved in the process. The best strategic plan is meaningless if the intended participants do not buy into the process, contribute to its development in a meaningful way, or accept the integration of the plan into their daily work lives. (Delprino, 2013, p. 197)

Delprino emphasizes the importance of including people in the strategic planning process not only as a way to ensure stakeholder buy-in, but also as a way to collect historical, institutional, and cultural knowledge that can inform direction and vision.

Literature specific to the strategic planning practices of nonprofit organizations helps to clarify the possible configurations of stakeholders and the role they play in the strategic planning process. John Bryson comments:

When strategic planning is focused on an organization, it is likely that most of the key decision makers will be “insiders” although considerable relevant information may be gathered from “outsiders.” Certainly this would be true of public agencies, local government, and non-profit organizations that deliver “public” services. When most of the key decision makers are insiders, it will likely be easier to get people together to decide important matters, reconcile differences, and coordinate implementation of activities. . . In contrast, when strategic planning is focused on a function—often crossing organizational or governmental boundaries—or on a community, almost all of the key decision makers will be outsiders. (2011, p. 13)

NYCLA will almost certainly be working with outside stakeholders, or decision makers, because strategic planning is focused on a community, the NYCLA alumni network. Therefore, setting the vision, identifying tasks, making decisions, and implementing plans will be less centralized and nonlinear in nature. Bryson goes on to say, “In these situations, the focus of attention will be on how to organize collective thinking, action, and learning more or less collaboratively within an inter-organizational network or networks where no one person, group, organization, or institution is fully in charge, but in which many are involved, or affected, or have a partial responsibility to act” (2011, p. 13).

Strategic planning in the context of community organizing also prioritizes the people involved in and impacted by the process. Through a community organizing lens, the purpose of a strategy is defined by the people on the ground, not the generals with a view of the battlefield. Ganz defines strategy as “how actors translate their resources into power. Strategy is how we turn what we have into what we need, to get what we want. It is how we transform our resources into the power to achieve our purposes” (2014, p. 53). In *Why David Sometimes Wins*, Ganz explains how strategic resourcefulness can overcome institutionalized power (2005). Resource identification and mobilization is central to Ganz’s organizing framework. He believes that “organizing is not only about solving problems. It is about the people with the problem mobilizing their own resources to solve it . . . and keep it solved” (2006, p. 8). This has significant implications for strategy development. Strategy requires the use of resources, and to shift power dynamics and enact change, resources must come from within the community advocating for change. By building and sustaining relationships with stakeholders, organizers can

uncover creative and novel resources. Placing people at the center of strategy development ensures that an organization is strategizing with a true understanding of community challenges and assets.

Stakeholders in the NYCLA alumni network: a hybrid model. All strategic planning frameworks mention stakeholder involvement as critical to the planning process, but the centrality of stakeholder involvement varies greatly from framework to framework. In this section, I examine two frameworks with different conceptualizations of stakeholder engagement, compare their merits, and draw on their strengths to propose a hybrid framework that best meets the needs of the NYCLA network.

Curtis and City (2009) place their strategic planning framework in the context of a K–12 district-level system (Figure 1). In this framework, the strategic planners are presumed to be a team of district-level administrators. Stakeholders are a critical part of the data collection process (school visits, interviews, surveys, etc.), and their perspectives inform strategy development. Ganz’s organizing framework (2013), on the other hand, views stakeholders as the actual authors of strategy (Figure 2). Ganz emphasizes that the people with the problem must mobilize their own resources to solve said problem.

Figure 1. Curtis and City Strategy Framework

Designing a Strategy and Theory of Action
1. Synthesize: Pull together the system’s vision, its problems of practice and their root causes, and an analysis of current work. Look at all of this information together, and see what it suggests about where and how the system should focus its energy to improve instruction, accelerate student learning, and realize its vision.
2. Generate Ideas: Step back from the work the team has done in the system, and explore more broadly the ideas about how to most effectively address the areas of focus identified in the <i>synthesize</i> step.
3. Place Bets: Decide on the few high-leverage things the system is going to focus on deeply to accelerate progress, and decide how it will do so. Determine the theory of action underlying the

emergent strategy. Consider strategic initiatives, ease and impact, synergy, and pacing and sequencing.

4. Vet: Vet the strategy to ensure that it has integrity, and check the beliefs and assumptions underlying the theory of action.

Source: R. E. Curtis & E. A. City. (2009). *Strategy in action: How school systems can support powerful learning and teaching* (p. 118). Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Figure 2. Ganz Organizing Framework

Five Organizing Practices
1. Shared Story: Root organizing practices in shared values that are expressed through a public narrative format (shared story). Public narrative tells a story of why we are called to leadership, the values of the collective community, and the challenges to those values that demand present action.
2. Relational Commitment: Build relationships and create mutual commitments to work together. Recast individual interests as common interests and use combined resources to achieve desired outcomes.
3. Shared Structure: Create a shared structure and build the effectiveness of your strategy by 1. establishing a bounded, stable, and interdependent team; 2. engaging in a clear, consequential and challenging direction; 3. enabling an interdependent work structure; 4. creating clear group norms; 5. recruiting a diverse team with the skills and talents needed to do the work.
4. Shared Strategy: Establish a balance between larger and local objectives. Locate your final strategic objective, then “chunk out” smaller strategic objectives in time (deadlines) and space (local areas) as a campaign.
5. Shared Action: Engage in collective action, and ensure that organizing outcomes are clear, measurable, and specific. Adapt accountability practices and strategy based on experience.

Source: M. Ganz. (2013). *Leadership, organizing, and action, Ed.L.D. organizing workshop participant guide* (p. 11–13). Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Cambridge, MA.

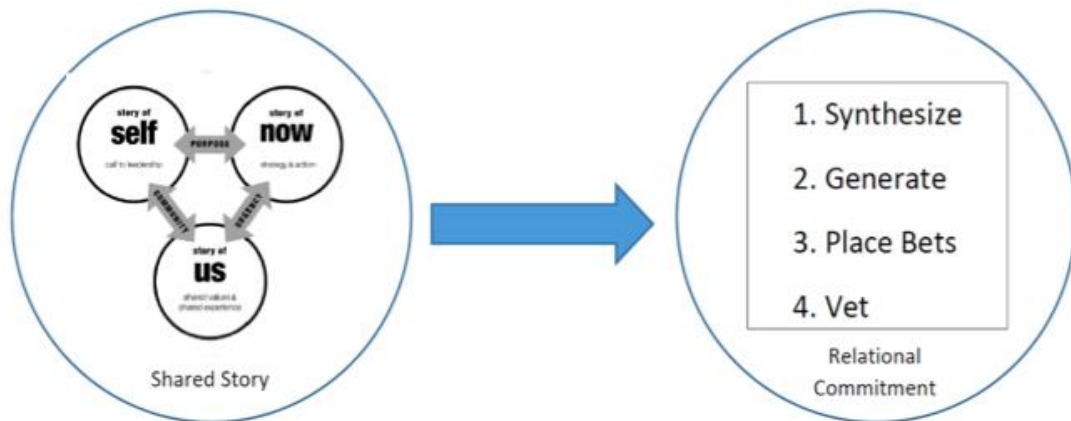
The two frameworks do not align for a perfect comparison, but it is reasonable to assume that stakeholders are central to Ganz’s framework and stakeholders can be seen as a component of Curtis and City’s framework. In fact, steps 1 to 4 of Curtis and City’s framework could be completed by a team of just two or three people. Curtis and City provide a solid, practical, implementable framework for strategy development. It is too easy, however, for organizations to take this framework and use it in isolation. By

combining critical elements of both frameworks, I hypothesized that NYCLA could better ensure that strategy is happening *with* stakeholders rather than *to* them.

Even though collective action is not the stated goal of Curtis and City's framework, they do acknowledge that district-level strategy must mobilize people and resources toward change. When defining strategy, they cite Stacey Childress: "[Strategy is] the set of actions an organization choose[s] to pursue in order to achieve its objectives. These deliberate actions are puzzle pieces that fit together to create a clear picture of how people, activities, and resources of an organization can work effectively to accomplish a collective purpose" (Curtis & City, 2009, p. 3). Moving people, activities, and resources toward a collective purpose requires collective action. So, what can education leaders learn from organizers?

In Figure 3, I outline what a possible adaptation of the two frameworks could look like. In this model, creating a shared story precedes strategy development. A shared story mobilizes people to action by creating a sense of urgency while empowering individual and collective agency. Once people are brought together through a shared story, strategy development can happen in the context of relational commitment. That means synthesizing, generating ideas, placing bets, and vetting *with* stakeholders.

Figure 3. Adapted Framework for the NYCLA Alumni Network



A shared story, or public narrative, comprises three narrative elements: a story of self (why I am called), a story of us (why we are called), and a story of now (why we must act now) (Ganz, 2015). Ganz explains “Public narrative is the “why”—the art of translating values into action through stories (2015, p. 6).” I contend that NYCLA must start by developing a shared story to authentically engage key stakeholders in the strategic planning process. Members of the alumni network must understand why NYCLA is called to this work (story of self), why alumni network members are called to this work (story of us), and why we must act now (story of now). If NYCLA can present a compelling public narrative, then alumni will respond to our call to action and engage in the strategic planning process.

The evidence I gathered from Sinek, Bryson, and Delprino also supports prioritizing the relational element of Ganz’s five organizing practices and shared narrative. Sinek codified the actions and communications among leaders and organizations ranging from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to Apple Inc., and discovered that the inspired leaders start with *why*. In explaining why some business and products succeed while others fail, Sinek writes, “People don’t buy what you do, they buy why

you do it. . . . The goal is not to do business with everyone that needs what you have. The goal is to do business with everyone that believes what you believe (2009).” This sentiment is consistent with Ganz’s framework for mobilization: moving people toward action requires a clear and compelling communication of the *why*. Once stakeholders are compelled to “buy,” or participate, in NYCLA’s case, then relational commitment must be nurtured to engage in collective strategic planning. Delprino argues that if stakeholders are engaged and contribute to strategic planning in a meaningful way, sustainable change is possible (2013). Organizing collective thinking, action, and learning, as Bryson states, is nonlinear and less centralized (2010). Despite the ease and efficiency of singularly setting a strategic vision, deciding important matters, and coordinating the implementation of activities, NYCLA must avoid the temptation of engaging in strategic planning with just a handful of internal actors.

Themes across sectors. Although K–12, higher education, community organizing, and business sectors differ in their approach to strategy development and strategic planning, five salient themes unite them. Across sectors, effective strategy is:

1. Diagnostic. Effective strategy considers political, cultural and historical context. What happened? What is happening? What worked? What didn’t work?
2. Visionary. It thinks outside the box, and is not constrained by conventional wisdom or expectations. It uses resources in novel ways.
3. Coherent. It creates alignment between vision, purpose, resources, and tactics.
4. Inclusive. It engages stakeholders in the planning process to increase buy-in and inform strategy development.

5. Responsive. It adjusts direction whenever necessary to fulfill the vision and mission of the strategy.

Creating, Maintaining, and Expanding Networks

People have been asking what our strategy is. Alumni, you are our strategy. —

Matt Kramer, co-CEO, Teach For America

While strategic planning is a central element of the development and launch of an active and sustainable NYCLA alumni network, understanding the dynamics of professional networks is critical to the success of this strategic project. To understand the nature of relationships within networks, I begin with an overview of network theory. Because a large number of alumni network members are APP alumni, I also explore alumni networks and research highlighting alumni perspectives and behaviors. Finally, I review the characteristics of Networked Improvement Communities, and consider implications for NYCLA.

Keeping networks together: strong ties versus weak ties. The number and strength of connections that exist in any given network depend on a several factors, encompassed in questions like the following: How many classes or cohorts exist in the network? How many years out are alumni from graduation? How intense were the relationships between peers before graduation? Answers to these questions will reveal the relative strength of connections between people in the network. It is undeniable that people who go through a similar experience are tied together in some way, and these ties can be understood as strong or weak (Granovetter, 1973; Krackhardt, 1992).

The basic operational assumption is that strong ties between people facilitate a stronger network. However, in 1973 Mark Granovetter proposed that weak ties are often more important than strong ties in understanding certain network-based phenomena (Krackhardt, 1992). According to Granovetter, the strength of a tie is determined by the length of time two people have been associated, the emotional intensity of their connection, their level of intimacy, and the degree of reciprocal service between them (Granovetter, 1973). A strong tie indicates a close connection between people; the relationship between two friends or between mentor and mentee are examples of strong ties. A weak tie indicates a loose connection. For instance, a person might be loosely connected to a friend of a friend, or a professional acquaintance. Granovetter writes, “Most network models deal, implicitly, with strong ties, thus confirming their applicability to small, well-defined groups. Emphasis on weak ties lends itself to discussion of relations between groups and to analysis of segments of social structure not easily defined in terms of primary groups” (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1360). Granovetter argues that because strong ties tend to bond similar people to each other, a network of strong ties is likely to stifle innovation. Confirming perspectives and redundant information prevent the spread of new ideas. Weak ties, however, provide a “local bridge” to parts of the social system that are otherwise disconnected, and therefore are likely to provide new information from disparate parts of the system (Krackhardt, 1992).

Granovetter makes a compelling case for weak ties as a vehicle for innovation, arguing that strong ties have a diminished impact on innovation. He does recognize, however, that strong ties are used for protection and reduction of uncertainty. Strong ties make people feel secure. Krackhardt (1992) expands on this theme by arguing that strong

ties are critical in times of severe change and uncertainty. He contends that strong ties constitute a base of trust that can reduce resistance and provide comfort in the face of uncertainty (Krackhardt, 1992). Therefore, he argues, change in a network or organization is best facilitated by strong ties, not weak ties.

The relationship between strong and weak ties is not dichotomous; rather, these ties exist on a continuum. Ties can move from weak to strong, and vice versa. This is particularly relevant for NYCLA because the APP summer intensive builds strong ties between participants that tend to diminish across time and space; these strong ties eventually turn into weak ties. Certain individuals may maintain strong ties between each other and the program, but the alumni base in general can be characterized as a collection of weak ties. Fortunately for NYCLA, weak ties are foundational to building dynamic, innovative networks, and one of the desired outcomes for the NYCLA alumni network is innovation. To close the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color in NYC, alumni need a space to acquire new information, share ideas, and collaborate on solutions. We need to be explicit about the strength of diversity in the room, and how that benefits participants.

Building alumni networks. Universities, MBA programs, and professional organizations like Teach For America have invested heavily in understanding how to build strong alumni networks. Fortunately, this knowledge has been codified and made widely available so that others can learn from practices that have been proven to work in the field. In this section, I move from the theoretical to the practical by exploring the findings from a CarringtonCrisp report on what alumni want and expect from their relationships with their business schools. I then examine the best practices for building an

alumni network put forth by the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation in its Alumni Playbook.

CarringtonCrisp is an education market research and consultancy firm for business schools and universities. In 2012, the firm released a study that synthesized findings from the survey responses of over 2,570 university alumni. Despite the range of program affiliations (undergraduate, MBA, PhD) and nationalities (more than 90 nationalities) surveyed, the study found clear trends in alumni perspectives and expectations. While the report was designed to meet the needs of business school and university development offices, the data can also be helpful in understanding the needs of professionals and what type of alumni programming might appeal to those needs.

Some of the major findings include these (Crisp, 2013):

- Just under 40% of alumni are not involved with their alumni networks because they are too busy with work and other commitments. One-third of alumni suggest they are not active in the alumni network because they are unaware of alumni services.
- Only 3% use alumni pages on school websites all the time, while 48% rarely use them and 13% never use them. By contrast, 74% of alumni use LinkedIn and 63% use Facebook.
- When asked what actions could be taken to quickly improve their relationships with their former schools, 32% of respondents requested online learning opportunities and 27% wanted their schools to provide stronger career support or enhanced career services.

- Alumni are interested in playing an active role in recruiting new students. Almost 90% of alumni would answer questions from prospective students.
- Top five reasons to be active in an alumni network:
 1. To build a network to support my career/business
 2. To find new job opportunities
 3. To keep in touch with classmates
 4. To keep up to date with new business thinking
 5. To support my school

Alumni are clearly interested in participating in and supporting alumni networks, but they must feel that there is a clear value-add and that alumni network offerings will fit into their existing lifestyle. Online learning opportunities and communication through social networks are prime examples of meeting alumni in places convenient for them. The alumni network should be viewed as a resource that alumni both contribute to and take from.

It is not enough just to know what alumni want: sustained alumni engagement requires strategy. The Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation collaborated with contributors from the Association of Yale Alumni, Teach For America Alumni Affairs, and Wexner Heritage Alumni to develop an Alumni Playbook. The playbook offers a practical guide for building and sustaining an alumni network. Strategy development is broken down into five steps: (1) create a vision; (2) get to know your alumni; (3) build strategic programming; (4) measure, iterate, and innovate; (5) maintain a lifelong community. The Alumni Playbook also recommends the use of an alumni

programming matrix. The matrix shown in Figure 4 measures the impact of programming against organizational mission and alumni profile (Schusterman, n.d.).

Figure 4. Alumni Programming Matrix



Source: Schusterman Foundation. (n.d.). Alumni playbook. Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.schusterman.org/playbook/>

The information provided in the Alumni Playbook is customized for organizations that are building or revitalizing alumni networks. Moreover, several themes in the playbook closely overlap with the literature on strategic planning. For instance, stakeholder engagement is central to strategy development, as is strategic coherence and alignment.

Building networks that learn together. One of the goals of this strategic project is to create a network of alumni and current program participants who collaborate on a single problem of practice. This section will explore Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) as a model for the learning communities we hope to build within the NYCLA alumni network. NICs can be described as large networks organized around complex problems to bring about change (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011). Originators

of the NIC concept, Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow, argue that the problems in education are complex.

While innovations abound in education . . . the field suffers from a lack of purposeful collective action. Instead, actors work with different theories of the same problem, activities are siloed and local solutions remain local. (2011, p. 5)

Because the goal is collective action, NICs differ from traditional communities of practice, where the goal is to support individual action around a common concern. The following structuring agents are necessary to form a NIC (Bryk, Gomez, & Grunow, 2011):

- 1) Common targets and measurable, ambitious goals;
- 2) Mapping a complex problem-solution: forming a shared language community;
- 3) Program improvement maps;
- 4) Driver diagram;
- 5) Common protocols for inquiry;
- 6) Continuous improvement ethic engaged across a network;
- 7) The central role of practical/common measurement;
- 8) Understanding variability in performance;
- 9) Commitment to contrast and comparison.

The structuring agents for a NIC are rigorous and thorough. NYCLA cannot realistically build a NYCLA alumni network NIC that strictly adheres to the agents necessary for participation in the first year of program implementation. Given the organization's capacity and program goals, immediate priority will be on the mobilization and engagement of the NYCLA alumni network. Furthermore, if the NYCLA alumni network members are the authors of the strategy for building network capacity to better serve boys and young men of color in NYC, they may decide to move forward with a different learning community model.

The organizing principles for a NIC, however, should be considered when designing for network engagement and learning because NICs emphasize a commitment to collective action and collective learning. Collective action for the NYCLA alumni

network could look like identifying a common problem of practice, working together to create a theory of action, and implementing that theory of action. Collective learning for the NYCLA alumni network could be a collection of common data points and collective analysis of results. This approach complements the collective action organizing framework described in the strategic planning section. Collective action contradicts what most alumni networks are designed to do: promote individual growth through networked support (similar to communities of practice). Will the NYCLA alumni network strategy promote the individual growth of alumni, or will it promote collective action toward a common goal? This inherent tension will force NYCLA to revisit the project purpose and decide which goals carry the most weight.

The purposes of the project are to:

- 1) Create a network of APP alumni who collaborate on a single problem of practice,
- 2) Facilitate the implementation of strategies that close the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color in NYC, and
- 3) Reinforce APP alumni connections to NYCLA.

While the strategic project is designed to meet multiple purposes, prioritizing these purposes should determine NYCLA's strategy and approach to the work. If the creation of a learning community around closing the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color in NYC is the means to the end of creating a stronger NYCLA alumni network, then the research points to strategies from exemplars of strong alumni networks (i.e., promote individual growth through networked support). Alternatively, if the engagement of the NYCLA alumni network is the means to the end of closing the

opportunity gap, then the research points to organizing frameworks and practices (i.e., collective action).

A Theory of Action for the NYCLA Alumni Network

My first consideration in crafting a theory of action is the prioritization of the multiple purposes of this project. Placing the elimination of the opportunity gap at the top of the list is the only configuration of priorities that will faithfully honor each purpose. With this prioritization in mind, I crafted the following theory of action:

IF I lead NYCLA's effort to employ a strategy to engage alumni in eliminating
the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color by...
understanding the current profile, needs, and capacity of alumni,
capturing, analyzing, and utilizing relevant alumni data points,
promoting and making known the power of the alumni network,
moving alumni toward urgency and action through public narrative,
collaborating with alumni to co-create and design alumni events and experiences,
matching resources with alumni needs in serving boys of color,

THEN

NYCLA will develop an alumni network that is organized for collective action toward improving academic outcomes for boys and young men of color in NYC, and structures and systems that sustain the alumni network will be in place.

The Strategic Project: Identifying Purpose, Parameters, and Influencers

In this section of my capstone, I identify the purposes, parameters, and influencers that shaped my strategic project. I then lay out the phases of my project and narrate the development and implementation of strategy for the NYCLA alumni network.

The Charge

I was charged with building an alumni network that met the goals and outcomes outlined in the Booth Ferris Foundation grant to NYCLA. Figure 5 highlights the major components of the grant proposal.

Figure 5. Excerpt from NYCLA Proposal Narrative to Booth Ferris, February 2015

<p><u>Program Description:</u> NYCLA will build and execute a comprehensive engagement strategy that supports graduates of our New York City Aspiring Principals Program (APP). This alumni network will galvanize principals around the topic of educational equity for Black and Latino boys and will share promising practice and learning locally and throughout the country to inform change.</p> <p><u>Program Goals:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Empower NYCLA's more than 500 alumni to be change agents to close the achievement gap for Black and Latino boys.2. Create a network that engages APP alumni, encourages their learning beyond APP graduation and across APP cohorts, and reinforces their connection to NYCLA.3. Leverage this network to expand our contributions to national educational leadership practice discussions.4. Incorporate best practices and learning into our APP curriculum and alumni professional learning communities. <p><u>Expected Program Deliverables:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Hire a full-time alumni program coordinator to develop and lead this effort; this individual will be guided and managed by current NYCLA APP leadership.2. Host a series of professional learning offerings over two years for APP alumni that feature experts in the field who share their research and best practices in regard to improving outcomes for boys of color. Also include select New York City APP alumni, who are leading successful efforts for boys of color in their underserved schools, to support the planning and execution of this initiative.
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3. Host a culminating event for NYC school leaders interested in this topic.
4. Launch an online component to provide materials, discussion forums, curriculum and more.
5. Offer 10 mini grants for APP alumni who are currently leading NYC schools and meet the criteria for executing initiatives on this topic.
6. Leverage NYCLA Research and Evaluation team to extend our learning in this area and employ research assistance to support additional qualitative and quantitative research.
7. Publish white papers or other related communication (op-ed's, blogs) about our research and evaluation learning as well as the impact of this community of practice.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Increase current number of NYC APP alumni who attend NYCLA events by 40%.
2. Have 15-20% of all APP alumni consistently use our online tools or participate in online discussions on the topic of educational equity for boys of color.
3. Majority of mini grants yield new practices which are positively trending.
4. Publish a number of communications about promising practices and learning from our Research and Evaluation team that emerge from this community of practice.

The funds awarded to NYCLA by the Booth Ferris Foundation support a two-year alumni network initiative. Because my residency tenure with NYCLA would last for only ten months, I understood the work of my strategic project to be about (1) building a strategic plan for the alumni network that would meet all the program goals and outcomes outlined in the Booth Ferris Foundation proposal and (2) launching first-year programming for the alumni network.

During my ten-month residency, I organized outputs into short-/medium-term and long-term categories. If I was successful at strategic planning and implementation, I would see short-/medium-term outputs during my residency at NYCLA; long-term outputs would be met after my departure.

Short-/Medium-Term Outputs

- Increase the number of alumni who attend NYCLA events by 30%.
- Receive mini-grant applications from at least 20% of alumni.

- Score at least a 90% satisfaction and usefulness rating on alumni network programming surveys.

Long-Term Outputs

- Increase and sustain the number of alumni who attend NYCLA events by 50%.
- Incorporate learning from the alumni network into the APP program curriculum.
- The majority of alumni network participants adopt and implement research-based strategies that close the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color.
- Majority of the mini-grants yield new practices that trend positively.

Beyond meeting the program goals and outcomes outlined in the Booth Ferris Foundation proposal, I hoped to build a strategic plan that would sustain the alumni network beyond the two-year grant period. The two prior organizational attempts at creating and maintaining an alumni network ultimately faded as time, people, and resources moved on. The Booth Ferris funding has given NYCLA an opportunity to rebuild an alumni network that can be sustained over time and withstand shifting political landscapes and personnel. Knowing that time and people will inevitably shift in unpredictable patterns, I chose to place one constant at the core of my strategic planning: NYCLA alumni. NYCLA alumni network participants have to be the authors of strategy, and NYCLA staff the stewards of implementation.

Project Management Structures

As I stated in the introduction, NYCLA revised its organizational structure and launched a new project management structure at the time of my strategic project. Additionally, the NYCLA alumni network is not a stand-alone project; rather, it sits

within the larger structure of the equity workgroup. In this section, I explain the project management structures for the NYCLA alumni network and highlight implications for strategic planning.

NYCLA alumni network team and influencers. Every project at NYCLA is managed by an account owner, engagement owner, and project manager. Larger projects may have additional team leads and team members. It is also possible for one person to fulfill multiple roles in this project management structure. At NYCLA, an account owner typically manages the organization's overall relationship with a particular client. The engagement owner is responsible for ensuring that project deliverables are met, the work is of high quality, and all stakeholders are satisfied. A project manager is responsible for the day-to-day execution of NYCLA's teamwork against project deliverables. A team lead guides the design process and develops programming. Team members contribute to the design process and program delivery. Within this project management structure, the client (e.g., a school district or state department of education) is central. From the top down, each role works to fulfill the needs and desires of a particular client.

The alumni network is an anomalous project within the NYCLA project management structure. Unlike our contracted work with districts, there has been no clearly defined client. The alumni network is also a NYCLA-generated project; we have not contracted with anyone to carry it out, though it is supported by Booth Ferris. Nonetheless, thus far we have operated within this client-based project management structure. The account owner for the alumni network is the vice president of External Affairs, the engagement owner is the senior director of leadership development, and I am the team lead and project manager. Though we never discussed the role of the client at

any of our meetings, designating the vice president of External Affairs “account owner” seemed to suggest that the primary client was Booth Ferris.

Beyond this formal project management structure, other influencers guided the direction of the NYCLA alumni network. First, the alumni network is one initiative within the larger equity workgroup agenda. The equity workgroup’s mission is to support NYCLA in addressing issues of racial equity and social justice through internal and external educational leadership work (J. Carlisle, personal communication, November 13, 2015). Figure 6 illustrates the connection between the NYCLA alumni network and equity workgroup agenda.

Figure 6. Objective 2 of Equity Workgroup Objectives and Actions

Need & Objectives	Actions
<p>Objective 2: Incorporate strategies for addressing issues of racial equity and social justice into the content of our client programs, products, services, and tools.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify needed changes to our standards, curriculum, and materials in order to promote an understanding of and leadership practices relating to addressing racial equity and social justice in schools (e.g., curriculum audits). b. Provide ideas for new resources to facilitate practice change among our clients (e.g., workshop series, SIMS, other tools). c. Restructure NYC alumni network <u>that is framed in learning and leadership strategies for improving outcomes for boys and young men of color (e.g., programming, virtual network, mini-grants, advisory roles, Wallace Alumni PLC action plan, DOE AP initiative).</u> d. Develop Client and Partner Network and deliver a convening focused on leadership as it influences racial equity and social justice.

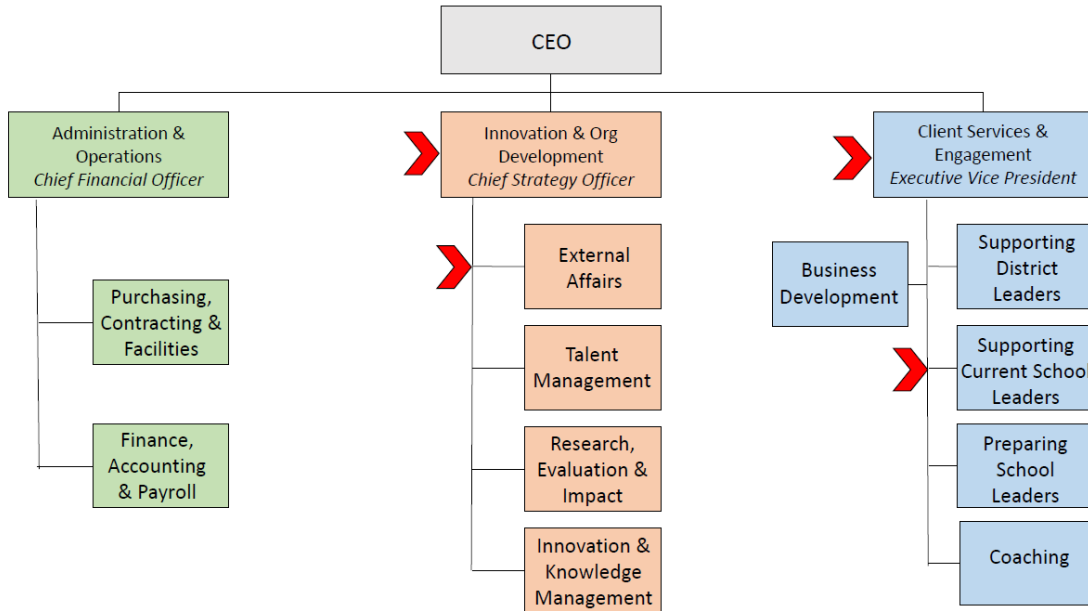
Source: J. Carlisle, personal communication, November 13, 2015

Other influencers to consider are the vice president of Supporting Current School Leaders (SCSL), the executive vice president of Client Services and Engagement (CSE), and the chief strategy officer of NYCLA. Both the engagement owner for the alumni network (the senior director of leadership development) and I are members of the SCSL team. While the alumni network was not born out of this service area, our work has been

folded into the larger strategy of this particular division. The vice president of SCSL has started to think about ways the alumni network can be leveraged to beta test products and services that are being developed in the SCSL division. The executive vice president of CSE is my residency supervisor and oversees my work at NYCLA. She engaged in thought-partnership about alumni network strategy at our monthly check-ins. The chief strategy officer, while not formally on the alumni network team, was very involved in the work. She was at the launch meeting, and she reviewed and approved programming for the network, influenced strategy, and participated in all NYCLA alumni network After Action Review meetings. The vice president of External Affairs (account owner for the alumni network) reports to the chief strategy officer.

Figure 7 maps NYCLA's organizational structure and key players. Note that NYCLA alumni network influencers lived equally in Innovation and Organizational Development and Client Services and Engagement. By virtue of their roles within the organization, these two divisions maintain slightly different perspectives on and approaches to work. The role of Innovation and Organizational Development is to support NYCLA's development and growth while the Client Services and Engagement team is responsible for supporting sitting school leaders.

Figure 7. NYCLA’s Organizational Structure



Implications for strategic planning: examining client interests. From the previous section, it is clear that the alumni network exists to serve multiple interests. Based on the project management structure, the client could be said to be Booth Ferris because the account owner, vice president of External Affairs, manages the relationship with all grant officers. However, programming for the alumni network is intended to serve the alumni, so they could be seen as a client as well. Finally, NYCLA could be seen as a client because NYCLA has relaunched the alumni network to support larger organizational objectives. Figure 8 illustrates the multiple client interests of the NYCLA alumni network.

Figure 8. Alumni Network Client Interests

Client	Client Interests*
NYCLA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase visibility and relevance in K–12 education leadership spaces. ● Position the organization as a thought leader in the field of K–12 education leadership.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Expand the reach of the NYCLA equity agenda. ● Incorporate alumni network learning into APP curriculum. ● Reinforce and build positive connections between NYCLA alumni and NYCLA.
Booth Ferris	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase current number of NYC APP alumni who attend NYCLA events by 20%. ● Have the majority of APP alumni network participants adopt and implement research-based strategies that close the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color. ● Have the majority of the mini-grants yield new practices that are positively trending.
NYCLA Alumni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus resources on building collective capacity to lead conversations about race in schools and districts. ● Reach out to leaders doing this work well to learn from these successful individuals and organizations that serve young males of color. ● Include the voices and experiences of our young men of color; plan for a brain trust, talk to boys of color, and ask them what they need and want to be successful in school.

*I gleaned NYCLA client interests from conversations with External Affairs, NYCLA Equity Committee documents, and goals outlined in the Booth Ferris grant application. Booth Ferris client interests were set out in the Booth Ferris grant application and award letter. NYCLA alumni client interests came from focus group transcripts, notes from one-on-one meetings with alumni, and notes from the Alumni Advisory Committee meeting on 11/16/15.

Examining Purpose and Parameters

To begin the strategic planning process, I met with the chief strategy officer of NYCLA and vice president of External Affairs (contributors to the Booth Ferris Foundation grant proposal) to define the purpose of the NYCLA alumni network, which they saw as twofold. A successful network would facilitate the implementation of strategies that closed the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color *and* it would reinforce the alumni/coached-principal connection to NYCLA. Therefore, I understood my work to include both recruitment and content delivery: How could we get alumni/coached principals in the door and what programming did we need to help them serve boys and young men of color? This dual purpose speaks to the tension between

ideal impact and organizational solvency. At this point in the planning process, though, I sensed the tension but could not name it. I certainly did not see its implications for strategic planning. I will return to this tension later in the analysis section.

With the dual purposes of the alumni network in mind, I revisited the grant application to understand the parameters of my work. The grant called for at least two NYCLA alumni network events in the spring, four more events the following school year, the launch of an online platform for learning, the release of mini-grant funding to alumni after July 1, a culminating event in spring of 2017, and an increase in alumni attendance by 20%. Additionally, though it was not in the grant application, a Carnegie grant requirement called for another event focused on equity before the end of 2015. The kick-off event for the NYCLA alumni network would have to be held in December, using Booth Ferris funding. It could not be branded as a kick-off event, however, as this work had already been launched twice.

NYCLA Alumni Network Project Phases

After exploring the purpose and parameters of the project, I drafted the program phases shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. NYCLA Alumni Network Project Phases



Phase 1. (Ongoing) Information Gathering and Relationship Building

- Research best practices in building alumni networks.
- Research best practices in building learning networks.
- Gather existing program alumni information.
- Collect and analyze survey data.
- Conduct additional focus groups/interviews.
- Identify and build relationships with key alumni.

Phase 2. (September–October) Strategic Planning

- Build an advisory committee that will contribute to the strategic planning process.
- Define a vision for the NYCLA alumni network and plan for implementation and sustainability in collaboration with NYCLA staff and alumni.
- Build a project work plan that aligns with the vision for the alumni network.

Phase 3. (October–November) Program Development

- Define mini-grant requirements, timeline, RFP, and selection criteria.
- Plan programming (December launch and events in the spring).
- Brainstorm ways to integrate and use online tools as a learning platform.

Phase 4. (November–December) Program Launch

- Use relationships, networks, and social media to generate excitement around the program launch.
- Host a program launch event that reaches at least 100 NYCLA alumni and coached principals.

Phase 5. (December–March) Measure, Iterate, Innovate

- Host multiple in-person and virtual NYCLA alumni network events.
- Launch and manage mini-grant program.
- Measure impact and gather data.
- Use data to inform real-time problems of practice.

Phase 6. (March–April) Development and Implementation of Exit Strategy

- Begin planning for year 2 of alumni network programming.
- Collaborate with Research and Development and Principal Preparation Programs to share lessons learned.
- Use knowledge to inform program development.
- Update entire NYCLA community on progress and lessons learned.

I presented these proposed project phases to a group of NYCLA staff to elicit thoughts and feedback. The group included the project management team, people who had worked on the alumni network in the past, and the chief strategy officer of NYCLA. Because the group approved of the project phases, I proceeded to build a project work plan that aligned with my theory of action and project phases (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Strategic Project Aligned Inputs and Anticipated Outputs

Theory of Action: If I lead NYCLA’s effort to employ a strategy to engage alumni in eliminating the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color...			
By...	Aligned Inputs	Year 1 Anticipated Outputs	Then (Outcomes)
Understanding the current profile, needs, and capacity of alumni	-Analyze and organize existing alumni data. -Gather additional data and build relationships with alumni and NYCLA staff through one-on-one meetings. -Survey alumni at events.	-A comprehensive document that provides detailed information about alumni at the individual and aggregate level	NYCLA will develop an alumni network that is organized for collective action towards improving academic outcomes for boys and young men of color in NYC, and structures and systems that sustain the alumni network will be in place.
Capturing, analyzing, and utilizing relevant alumni data points	-Set up data collection to inform the theory of action and program improvement. -Use data to adjust the theory of action and strategy.	-Data collection plans for every initiative and event (from email communication to programming) -Evidence of reflection and adjustment of strategy based on data	
Promoting and making known the power of the alumni network	-Use social media to generate community, networking and support among alumni. -Interview alumni and share their narratives and accomplishments on social media.	-At least 50 Facebook members of an alumni Facebook group -Monthly posts profiling alumni -Weekly posts intended to generate conversation -At least 10 posts by alumni	
Moving alumni toward urgency and action through public narrative	-Use the public narrative framework at alumni network events and through social media.	-A 50% response rate to calls to action issued at alumni network events -A 60% follow-through rate for alumni who responded to a call to action	
Collaborating with alumni to co-create and design alumni events and experiences	-Create an advisory committee to guide the vision and strategy of the network.	-Advisory group of 10–15 alumni and coached principals meeting at least three times over the course of the year to guide strategy -Advisory group maintaining a 90% consistency rate in attendance	

Matching resources with alumni needs in serving boys of color	-Identify and leverage internal and external resources in this work.	-Partnerships with 2 or 3 outside people or organizations that can support alumni -Partnerships with internal (NYCLA) departments and individuals that can be leveraged to support alumni	
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Phase 1. Information Gathering and Relationship Building

To build the foundation for effective strategy, I invested heavily in collecting and organizing existing alumni network data. Effective data organization and management would inform us as to where we had been as an organization, and it would shed light on where we need to go. I began by tracking down and codifying ten sources of data: APP alumni contact information, past and current coached-principal contact information, coach names, current alumni contact information, current alumni job placement information, alumni event attendance data, alumni history of mentorship, alumni focus group transcripts, and miscellaneous notes. Previously, these data had occupied separate file folders and separate departments. Because the information was sparse and difficult to access, I struggled to understand the historical context of the NYCLA alumni network. I aimed to organize the data in a way that made that historical knowledge visible and accessible. It was a challenge to gather and organize these data, but I prioritized data organization because I wanted to capture historical knowledge, organize for ongoing learning, and build a structure that would help to sustain the alumni network beyond my tenure at NYCLA.

Several alumni events had taken place over the past 10 years, but NYCLA had tracked and archived data and records of attendance from only six events. Documentation

from one of those events only approximated the number of attendees; staff had not kept sign-in sheets or any record of participant names. Only one event had a record of survey data that tracked satisfaction with programming. The Booth Ferris increase benchmarks for alumni event attendance were set in relation to this limited data source.

While managing the data collection process, I began building relationships with internal stakeholders. I met with fourteen NYCLA staff members and coaches in individual or group meetings. Through these meetings, I grounded myself in the historical context of the organization and alumni network. Specifically, I sought to understand existing needs for an alumni network, visions for an alumni network, and resources that could be leveraged in building an alumni network.

I found the coaches at NYCLA to be invaluable for building relationships. Ganz (2013) recognizes that relationships are vital to building a shared strategy. While the issue of improving education for boys of color is a compelling reason for alumni to get involved with the network, that reason alone will not suffice for many people. Ganz writes, “Relationships built as a result of one-on-one meetings and small group meetings create the foundation of local campaign teams, and they are rooted in commitments people make to each other, not simply commitment to an idea, task, or issue” (2013, p. 12). The coaches, many of whom have been with NYCLA for several years, have spent a significant amount of time cultivating relationships with principals through individual meetings. They also have a deep understanding of alumni profiles, strengths, and needs. I worked to build relationships with coaches and invest them in the alumni network task of improving education for boys and young men of color. Several coaches, once committed

to the alumni network, participated in outreach, contributed to program design, and recruited principals to participate in alumni network events.

My meetings with internal stakeholders led me to reach out to key external stakeholders, APP alumni, and coached principals. I organized several in-person and phone meetings with alumni and coached principals to learn about their perspectives on the NYCLA alumni network and to gauge their interest in joining a network that focused on improving education for boys and young men of color.

Phase 2. Strategic Planning

Central to our theory of action are collaboration and co-creation. Because our network of APP graduates and coached principals includes more than 1,500 educators in NYC alone, we decided to convene an advisory group to engage in collaboration and co-creation. In late October, I reached out to 26 alumni and invited them to serve on the advisory committee for the alumni network. Twelve people agreed to attend a meeting on November 16, 2015. Three NYCLA coaches who are highly invested in equity initiatives attended the meeting as well. Attendees understood that NYCLA had received funding to support the development of an alumni network that focused on improving education for boys and young men of color, and their charge was to help develop a strategic vision for the network.

After framing the context and purpose of the advisory committee, I asked alumni to begin setting the strategic vision by engaging in the “5 Whys” protocol. Alumni were asked to divide into groups that would focus on the “process why” and the “content why.” The process group would analyze why alumni were not showing up to alumni

events, and the content group would analyze why educators struggled to serve boys of color. The rationale behind the two groups came from the dual purpose of the alumni network. I decided to use the “5 Whys” protocol because I believed the questioning process would help the advisory group focus on the root causes of low attendance at alumni network events and poor education for boys and young men of color. In Curtis and City’s (2009) strategy design process, identifying the root cause and focusing efforts on a common vision are components of the first step: *synthesize*.

Once we divided advisory committee members into process and content groups, committee members began to question the purpose of asking the process question. They wondered why we were not just focusing on content. One alumna said:

I went to the closing the gap [alumni] event, and we talked very surface level about boys of color for an hour, then we were told to go upstairs for wine and cheese. I don’t want wine and cheese. I can have wine and cheese at home. I went to that event to find out how to better serve my boys of color, and that didn’t happen. It was a waste of time.

Another alumna reflected in an email after the meeting:

I think tonight was hard. The responses this evening reflected back that tension in purpose that has been named a few times in our own conversations. . . . The mini-grants won’t be enough, the network may not even be enough [to meet the needs of alums], but the purpose will be. . . . You’re also working off a history of false starts and what sounded like broken promises.

Despite the tension in the room, the alumni remained engaged in the conversation. They pushed us to focus on defining purpose and building strategy that would directly affect boys and young men of color, not strategy that would focus on bringing alumni together for events. After a difficult and nonlinear discussion, three themes surfaced as critical focus areas for effectively educating boys of color:

1. We need to focus our resources on building collective capacity to have and to lead conversations about race in schools and districts.

2. We must reach out to leaders doing this work well to learn from these people and organizations that are serving young males of color effectively.
3. The voices and experiences of our young males of color are important; we need to create a brain trust and ask boys of color what they need and want to be successful in school.

Many advisory members left the meeting frustrated and skeptical. However, they all agreed to give us time to adjust strategy based on their feedback and to return to a second advisory meeting.

Phase 3. Program Development

On November 19, 2015, the engagement owner and I convened a meeting with a NYCLA alumnus and staff member and NYCLA coach to debrief the advisory committee meeting. We agreed that focusing on the process of building a NYCLA alumni network was misguided. The alumni and coached principals we convened were already quite dedicated to improving education for boys and young men of color and wanted authentic experiences that would develop their capacity to lead in this area. The NYCLA coach suggested, “Don’t focus on getting them in the door. Focus on helping them to serve boys of color. Build it, and they will come.”

With only two and a half weeks to adjust course before our first big NYCLA alumni network event, the engagement owner and I worked to revise the programming. Originally, we had planned to highlight four or five alumni and coached principals as speakers for the event. Each speaker would share a 5-minute narrative in the format of self, us, and now. We believed that if we emphasized the work and the power of the

NYCLA alumni network in the public narrative format, attendees would feel compelled to engage in future programming. Highlighting the narratives of alumni and coached principals did not align with the advisory committee's three critical focus areas, however. After the first advisory meeting, we resolved to align all programming directly with our advisory committee's three critical focus areas.

Because of the short timeline, we would be unable to create an experience that would authentically build alumni capacity to lead conversations about race, or to secure the commitment of experts who successfully serve young men of color. Therefore, we decided to focus on the third critical focus area: including the voices and experiences of the young men themselves. We asked four young men of color with diverse backgrounds and experiences to sit on a student panel and share their narratives for the kick-off event. A respected community leader with several years of experience working with boys of color in NYC agreed to moderate the panel. We asked one outstanding coached principal and one APP alumnus to serve as masters of ceremonies for the event. The CEO and president of NCYLA would welcome attendees and speak on behalf of NYCLA's commitment to boys and young men of color. Maintaining the spirit of the public narrative, the kick-off would be a call to action. We would use the story of self, us, and now to secure alumni and coached principal commitment to programming in the spring semester. We worked with all speakers before the event and coached them to think about the narrative elements of self, us, and now. Finally, we partnered with Scholastic to host the event at their headquarters in Manhattan. Scholastic also agreed to provide copies of Dr. Alfred Tatum's book on engaging African American adolescent male writers to all event attendees.

Phase 4. Program Launch

After an aggressive outreach campaign, we knew to expect 60 to 80 alumni at the event. This was our chance to prove to the advisory committee and larger alumni network that we were ready to authentically engage them in programming that would improve academic outcomes for boys and young men of color. Because this was our launch, we designed programming that would be powerful enough to commit people to return for more. We organized the agenda in a way that would clearly define:

- 1) Who we are and what calls us to this issue: Story of Self
- 2) Who we are as a NYCLA network and our shared values and interests: Story of Us
- 3) Why we must act now, an actionable “ask” from NYCLA: Story of Now

Figure 11 includes key excerpts from speakers at the event. Although the event was not tightly scripted, the order of the speakers and the program's format highlighted the three essential elements of Ganz's public narrative framework. We issued a call to action that was measurable and actionable. In the end, 78% of the 67 APP graduates and coached principals in attendance committed to joining a NYCLA learning community focused on improving education for boys and young men of color. These data are explored in detail in the results of strategic project section.

Figure 11. Sample Stories from NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering, December 7, 2015

Story of Self (Why I am called)

“I was born in the High Bridge section of the Bronx and still at the age of 45, I can count on one hand the number of black males I have in my family or in my friend circle who finished both high school and college. The work that we do, that inspires me specifically, is rooted in literacy and partnerships because I was told that if I could read, that would be my ticket to the future. It's very, very special to be in Scholastic as I remember the magazines that encouraged me and gave me hope. I think of the educators who wanted to make sure that I had access to the possibilities that would allow me to dream with my eyes open.” —NYCLA coached principal and master of ceremonies

Story of Us (Why we are called)

“We had Reggie, principal in Harlem, who also made a presentation last year. I don't know if Reggie's here. Yes, Reggie. He talked to us about what he was doing and how he was modeling for his students. It's not enough to just have one or two individuals talk about what they're doing in their schools. We need to do more than that. It's going to take an army. We have an army. We have 525 graduates from the academy. Over 400 are still working in New York City. We have the army. We need everyone to come together and to talk about the issues. It's hard. We need to confront them. We need to talk about them. We need to be able to have those conversations in our schools. I was talking with Susan. Where's Susan? Susan, when we were talking, was telling me she's a 10th-year principal. She's a graduate. She was telling me how it took her until now to really be able to reflect, to think, and to push hard in her school.” —NYCLA staff member

Story of Now (Why we must act now)

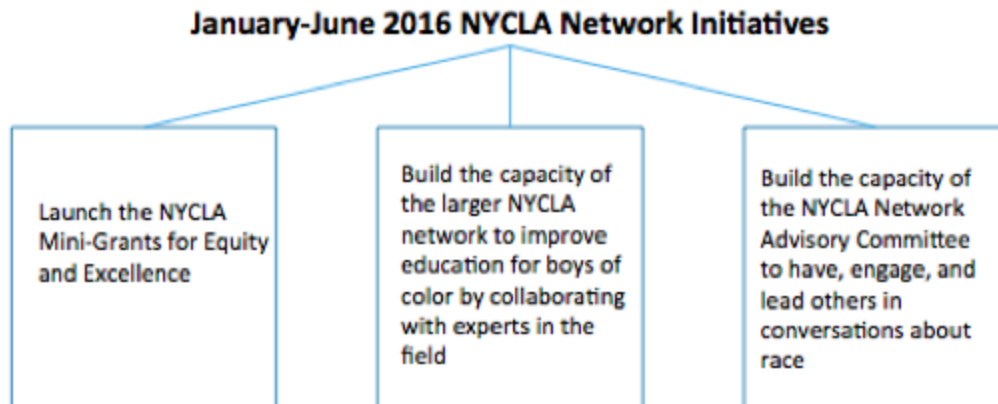
“My fear, and I've always had this fear, is just dying young and not being able to accomplish the things that I want to accomplish. People are really dying every day. We got like 320 murders in Baltimore, to date, this year. It could be anybody. I don't really have anything accomplished yet. If I get shot or I get stabbed, leaving out of my home, or I'm in the parking lot or the gas station, that's another ability gone out the window. That's my fear, just dying young.” —Student panel participant

“Do you have the courage to listen? One way, shape, or form, one of these young men, or all, have said something that has struck your core. . . . With inspiration, aspiration, come perspiration. My work here right now is about perspiration. What are you willing to do?” — NYCLA staff member

Phase 5. Measure, Iterate, Innovate

With more than 50 written commitments to join a professional learning community focused on improving educational outcomes for boys and young men of color, we needed to begin planning for the structure of this professional learning community. The engagement owner and I referred to the three themes highlighted by the advisory committee and grant requirements to guide our proposal for spring programming (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Alumni Network Spring Initiatives



On January 28, 2016, we held a second advisory committee meeting to propose the 2016 network initiatives and solicit feedback on our first network-wide event of 2015. Fifteen people attended the meeting, with only three people from the previous advisory meeting not returning; three new members at the meeting asked to join the advisory committee after attending the kickoff event in December. Members expressed deep gratitude for the December event, agreed with the three January-June alumni network initiatives the engagement owner and I proposed, and contributed several ideas and resources for our upcoming network-wide alumni event. While the tone of the meeting was much improved from the first meeting, one alumna still struggled with the purpose of the alumni network and advisory committee. She did not understand how the purpose of the network aligned with the advisory committee and three network initiatives. I responded in the moment, but I understood her confusion: we had not taken the time to clearly define purpose in relation to strategy.

After the January advisory committee meeting, our team focused our efforts on several exciting initiatives: (1) planning for mini-grant information sessions and an outreach campaign to increase the number of applicants, (2) designing an online learning

community and in-person experiences for our advisory committee to increase their capacity to lead conversations about race, and (3) developing a consultancy model for our larger alumni network that would match alumni need with alumni expertise. Although the work is ongoing, at the time of this writing, Phase 5 is partially complete and the development and implementation of an exit strategy (Phase 6) has not yet begun.

Results of Strategic Project

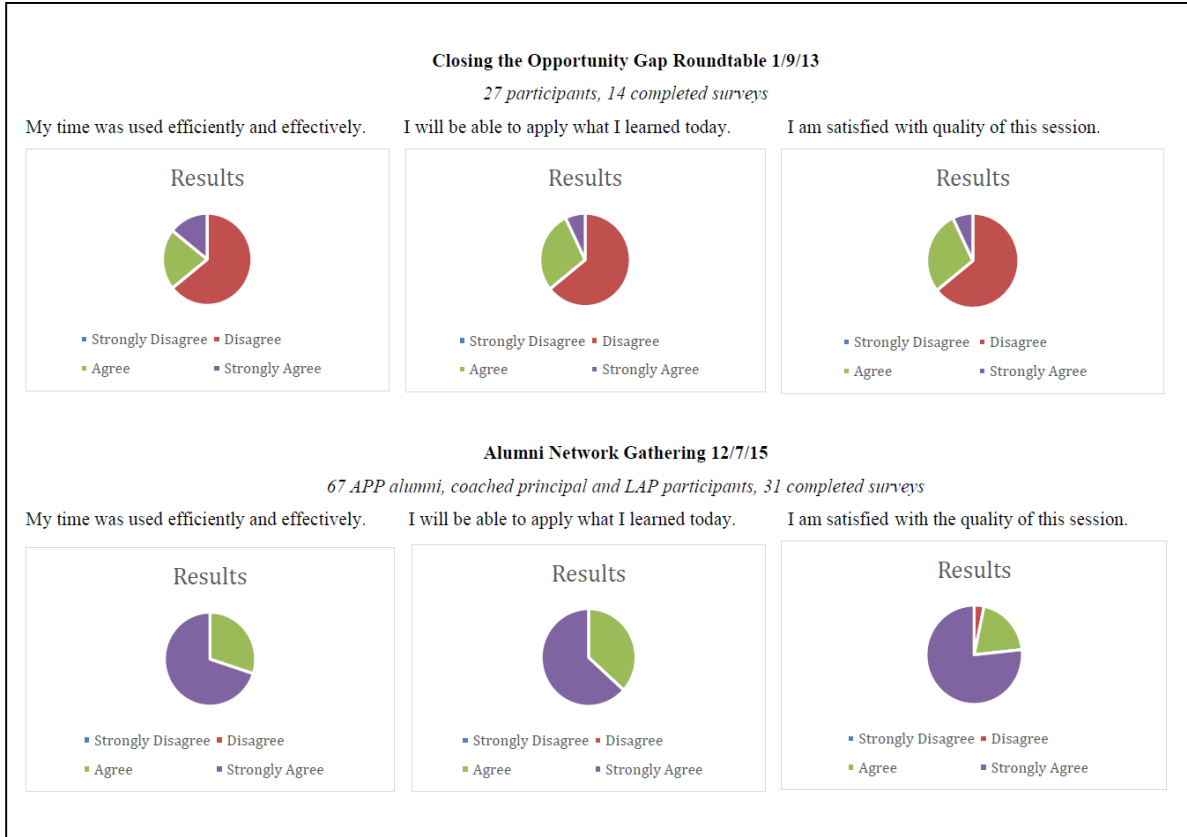
In this section, I analyze the degree to which NYCLA alumni network objectives have been met and I measure progress toward fulfilling my theory of action. I first compare the NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering data to data from a 2013 alumni event to show progress in outcomes. I then dive deeper into the NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering data to highlight the power of narrative in moving people toward action. This deep dive sheds light on our network member strengths and areas for growth regarding education for boys and young men of color. Finally, I step back from the NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering data to measure program implementation data against my objectives and theory of action. Ultimately, this examination illuminates an inconsistency between the “if” and “then” statements in my theory of action.

Comparative View of Event Data

Little to no data survived the last two iterations of the alumni network, so it is difficult to measure the 2015 NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering data against past efforts. Survey data for one earlier event, however, were collected and archived. The Closing the Opportunity Gap Roundtable alumni event in 2013 was the best-attended event with a record of individual attendees. Of the 27 participants, 14 completed surveys. At the Closing the Opportunity Gap Roundtable, 35% of people who completed a survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am satisfied with the quality of this session.” In contrast, 94% of people who completed a survey for the NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering agreed or strongly agreed with the same statement. Both survey administrations yielded about a 50% completion rate, perhaps because surveys were

administered at the end of the event and completion was not required for exit. Overall, the data show a significant improvement in attendance and satisfaction (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Comparative View of Survey Results, 2013 and 2015



Event Data Deep Dive

The 2015 NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering provided an abundance of rich, informative data. In this section, I look closer at the data from that event to analyze the impact of public narrative on (1) the cohesiveness of our network and (2) alumni commitment to improving education for boys and young men of color. I also analyze and code two qualitative data sets to identify themes in alumni strengths and alumni needs.

The power of public narrative. Ganz (2008) states that “Public narrative is a leadership art. Leaders draw on narrative to inspire action across cultures, faiths,

professions, classes, and eras” (p. 1). Hoping to mobilize a large group of people, I placed my bets on public narrative as a way to move people to act. As illustrated in the program launch section of this paper, we designed our program launch event to communicate a story of self, us, and now. We wanted to call our network to action and have them commit to joining a community of educators working to improve education for boys and young men of color. As a result of our narrative that night, we received 51 written commitment cards from alumni attendees saying “yes” to our call to action and providing data on strengths and areas for growth in serving boys of color. We got two commitment cards responding “maybe” to our call to action. Therefore, 79% of NYCLA alumni network attendees expressed commitment or interest in participating in future events.

It was clear that the event moved and inspired many people. Both the mood of the room during the event and the survey results reflected appreciation. Here are some comments from the event survey:

“The student panel and spoken word piece—I needed this to keep me in the fight. As a woman of color leading a school, I face much of the same burdens that our students do—but how do I create space for all of that in a school?”

“Thank you for putting your money where your life is. This feels meaningful and authentic and I needed it.”

“Hearing from the young men who told their stories so honestly [was most beneficial to me]. I thank them. Getting behind their eyes make our work more meaningful and authentic!”

“The voices of the young men to hear their needs [was most beneficial to me]. I recorded and will be sharing their testimonies with my staff to continue the work we are doing with our community.”

In the analysis section of this paper, I explore the extent to which our narrative at the launch event was successful and why (see Appendix B for full survey results).

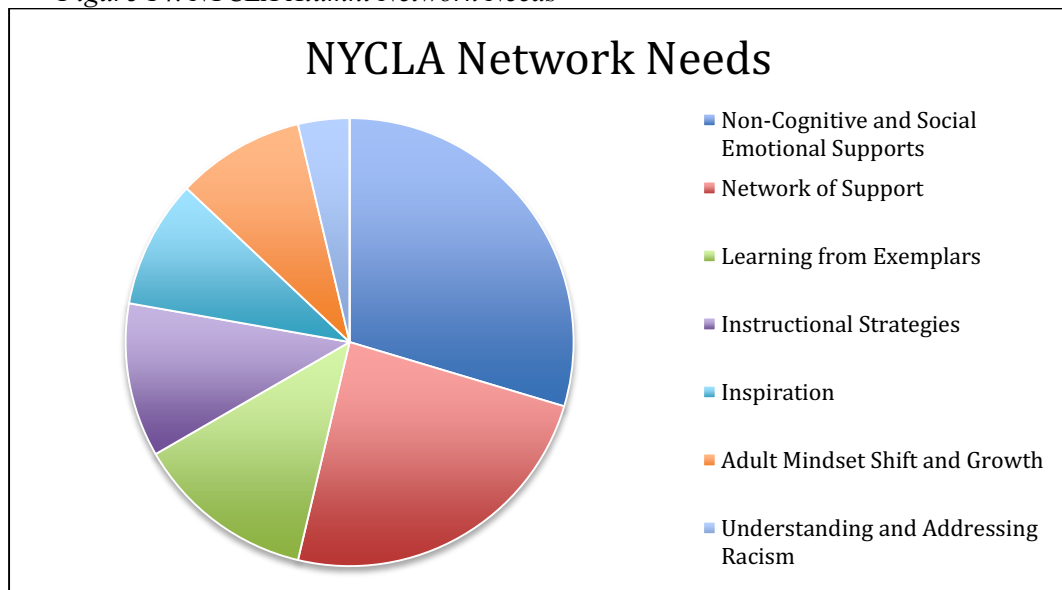
Understanding the profile and needs of alumni. To understand alumni needs, I analyzed and coded written responses to the following prompts:

- Please describe aspects of this programming that were most beneficial to you.
- Please describe aspects that were least beneficial to you.
- What would you like to learn more about?
- What would you like to share with the NYCLA alumni network?
- Please provide us with any other comments on this programming that might not have been captured above.

I identified seven major themes and categorized any expressed needs accordingly

(Figure 14) (see Appendix A and B for survey responses and coding methods).

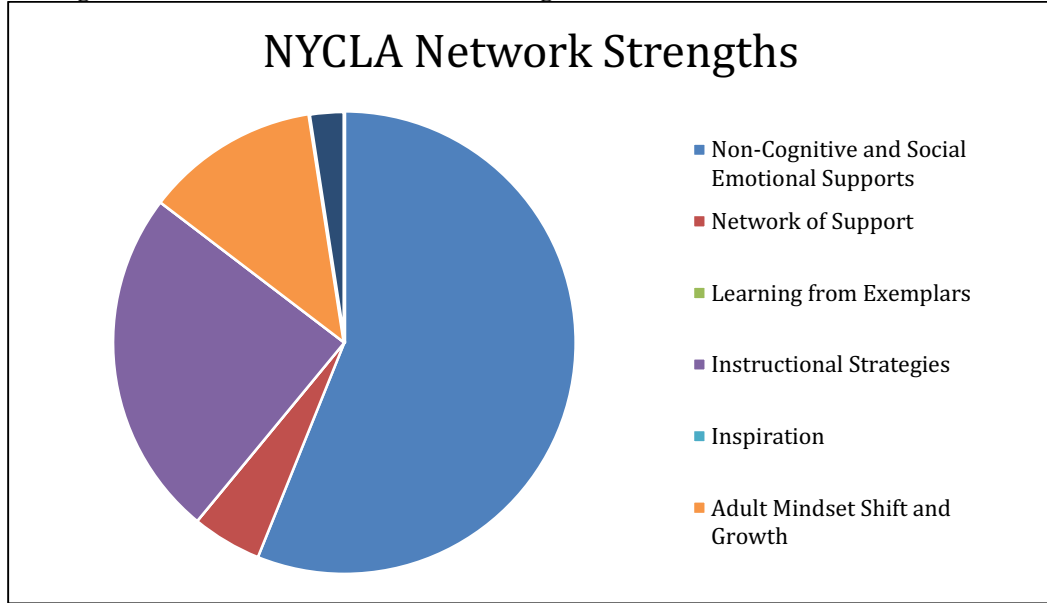
Figure 14. NYCLA Alumni Network Needs



Respondents' most-often expressed need was support for non-cognitive and social-emotional development. Sample responses to “I would like to learn more about,” were “How to build hope in students who have lost it” and “How to balance the rigor of the CCLS with the social-emotional supports boys and young men of color need.” NYCLA alumni network members also expressed interest in sharing practices and knowledge that would advance our collective effort to better serve boys and young men

of color, as shown in their need for a network of support and learning from exemplars (see Figure 14). Figure 15 shows respondents' assessment of the network's strengths.

Figure 15. NYCLA Alumni Network Strengths




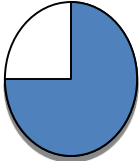
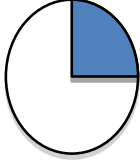
Interestingly, the greatest expressed need matched the greatest expressed strength. Twenty-three respondents said they would like to share practices related to non-cognitive and social-emotional development. Sample responses to “I would like to share with the NYCLA Network” include “advisory and character development” and “developing school cultures based in mutual respect.” These data confirmed my belief that the answer can be found in the room: where there is a need in one part of the room, there is a resource in a different part of the room. It would indeed be possible to organize this network of education leaders for collective action.



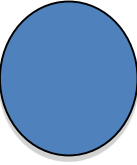
Evaluating Progress toward Theory of Action and Goals

In the previous section, I assessed progress toward the theory of action and goals using the NYCLA Network Gathering event data. In this section, I gather a wider range

of data to evaluate the direction of my strategic project. I begin with an assessment of the “if” statements in my theory of action by comparing anticipated outputs with actual outputs of the alumni network (Figure 16).

Figure 16. Assessment of Success to Date

Theory of Action: If I lead NYCLA’s effort to employ a strategy to engage alumni in eliminating the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color...				
By...	Aligned Inputs	Year 1 Anticipated Outputs	Year 1 Actual Outputs	Success to Date (Blue = Complete)
Understanding the current profile, needs, and capacity of alumni	-Analyze and organize existing alumni data. -Gather additional data and build relationships with alumni and NYCLA staff through one-on-one meetings. -Survey alumni at events.	-A comprehensive document that provides detailed information about alumni at the individual and aggregate level	-A comprehensive document that contains all existing organizational information about alumni at the individual and aggregate level	
Capturing, analyzing, and utilizing relevant alumni data points	-Set up data collection to inform theory of action and program improvement. -Use data to adjust theory of action and strategy.	-Data collection plans for every initiative and event (from email communication to programming) -Evidence of reflection and adjustment of strategy based on data	-Data collection plans for major events but not for advisory committee meetings -Detailed information about alumni profiles and needs, which sometimes informs program design -Team individually reflects on informal data points; two team meetings to discuss existing data and implications for design	
Promoting and making known the power of the alumni network	-Use social media to generate community, networking, and support among alumni. -Interview alumni and share their narratives and accomplishments on social media.	-At least 50 Facebook members of an alumni Facebook group -Monthly posts profiling alumni -Weekly posts intended to generate conversation -At least 10 posts by alumni	-14 members joined NYCLA alumni Facebook group -8 Facebook group posts intended to generate conversations; resulted in 6 “likes” and one comment -0 posts by alumni -0 posts highlighting alumni profiles	

<p>Moving alumni toward urgency and action through public narrative</p>	<p>-Use public narrative framework at every alumni network event and through social media.</p>	<p>-A 50% response rate to calls to action issued at alumni network events -A 60% follow-through rate for alumni who responded to a call to action</p>	<p>-Used narrative at kickoff event and included a specific call to action; 79% of kickoff attendees responded to the call to action through commitment cards -Leveraged commitment card data from alumni to inform event outreach -Did not use narrative at the two advisory committee meetings</p>	
<p>Collaborating with alumni to co-create and design alumni events and experiences</p>	<p>-Create an advisory committee to guide the vision and strategy of the network.</p>	<p>-Advisory group of 10–15 alumni and coached principals meet at least three times over the course of the year to guide strategy -Advisory group maintains a 90% consistency rate in attendance</p>	<p>-Advisory group of 10–15 principals has met twice and an additional June meeting has been planned -Advisory group maintains a 75% consistency rate -In addition to guiding strategy, advisory members have contributed greatly to our alumni events (connecting us with students, serving as facilitators of learning, sharing personal narratives, etc.)</p>	
<p>Matching resources with alumni needs in serving boys of color</p>	<p>-Identify and leverage internal and external resources to support programming and offerings to alumni.</p>	<p>-Partnerships with 2 or 3 outside individuals or organizations that can support alumni -Partnerships with internal (NYCLA) departments and individuals that can be leveraged to support alumni</p>	<p>-Partnered with Scholastic to host the NYCLA Network kickoff event -Continued partnership with Scholastic to provide access to experts and resources for our alumni (speakers, books, literacy materials) -Partnership with COSEBOC (expert access, thought partnership, standard implementation) -Partnership with Future of Tomorrow to include youth voice in programming -Partnership with Pacific Education</p>	

			<p>Group to provide training to advisory group members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Anticipated partnership with Chris Emdin and David Banks -Identified key alumni who have had expertise with educating boys of color (i.e., founder of Eagle Academy, Queens) and leveraged participation at events and in the planning process -Invested coaches in the alumni network initiatives by requesting support in outreach, program preparation and planning, and networking -Streamlined work with the NYCLA Leadership Support Team, and secured 30 hours of consulting and thought partnership for alumni 	
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It is clear that the “if” statements in my theory of action strongly guided my work plan. I am close to completing many of the anticipated outputs shown in the chart above. Two of my “if” statements, however, produced outcomes that I did not anticipate. First, I hoped to use social media to connect people and facilitate the sharing of resources and ideas. I set my goal for online engagement low, given that our network members do not have a history of engaging with each other through social media. I was sure we would reach our target with such modest numbers for engagement, but that did not happen. It was very difficult to generate activity and community among our alumni through social media. I created a private Facebook group specifically for APP alumni and coached principals. I shared the purpose of the Facebook group and used names and emails to find and invite people to the group. Despite more than 100 invitations, only 14 APP alumni/coached principals joined the group.

The second unanticipated outcome was our success at identifying and leveraging internal and external resources. Both internal and external support have been abundant and invaluable to our programming. At the beginning of this planning process, the engagement owner emphasized the importance of partnerships in taking on such a significant task as improving education for boys and young men of color. Partnerships would help us build collective capacity and provide access to critical resources that might not exist within NYCLA. Because of the engagement owner’s outreach to mission-similar organizations, we were able to build meaningful partnerships with Scholastic, the Expanded Success Initiative (ESI), the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC), the Pacific Educational Group (PEG), and the Future of Tomorrow youth group.

Given that my “if” statements have largely been realized, if my theory of action is correct, it should follow that I am making similar progress on my “then” statements. Has NYCLA built an alumni network that is organized for collective action to improve academic outcomes for boys and young men of color in NYC? Are structures and systems in place that will sustain the NYCLA alumni network? I explore these desired outcomes of my theory of action in Figure 17.

Figure 17. Outcome Analysis, Theory of Action

Desired Outcome from Theory of Action	Status	Evidence/Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The alumni network is organized for collective action to improve academic outcomes for boys and young men of color. 	Not yet realized	<p>In my RKA, I hypothesized that collective action could look like the alumni network identifying a common problem of practice, working together to create a theory of action, and implementing that theory of action.</p> <p>While the advisory committee has met twice to give feedback on programming and contribute to the direction of the alumni network, the network has not yet engaged in collective action. NYCLA alumni network events facilitate individual action toward common problems (i.e., consultancy protocol). I do believe, however, that if we continue to develop the leadership of the advisory committee, there is potential for collective action within the advisory committee.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structures and systems are in place that will sustain the NYCLA alumni network. 	Not yet realized	<p>The advisory committee is one structure that can sustain the NYCLA alumni network. The committee is established, and its membership can continue in the years to come. Similarly, we have a handful of coaches who are actively engaged in the planning and will likely continue beyond this year.</p> <p>The involvement of an advisory committee and coaches does not guarantee sustainability, however. In its last iteration, the alumni network had an advisory committee and coaches who contributed to the planning process. When the leader of the alumni network, former executive vice president of NYCLA, left, the alumni network was no longer regularly convened. This emphasizes the point that sustainability cannot depend on individual people or grants; structures and systems must be in place. In the</p>

		implications part of this capstone, I offer a plan for sustainability of the alumni network.
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Interestingly, while we have not yet realized the “then” of our theory of action, we have almost fully realized the measurement goals from the Booth Ferris grant application (Figure 18).

Figure 18. Outcome Analysis, Booth Ferris Grant-Guided Deliverables

Short-/Medium-Term Outcomes	Status	Evidence/Rationale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase current number of NYC APP alumni who attend NYCLA events by 30%. 	Realized	Increased current number of NYC APP alumni who attend NYCLA events by 150%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Receive mini-grant applications from at least 20% of current APP alumni. 	On track	At least 20 alumni have expressed interest in person, via email, or over the phone. Mini-grant opportunity is promoted at all alumni events. NYCLA coaches have shared the mini-grant opportunities with their principals. To date, the online application page has had 764 page views and 291 unique visitors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Survey results of APP alumni network programming show at least a 90% satisfaction and usefulness rating. 	Realized	Survey results from the most recent event shows a 100% usefulness rating and 94% satisfaction rating.
Long-Term Outcomes	Status	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase and sustain current number of NYC APP alumni who attend NYCLA events by 50% 	On track	Strong focus on attendance in planning and After-Action Review meetings; this is a priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learning from the APP alumni network is incorporated into APP program curriculum. 	Not yet realized	Meetings have not yet been scheduled with the NYC APP or APP national team to discuss what has been learned from year 1 programming. This particular outcome is not reflected in the NYCLA alumni network project work plan.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The majority of APP alumni network 	On track	We will not have data showing progress on this outcome until next school year. However, all mini-

<p>participants adopt and implement research-based strategies that close the opportunity gap for Black and Latino boys.</p>		<p>grant categories are research-based. Because of the structure and requirements of the mini-grant program, grant winners can adopt and implement only research-based strategies.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of the mini-grants yield new practices that are positively trending. 	<p>On track</p>	<p>We will not have data showing progress on this outcome until next school year. However, systems for data collection have been incorporated into the mini-grant application and requirements. These data from principals will show us if the practices show promise.</p>

The outcomes of the alumni network planning process to date show dissonance between the “if” and “then” statements in my theory of action. In the following analysis section, I critique my theory of action and consider the power of the Booth Ferris grant framing in the development of my theory of action.

Analysis of Strategic Project

I begin my analysis with a critique of my theory of action. I then return to the five themes of strategic planning outlined in my RKA to better understand the flaw in my theory of action and subsequent strategy development. The K–12, higher education, community organizing, and business sectors define effective strategy as diagnostic, visionary, coherent, inclusive, and responsive. I conclude that my strategy lacked coherence because I did not use a strategic planning process that accounted for multiple clients and purposes. I argue that nonprofits have unique strategy development considerations, and I offer the strategic triangle as a framework for reimagining NYCLA’s alumni network strategy. Finally, I explore the role of public narrative in building legitimacy and support for the alumni network.

Critique of Theory of Action

Curtis and City define a theory of action as “a hypothesis using an *if-then* statement to articulate what will be achieved and how, in the broadest sense, it will be achieved” (2009, p. 114). Upon revisiting my theory of action, it is clear that my vision of *what* would be achieved was misaligned with *how* it would be achieved. My “if” statements were not in alignment with my “then” statements because my “if” statements were designed to meet grant deliverables. Furthermore, Figure 19 shows that my articulation of desired outcomes (“then” statements) was different from the outcomes we outlined for year one (grant deliverables). Note the mismatch between columns 2 and 3, and the close match between columns 1 and 3.

Figure 19. Critique of Theory of Action

Theory of Action: If I lead NYCLA's effort to employ a strategy to engage alumni in eliminating the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color...		
By...(inputs)	Then...(desired outcomes)	Outcomes Articulated for Year 1 (grant-guided)
Understanding the current profile, needs, and capacity of alumni Capturing, analyzing, and utilizing relevant alumni data points Promoting and making known the power of the alumni network Moving people toward urgency and action through personal narrative Collaborating with alumni to co-create and design alumni events and experiences Matching resources with alumni needs in serving boys of color	NYCLA will develop an alumni network that is organized for collective action to improve academic outcomes for boys and young men of color in NYC, and Structures and systems that will sustain the alumni network will be in place.	Increase current number of NYC APP alumni who attend NYCLA events by 30%. Receive mini-grant applications from at least 20% of current APP alumni. Survey results of APP alumni network programming show at least a 90% satisfaction and usefulness rating.

At the heart of my theory of action lies the tension between staying in business and staying on mission. As I stated earlier, I hoped to build a strategic plan that would sustain the alumni network beyond the two-year grant period. Central to that vision were collective action and self-sustaining structures and systems. These “then” statements represent my mission. The “if” statements align very closely with increasing attendance, participation, and satisfaction: the grant-guided year 1 outcomes. These statements represent the organization’s immediate and valid need to stay in business.

It could be argued that the grant-guided outcomes were not at odds with my longer-term vision for sustainability and collective action, but rather, they could have

been regarded as early indicators of progress. However, the grant-guided outcomes were not designed with sustainability and collective action in mind, and I never strategically planned to leverage them to reach my longer-term vision; thus there was not a causal or strategic relationship between the two. My “then” statements and the grant-guided deliverables therefore functioned as distinct interests that were essentially at odds with each other.

When I designed my theory of action for the alumni network, though I felt a tension between the grant-guided outcomes and my “then” statements, I did not know how to manage this tension. Therefore, my theory of action and corresponding strategic plan reflect multiple missions and purposes for the alumni network in an unfocused manner. How could I have designed a theory of action and strategic plan that would simultaneously and intentionally have fulfilled the alumni network’s mission and accommodated our responsibilities related to organizational solvency? To begin the exploration of that question, I revisit my strategy development process.

Revisiting Strategy Development

Given my “if” statements and inputs, it is no surprise that NYCLA’s grant-guided outcomes were prioritized over my mission to create a sustainable network. To further understand how I came to design a flawed theory of action, in Figure 20 I revisit the five themes of effective strategy identified in my RKA.

Figure 20. Effective Strategy vs. NYCLA Alumni Network Strategy

Effective Strategy	NYCLA Alumni Network Strategy
Diagnostic: Considers political, cultural, and historical context. What	Evidence of alignment: We gathered and collected data on alumni, coached principals, and NYCLA staff perspectives. We tracked and used data in our strategy development. We developed an

<p>happened? What is happening? What worked? What didn't work?</p>	<p>understanding of the NYCDOE and NYC-based initiatives that engage in similar work.</p> <p>Evidence of misalignment: It was difficult to understand the historical context of the alumni network because of the lack of artifacts and data.</p>
<p>Visionary: Thinks outside the box, and is not constrained by conventional wisdom or expectations. Is able to use resources in new and novel ways.</p>	<p>Evidence of alignment: We partnered with Scholastic and many other mission-alike organizations to support the work of this initiative. We used organizing practices to engage alumni and coached principals.</p> <p>Evidence of misalignment: We operated and designed within the parameters of the grant.</p>
<p>Coherent: Creates alignment between vision, purpose, resources, and tactics.</p>	<p>Evidence of alignment: The NYCLA alumni network vision and purpose aligned with the overall equity work happening within NYCLA. Resources and tactics of the NYCLA alumni network aligned with the larger equity agenda.</p> <p>Evidence of misalignment: Though NYCLA staff, alumni, and other stakeholders understood the focus of the network to be about boys and young men of color, there was not a common, shared understanding of the vision, purpose and end goals of the alumni network. Alumni network resources and tactics that were employed met multiple interests and purposes.</p>
<p>Inclusive: Engages stakeholders in the planning process to increase buy-in and inform strategy development.</p>	<p>Evidence of alignment: We developed an understanding of stakeholder perspectives through focus groups and one-on-one meetings. We engaged stakeholders in strategy development through the creation of an advisory committee. Beyond coached principals and APP alumni, we have developed partnerships with Scholastic, the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color, the Expanded Success Initiative, and many individuals working on improving education for boys and young men of color.</p> <p>Evidence of misalignment: N/A - Stakeholder engagement has been the focus of our work. We can continue to build relationships with our stakeholders and engage them in the process.</p>
<p>Responsive: Adjusts direction whenever necessary to fulfill the vision and mission of the strategy.</p>	<p>Evidence of alignment: We were very responsive to our stakeholders and we adjusted plans based on their feedback.</p> <p>Evidence of misalignment: Responses were not necessarily aligned with the vision and mission of the strategy. It was difficult to determine if responses fulfill the vision and mission of the strategy because there were multiple understandings of vision and mission, as described in the "coherent" section of this table.</p>

When compared to the effective strategy themes, the NYCLA alumni network strategy is in alignment with almost all the themes; the most problematic is coherence. We fell short on coherence because we worked to fulfill multiple visions, purposes, and interests through a single client framing. A single client framing necessitates that you identify and design for a specific user need; we never agreed on a single client because there was no single client. In one meeting, the account owner for the alumni network said Booth Ferris was the client, which is why the work was housed under External Affairs. In another informal meeting, an executive-level NYCLA employee insisted that the alumni were our clients. And just last week another colleague asserted that the boys and young men of color are our clients. I wasn't sure who was right, but I did know client identification had implications for project purpose. In both of our advisory committee meetings, our alumni pushed for an understanding of the network's purpose and their role as advisory committee members. I gave them vague and unsteady answers.

Instead of recognizing and strategically managing the multiple interests of the alumni network, we attempted to design for the user needs of NCYLA, the NYCLA alumni network, and the Booth Ferris Foundation. As outlined earlier, all three users have similar but distinct client interests. The advisory committee's purpose for the NYCLA alumni network is to build their capacity to better serve their boys and young men of color. While NYCLA does want to build the capacity of its leaders to improve educational outcomes for boys and young men of color, they also seek to meet grant requirements to secure funding, build a strong network with an external face and become thought leaders in the field of equity. Evidence of these purposes can be seen in the grant application, the assignment of an account owner from External Affairs, and allocation of

resources to produce a white paper on strategies that close the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color. Therefore, resources and tactics align with NYCLA’s vision and purpose for the network rather than the vision held by the advisory committee.

The impact of disparate interests can also be seen in the way I collected and reflected on data. Even though collective action was the desired outcome in my theory of action, I did not take the time to look for resources and opportunities for collective action after the 2015 NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering. In fact, I did not take the time to code data in a meaningful way until January, one month after the event. Immediately after the event, I only gathered and analyzed attendance and survey satisfaction data; these data were central to the After-Action Review with the alumni network account owner, engagement owner and chief strategy officer of NYCLA (Figure 21). The prioritization of attendance and satisfaction data analysis shows that my focus was on meeting attendance goals and ensuring satisfaction so that people would return to future NYCLA alumni network events. I did not use the needs and strengths data to inform in-time strategy development.

Figure 21. After-Action Review Data Points

Data points presented at After-Action Review Meeting on December 8, 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Total RSVPs</u>: 180; Total attendance: 97-99; Day-of Attendees: 10• <u>Guest Affiliation</u>: 16 NYCLA staff, 7 guests, 5 students, 55 APP alumni, 9 coached principals, 3 LAP participants, 2 staff of alumni/coached principals• <u>APP Attendance by Cohort</u>: APP 1: 10; APP 2: 9; APP 3: 3; APP 4: 2; APP 5: 4; APP 6: 0; APP 7: 1; APP 8: 4; APP 9: 4; APP 10: 1; APP 11: 5; APP 12: 5; APP 13: 7• <u>First-Time Attendees</u>: Six participants had attended alumni events in the past (according to 2013 alumni event attendance data). Therefore 61 alumni and coached principals are first-time attendees.• <u>Communication Data</u>: Email communication to alumni and coached principals with reference to a coach or NYCLA staff in the email received a 65% response rate; when coaches or NYCLA staff reached out directly to alumni, there was an 88% response rate.

- Survey Results: My time was used effectively: 100% satisfaction; I will be able to apply what I learned today: 100% satisfaction; I am satisfied with the quality of this session: 94% satisfaction
- Number of commitment cards submitted: 51

There were instances in which project resources and tactics fulfilled the similar but distinct interests of alumni, Booth Ferris and NYCLA. For example, our tactic of focusing on alumni need for the 2015 NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering ensured alumni were satisfied, attendance goals were met, and the seeds for NYCLA thought-leadership were sown. The success of this event proved that the multiple interests of the alumni network were not incompatible. Rather, they were unmanaged. Though the 2015 NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering successfully aligned resources and tactics to meet multiple interests, I did not plan for that alignment. Because the alignment was more coincidental than intentional, I was not able to reliably reproduce this alignment of interests in the After-Action Review, mini-grant design process, and advisory committee meetings.

The root cause of this coherence problem *has not been* the fact that there were multiple client interests influencing my strategy and actions. The single-client framing has been the problem. Because of the nature of this project, it is impossible to design for and meet the needs of a single client. That is, multiple interests must be managed and addressed through the alumni network; if we identify the alumni as our client, and design for their interests and needs, we still have to attend to the needs of NYCLA and Booth Ferris to ensure there is funding to support the network. NYCLA is not a for-profit organization, for which meeting client needs would ensure that both profit and value are created. As a nonprofit organization, NYCLA will always have to take into account

staying on mission (improving education for boys and young men of color) and staying in business (adhering to funding requirements) all while building its brand. Therefore, NYCLA should adopt a strategic planning process that recognizes and accommodates this dynamic.

At the beginning of the strategic planning process, I identified a tension between staying on mission and staying in business; in doing so, I constructed a false dichotomy. Staying on mission and staying in business can drive the strategic planning process in competing directions, but it needn't. The planning process matters.

The Unique Needs of Nonprofits

When I initially explored the strategic planning process in my RKA, I failed to consider the unique needs of nonprofits. I believed I could synthesize themes of effective strategies across sectors to guide my strategy development for the alumni network. The themes across sectors are helpful, but they cannot be used without considering strategy specific to the needs of nonprofits. Mark Moore (2000) argues that the for-profit, nonprofit, and government sectors have distinct expectations and demands across different stakeholders. This difference in context requires a difference in strategy development (Moore, 2000, p. 186):

Given that organizations attend to their sources of revenue and that these sources differ to some degree across sectors, it follows that the strategies embraced by these organizations will be responsive to the expectations and demands of quite different groups. For-profit firms will attend to what customers want. Nonprofit firms will attend (at least in part) to what their donors expect. Government bureaucracies will attend to what citizens and their representatives have mandated them to achieve...these differences in sources of revenue and purposes are sufficiently important, that the organizational strategy developed in the business world is not a frame that can be easily carried over into the public world of

nonprofits, and that leaders of these organizations would be better served by adopting a different model altogether.

Because of the multiple funding sources, nonprofits are particularly susceptible to mission creep, which takes place when organizations bend their missions to secure funding or satisfy outside interests. Jonker and Meehan write, “Mission creep plagues the nonprofit sector. In the private sector, pencil manufacturers, for example, rarely dive into the bakery business or into human resources consulting. Yet nonprofits routinely do the equivalent, expanding their programs far beyond their organizations' original scope, skills, and core competencies—often in response to funding opportunities or staff members' interests” (2008, p. 60). Jonker and Meehan go on to say that a well-defined mission helps nonprofits avoid mission creep. At the time of my strategic project, the alumni network did not have a well-defined mission. Therefore, alumni network actions and inputs were guided by disparate interests and funds instead of a clearly-defined, commonly accepted mission.

Throughout this paper, I have used many terms to describe the dissonance in end-goal perspectives for the alumni network. Whether it is a mission, vision, purpose, or client interests, our alumni network stakeholders were not all on the same page. One reason I believe stakeholders were not on the same page is that although I could see the dissonance, I did not push for a common definition of the client(s) or a purpose for the alumni network. As a resident, I spent a lot of time gathering information and building relationships. I spent less time creating productive tension and bringing to light the inconsistencies in vision, mission, and tactics among alumni network stakeholders. At the beginning of this strategic planning process, I asked many people, “What is the purpose

of this alumni network?” I took note of the inconsistency in responses but rarely pressed the issue in alumni network planning meetings. Though I expressed concern to individuals in the organization about competing interests and visions, I never planned an intervention that would force people to come to a common understanding of the work. Because I was leading without any formal authority, I felt limited in my ability to create tension or discomfort. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky (2002) recognize the difficulty of drawing attention to an important issue when you are leading without or beyond your authority. When focusing attention on an issue, they say, “If you hold steady, taking the immediate heat and keeping your intervention short and clear, your odds of success increase. Your position may be heard and people may respect you for putting yourself on the line. If you back down quickly, you merely reinforce your lack of credibility” (p. 154). I did not put myself on the line, and I believe that contributed to the lack of shared understanding of the mission and vision of the alumni network.

Even if I had been courageous about pointing out inconsistencies in vision, client interests and goals, that would not have been enough to create a coherent strategy. I would have needed a strategic planning process to help make sense of and reconcile those inconsistencies. Nonprofits can be intentional about their strategic planning process to navigate, meet, and prioritize multiple interests and needs. In the following section, I explore the role of public value in creating coherence in the alumni network strategy.

Defining Public Value

In this strategic planning process, I struggled to define a single client for the alumni network. My theory of action, my inputs, and corresponding outputs reflected my

lack of clarity about client interests and needs. Moore argues that private-sector strategic planning processes do not work for public-sector managers because, unlike for private firms, social value in the public sector does not necessarily stem from financial performance or organizational survival (Moore, 2000). What matters in the public sector is the creation of public value, not profit. Therefore, public value lies at the heart of Moore's framework.

Instead of beginning by defining the value we wanted to produce for the public through the alumni network, I began the strategic planning process with the dual-purpose framing provided by External Affairs: A successful network would facilitate the implementation of strategies that close the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color *and* it would reinforce the alumni and coached principal connection to NYCLA. Ultimately, we want to improve education for boys and young men of color; this is the public value of the alumni network. The implementation of strategies that closed the opportunity gap for boys and young men of color and the reinforcement of alumni connections to NYCLA are both means to that end.

While it may seem trivial, clearly articulating the public value created by the alumni network is critically important to our strategic planning process. Because we never clearly articulated our public value and held it as the core of our strategy development, we struggled to create alignment between vision, purpose, resources, and tactics. Abundant evidence shows that failing to clearly articulate the public value of the alumni network created dissonance, confusion, and misalignment in our strategic planning process.

In light of the challenges I experienced, I offer Mark Moore's strategic triangle as a framework for understanding the limits of NYCLA's client-based model for the alumni network. Currently, NYCLA's client-based model requires account owners, engagement owners, and project managers to design and program for client interests and needs. As I have already established, the alumni network must accommodate the interests and needs of multiple stakeholders, or "clients." We were unable to design for a single client in our strategic planning process, which resulted in a misalignment between vision, purpose, resources, and tactics. The client-based model has not worked for the alumni network. Instead of selecting a single client and making irrelevant the needs of other users of the alumni network, the strategic triangle offers a way to manage the tension of those seemingly competing interests.

The Merits of the Strategic Triangle

Moore built the strategic triangle, shown in Figure 22, as a conceptual framework for understanding the unique strategic challenges that face public-sector managers (Benington & Moore, 2011). More specifically, the strategic triangle helps us understand what public-sector organizations must do to produce public value for society. The strategic triangle has three components: public value, legitimacy and support, and operational capabilities.

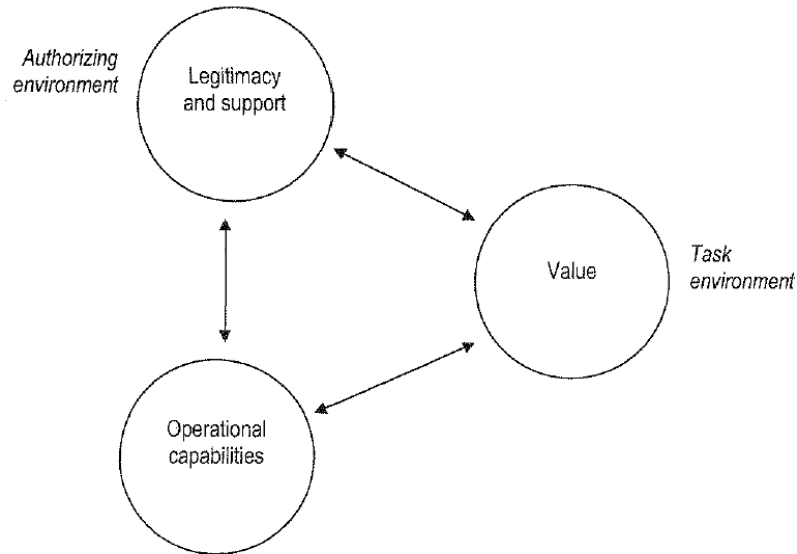


Figure 22. *The Strategic Triangle*

Source: M. H. Moore. (1995). *Managing for value: Organizational strategy in for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental organizations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

The strategic triangle “align[s] three distinct but inter-dependent processes which are seen to be necessary for the creation of public value” (Benington & Moore, 2011, p.

4). Figure 23 summarizes the function of each point in the triangle.

Figure 23. *Functions of the Strategic Triangle*

Strategic Process	Function
Defining Public Value	“Directs managerial attention to the value proposition that guides the organization. For an enterprise to succeed in producing value, the leaders of the enterprise have to have a story, or an account, of what value or purposes that the organization is pursuing” (Benington & Moore, 2011, p. 197).
Defining Legitimacy and Support	“Directs managerial attention to the question of where the support for pursuing the value will come from. Others, who provide the necessary financial resources and authorization, have to agree with that judgment” (Benington & Moore, 2011, p. 198).
Defining Operational Capacity	“Focuses attention on the question of whether sufficient know-how and capability exist to achieve the desired results” (Benington & Moore, 2011, p. 198).

The strategic triangle is relevant to the alumni network strategic planning process because it helps address the tension between ideal impact and organizational solvency by defining the relationships among legitimacy and support, public value, and operational capabilities. Before I undertook this project, I understood business development interests to be separate from or in opposition to the actual work of improving education for boys and young men of color. Moore argues, however, that legitimacy and support (funding sources, branding, partnerships, status, thought leadership, etc.) are essential to achieving public value. For example, you cannot provide programming to improve education for boys and young men of color without money, a sound reputation, and an audience.

When strategizing, public managers must consider how legitimacy and support and operational capacity can operate in service of public value. Take the development of a white paper for the alumni network, for instance. When we strategize through the lens of the strategic triangle, the question moves from *How can this white paper help situate NYCLA as a thought leader in the field?* to *What legitimacy and support is needed for us to improve education for boys and young men of color?* We might discover that a white paper is exactly what we need to achieve public value, or we might not. By using the strategic triangle to guide strategy development, we make all business development decisions to strategically enhance our ability to achieve public value.

The Alumni Network Narrative

Finally, I return to the public narrative framework to analyze its role in building legitimacy and support for the alumni network. We successfully used the public narrative format at the 2015 NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering to commit 79% of our attendees

to action. An emotional night for many, our launch event generated feelings of excitement, anger, and hope. Ganz (2008) writes, “Leadership requires engaging others in purposeful action by mobilizing feelings that can facilitate it to challenge feelings that inhibit it. This can produce an emotional dissonance, a tension that may only be resolved through action. Organizers call this *agitation*” (p. 4). Hearing an emotional call to action from boys and young men of color produced in our alumni a sense of urgency and a desire to act. On that night, one of the student panelists said to the alumni:

If you are poor and black, you either go to jail or you go to jail. The actual prison, or the inner-city school system. They are one in the same, but the question still remains: "Who is to blame?" Who will be the bigger man? Which snowflake will admit that they caused the avalanche? I give up. I give up. I can't get a proper education because [of] the color of my face. I just wanted to be free. Have a fair track meet. Have a fair race. We tired of traditional bias haunting us from the past. We tired of the darker-shade people placing last. —Student panel participant

The messages from the student panelists were particularly powerful in a room full of educators who likely saw many of their students reflected in them. In Figure 24, Ganz (2008) illustrates the action catalysts that are triggered by public narrative. By communicating stories that elicit feelings of urgency, hope, anger, You Can Make A Difference (YCMAD), and solidarity, leaders can mobilize groups of people to act.

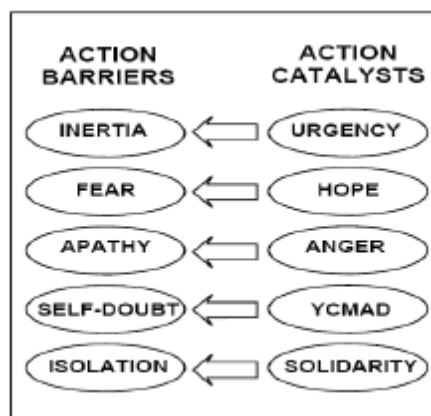


Figure 24. Action Barriers and Action Catalysts

Source: M. Ganz. (2008). What is public narrative? *New England Grassroots Environment Fund*. Retrieved from <http://chutzpahportfolio.yolasite.com/resources/WhatIsPublicNarrative08.pdf>

Not only did we elicit feelings that moved people towards action, we also leveraged the opportunity to commit our alumni to action by filling out a commitment card (see Appendix C for details). It will be important for NYCLA to use those commitment cards to follow up with individual people, and it will continue to be important that NYCLA employ the public narrative format at all alumni network gatherings. Because we are trying to mobilize a large group of people toward action, it is essential to consistently and authentically communicate why this work is important to NYCLA, why the alumni network is the vehicle for change, and why we must act now. As Ganz (2008) states, “Narrative is not talking 'about' values; rather narrative embodies and communicates values. And it is through the shared experience of our values that we can engage with others, motivate one another to act, and find the courage to take risks, explore the possibility, and face the challenges we must face” (p. 15).

Conclusion and Revised Theory of Action

After taking a closer look at the efficacy of my theory of action, I found that it did not produce my desired outcomes because I did not develop a causal theory. Rather, my “if” statements, or inputs, corresponded more closely to grant deliverables. Not surprisingly, the alumni network strategy also reflected this dissonance in desired outcomes and inputs. The overall strategy lacked coherence because people involved in the alumni network never came to a common understanding about client interests and the purpose of that network.

I argue that the strategic planning process was influenced by two major interests: staying on mission and staying in business. Because the client-based model we used for alumni network strategy development is not designed to create alignment between these two interests, we ended up with a somewhat muddled strategy that attempted to satisfy all parties. To account for the unique strategy development needs of nonprofits, I explored the role of public value and the strategic triangle in producing a coherent and sound strategy for public-sector organizations. Finally, I explored the impact of public narrative on our alumni network. Consciously employing key elements of the public narrative format at our 2015 alumni network launch event compelled and committed our alumni to action. The revised theory of action that follows takes into consideration the progress and challenges of the alumni network to date, and offers a new way to approach the work in the future.

IF NYCLA

clearly defines the public value of the alumni network,

clearly communicates the public value of the alumni network to all stakeholders through public narrative,
organizes legitimacy and support around the pursuit of public value, and
builds operational capacity in pursuit of public value,

THEN

There will be an alignment between purpose, resources, and tactics,
and the alumni network will be mobilized for action.

Implications for Site

Strategizing for Public Value

Even if NYCLA is able to define a single client for the alumni network, the strategic triangle is still an important tool in the strategic planning process. It provides a framework for understanding how multiple interests can be leveraged to produce public value. Therefore, I recommend that NYCLA consider strategizing for public value when designing for year 2 of the alumni network.

To strategize for public value, NYCLA staff members must first come to a common understanding about the public value they want to produce. This step in the strategic planning process ensures that various stakeholders are working toward a shared goal. It is common, and many say healthy, for an organization to have multiple interests and tensions impacting the work of a single project, but unmanaged tensions become self-interested. A focus on public value facilitates productive tensions that bring the best out of diverse teams.

In the analysis section of this paper, I proposed that the public value of the alumni network should be to improve education for boys and young men of color. How might this decision affect the strategic planning process for the NYCLA alumni network? First, the process of naming and defining a public value for the alumni network would ensure clarity of purpose, roles, and strategy. To define public value, Moore (personal communication, January 30, 2014) noted, “one [must] think concretely about what is implied by the social change one seeks to make.” In other words, the alumni network planning team would define what it might look like for the alumni network to improve

education for boys and young men of color, and how we would know we were succeeding at producing this public value.

In the public sector, a leader cannot define and pursue public value in isolation; the work must be perceived by key stakeholders as important and useful. Moore writes, “It is not enough that an entrepreneurial leader judges some purposes to be valuable. Others, who provide the necessary financial resources and authorization, have to agree with that judgment” (2000, p. 198). There must be sufficient legitimacy and support within and outside of an organization to pursue public value. For the alumni network, legitimacy and support are currently afforded by the following groups and entities:

The Booth Ferris Foundation: The foundation and grant officers provide funding, endorsement and direction for the alumni network.

NYCLA alumni: Alumni interest in participating in the alumni network gives legitimacy to the initiative. Furthermore, alumni serve on the advisory committee and donate time and talent to alumni network events.

NYCLA staff: Some staff members have extensive expertise in improving education for boys and young men of color. Staff also have strong connections with sitting principals and have insights into their challenges and strengths.

NYCDOE: Many APP alumni work for the NYCDOE, and the children NYCLA works to serve attend NYCDOE schools. The NYCDOE has several initiatives that target improving education for boys and young men of color that can be leveraged.

Reputable equity-focused organizations: NYCLA must secure the support of reputable equity-focused organizations. NYCLA has engaged in equity-related

work in the past, but it is not known for a specific expertise in educating boys and young men of color. Therefore, NYCLA must continue to cultivate existing critical partnerships like the ones with COSEBOC, ESI, NYU, and Scholastic to bring legitimacy and support to the alumni network.

Though I have confidence that the authorizing environment outlined above would find it valuable to improve education for boys and young men of color in NYC, NYCLA should clearly communicate its public value to all stakeholders to ensure and generate further support on this issue (and to gauge potential resistance).

Finally, does NYCLA have the operational capabilities to pursue the public value of improving education for boys and young men of color? I believe so, and through the use of the strategic triangle, people and resources can be strategically organized to maximize public value (Figure 25).

Currently, the project is housed under External Affairs. Although External Affairs has the capacity to build legitimacy and support for NYCLA's public value, it does not have the know-how and capability to improve education for boys and young men of color. The Supporting Current School Leaders (SCSL) team is better situated to achieve the alumni network's goals. Therefore, I propose that NYCLA staff members with expertise in principal development and education for boys and young men of color, like those on the SCSL team, lead this project. The role of External Affairs is critically important, though, in maintaining legitimacy and support for the alumni network. External Affairs should continue to guide the development of the alumni network by sitting on the project team. This recommendation is intended to bring the operational capabilities of NYCLA to bear in a more complete way.

Figure 25. NYCLA Alumni Network Project Management Structures

Management Roles	Current Project Management Structure	Proposed Project Management Structure
<i>Account Owner</i> – Manages the relationship with the client	Vice president of External Affairs	Not necessary because there is no single client relationship to manage
<i>Engagement Owner</i> – Ensures overall quality of project and client satisfaction	Senior director of leadership development	Senior director of leadership development
<i>Project Manager</i> – Ensures project deliverables are delivered on time and on budget	Harvard resident	Supporting Current School Leaders (SCSL) team member to be named
<i>Team Lead</i> – Responsible for project design	Harvard resident	Senior director of leadership development or other SCSL team member to be named
<i>Team Members</i> – Contribute to project design and implementation	N/A <i>Informal contributors to the project: NYCLA coaches, School Leadership Support team, NYCLA executive leadership team</i>	Vice president of External Affairs, coaches, SCSL team members

The application of the strategic triangle for the alumni network is critically important because it helps to situate various interests and stakeholders in relation to the public value, not in competition with it (Figure 26). One NYCLA colleague commented, “The tension between staying on mission and staying in business [for the alumni network] is about resource competition.” For instance, one part of the organization may see the alumni network as a resource to improve public perception of NYCLA while a different part of the organization may see the alumni network as a resource to support principal development. This difference in perspectives on and approaches to the work creates a competition between actors.

Perhaps with the single-client model, staying in business and staying on mission were in competition with each other, but the application of the strategic triangle to the alumni network mitigates and manages this competition. Earlier, I understood the interests of Booth Ferris and NYCLA to be in tension with the interests of the alumni network. Now I understand that Booth Ferris and NYCLA provide legitimacy and support for the alumni network; they are essential to the pursuit of public value. Without NYCLA and Booth Ferris, the alumni network would not have the structures, systems, or supports necessary to create change for boys and young men of color in schools.

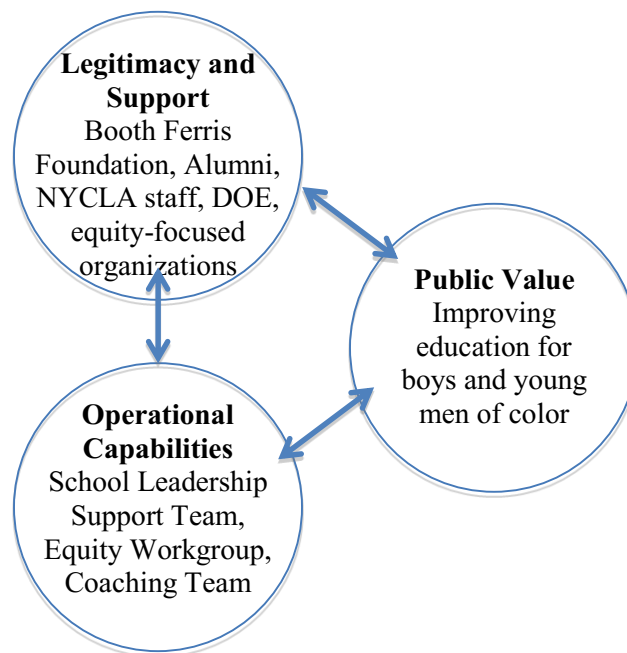


Figure 26. Strategic Triangle for the NYCLA Alumni Network

Building for Sustainability

Sustainability is still a major issue as I prepare to leave NYCLA. I have attempted to capture and archive the history of the alumni network for future project managers, but

a document summarizing the context and history of the network is not enough to sustain the network. For this network to sustain itself beyond individual people and temporary grant awards, it should be moved to the SCSL team. Supporting principals is already the work of the SCSL team; it is only natural that the alumni network become its responsibility.

The alumni network would be more sustainable if it were integrated into the work plan of a stable, long-term team that focuses on supporting school leaders. Currently, the alumni network is in External Affairs, and the strategy and execution plans are led by a temporary employee (myself). It is unclear if NYCLA will always have sufficient funding to support an additional person who focuses solely on the alumni network. It is clear, though, that the SCSL team is a major and stable division of NYCLA's organizational structure and is likely to remain so. By housing the alumni network with this structure rather than attaching to a specific person, NYCLA can ensure continuity and sustainability.

The network advisory committee is also a structure that must be maintained to sustain the alumni network amid unpredictable changes in funding and leadership. Currently, membership is strong and many advisory committee members have been very involved in developing programming and leading sessions for the alumni network. If NYCLA continues to build the leadership of the advisory committee and shift responsibilities gradually to the advisory committee members, it will ensure that yet another structure is in place to promote sustainability.

Finally, the role of relationships must be considered when building for sustainability. The engagement owner and I spent many hours cultivating relationships

with alumni, NYCLA staff and outside supporters who brought resources and support to the alumni network. I know many of the alumni network members and they know me. I've been to their schools, I've listened to their problems of practice, and I've coached them on their public narratives. Establishing a rapport with alumni has been key to the success of our network. Whoever takes on this work in the future should continue to cultivate the relationships that have already been established, build new relationships with key supporters and approach the work with a priority on people.

Implications for Sector

Defining and Pursuing Public Value

Nonprofits are particularly susceptible to mission drift in the pursuit of funding and growth. To avoid these pitfalls, it is important for nonprofits to hold the creation of public value as central to the strategic planning process. Even if nonprofits are engaged in client-based, fee-for-service models, the creation of public value is the end goal of all nonprofits—it is what distinguishes them from for-profit organizations.

Where does public value come from? As I commented above, Moore (2011) argues that people who provide the financial resources and authorization—support and legitimacy—for your work must agree with your definition of public value. However, Ganz (2014) would argue that before you consider legitimacy and support, you must consider the people with the problem. Some nonprofit organizations do use a community organizing approach to generate public value, but it is not a common practice. You cannot know that you are indeed producing public value if the community you are working with does not itself define the value. When defining public value, nonprofit organizations should begin with the community they want to affect and seek to understand what would be of value to it.

It is important to distinguish pursuing public value from charity. Identifying a problem and securing resources to solve that problem does nothing to overcome institutionalized power if the people with the problem are not contributing to strategy development and using their own resources to solve the problem. For nonprofits to avoid

being vehicles for charity, and for them to truly engage in the politics of change, they must define and pursue public value through the lens of community organizing.

Holding the Tension and Embracing Inconsistency

Though pursuing public value will help create coherence and alignment in the strategic planning process, discrepancy and tension among departments can be good for an organization. The tension between staying on mission and staying in business is a reality for all nonprofits. Therefore, it is natural for someone from the marketing department to hold a different perspective on the work than someone from the community engagement department. The goal for nonprofits is not to eliminate tensions through the use of the strategic triangle, but rather, to use public value as a way to focus tensions productively on a common objective.

In addition to using the strategic triangle for strategic planning considerations, there is something to be learned from the private sector about managing tensions between seemingly competing interests. Binns, Smith, and Tushman (2011) write, “Our research suggests that firms thrive when senior teams embrace the tension between old and new and foster a state of constant creative conflict at the top—we call this leading ambidextrously. . . . When leaders take this approach, they empower their senior teams to move from a negotiation of feudal interests to an explicit, ongoing, and forward looking debate about the tensions at the heart of the business” (p. 76). Binns, Smith, and Tushman’s three leadership principles help firms grow their core businesses even as they cultivate new offerings that will reshape their industries (p. 76):

- 1) Engage the senior team around a forward-looking strategic aspiration.

- 2) Explicitly hold the tension between the demands of innovation units and the core business at the top of the organization.
- 3) Embrace inconsistency by maintaining multiple and often conflicting strategic agendas.

Though Binns, Smith, and Tushman (2011) write specifically about executive teams, diverse and interdisciplinary teams of any level can benefit from surfacing and leveraging multiple perspectives and strategic agendas. Furthermore, leading ambidextrously need not strictly relate to growing a core business while developing new offerings. Nonprofit teams can use the three leadership principles to strategize for the demands of staying on mission and staying in business.

For nonprofits to lead ambidextrously, they must create a psychologically safe space where conflicting perspectives can live. Amy Edmondson (1999) defines team psychological safety as “a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking” (p. 350). Cultivating psychological safety in teams can create a culture in which staff members are transparent about the value of exploring tensions and do not fear embarrassment or threat for doing so.

Implications for Self

Holding the Tension: Staying in Business and Staying on Mission

From the very beginning, the dual purpose of the alumni network made me uneasy about the nature of my strategic project. I did not like the fact that business considerations even figured into the strategic planning process. Whenever External Affairs pushed on expanding membership and promoting our work to the outside world, I worried that we would lose track of the needs of boys and young men of color and become focused solely on promoting the organization. In fact, even the word “network” made me apprehensive. It has actually been a loaded word for me, one that triggers a host of negative associations.

I distinctly remember blowing my shot at going to Georgetown University because I could not control my judgmental and negative response to the idea of a network. During my in-person interview, I was asked, “How will you take advantage of the network at Georgetown University and the larger networking opportunities available in Washington, D.C.?” I responded that I didn’t value networking and that I would not take part in any networking activities. I believed that networks and networking perpetuated privilege; they advantaged some while disadvantaging others. Having come from a family that was excluded from many networks that promoted social mobility, I did not want to become like the people I despised. (Needless to say, I wasn’t accepted to Georgetown University.)

Knowing that networking and anything related to business and profit was a growth area for me, I enrolled in a Harvard Business School class in my second year of

the Ed.L.D. program. I left the class unchanged and more suspicious of business motives than ever. I was not ready to challenge my mental model of the world; every comment from a classmate and assigned reading reinforced my aversion to business interests. So, in many ways, this strategic project was a successful intervention that I never saw coming. By critically analyzing the purpose and interests of people involved with the alumni network, I have come to see that business considerations can be a necessary component of pursuing public value. I can make sense of networking, funding sources, and branding when they arise during the pursuit of public value. In fact, public value could not exist without strategically attending to these considerations.

Sociologist Barry Johnson (1992) offers yet another way to think about managing the relationship between staying in business and staying on mission: polarities. He states, “Polarities are sets of opposites which can’t function well independently. Because the two sides of a polarity are interdependent, you cannot choose one as a “solution” and neglect the other. The objective of the Polarity Management perspective is to get the best of both opposites while avoiding the limits of each” (1992, p. xviii). Figure 27 shows the positive and negative poles of a set of opposites: individual and team. Focusing on just the individual produces negative outcomes for the team, and vice versa. Therefore, it is necessary to manage a relationship between the two opposites and shift thinking from individual *or* team to individual *and* team.

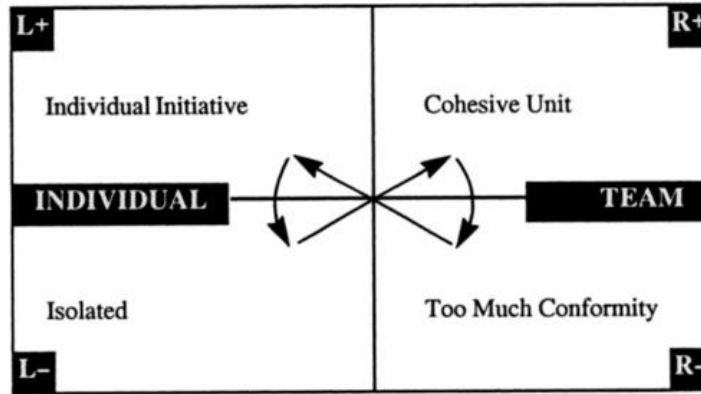


Figure 27. Polarity Dynamics

Source: Johnson, B. (1992). *Polarity management: Identifying and managing unsolvable Problems* (p. 11). Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press.

I viewed staying on mission and staying in business as a set of opposites, but I did not see the interdependent relationship between the two. Focusing merely on mission fulfillment, as I hoped to do, would have produced adverse outcomes for the alumni network. We could have lost funding sources and opportunities to build our brand. I needed the business development considerations to balance and enhance the probability of mission fulfillment.

Leading on the Line

Though I felt the tension between staying in business and staying on mission throughout my strategic planning process, and though I knew the client-based framing was not working for NYCLA's strategic planning process, I never made a significant intervention to try to resolve the problem. I am hopeful that this capstone will offer useful suggestions, but I believe I could have taken a more active role in tackling issues that I feared would create disequilibrium.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) describe three components of the adaptive leadership process: observe, interpret, and intervene (Figure 28). To engage in this

process, they say you must maintain an experimental mind-set because it "facilitates the iterative nature of the adaptive leadership process: you make an intervention based on your interpretation of the situation, and you see what happens. You use the results of your experiment to take the next step or to make a midcourse correction" (2009, p. 37). I was stuck in the *observe* and *interpret* phases, hesitant to intervene because I feared that I would be wrong or that I would upset people in the process.

The adaptive leadership process

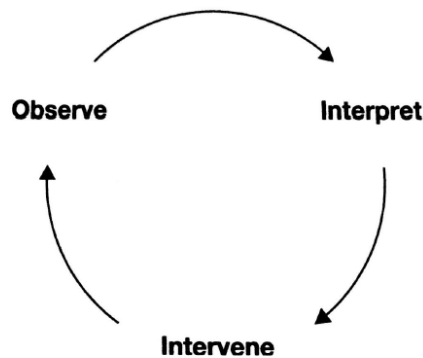


Figure 28. The Adaptive Leadership Process

Source: R. A. Heifetz, A. Grashow, & M. Linsky. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world* (p. 25). Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) go on to say, "In the realm of adaptive leadership, you have to believe that your intervention is absolutely the right thing to do at the moment you commit to it. But at the same time, you need to remain open to the possibility that you are dead wrong" (p. 37). Although I believed an intervention regarding the multiple understandings of the alumni network was absolutely the right thing to do, I feared being wrong. I wanted to ensure that I gathered enough data and listened to enough perspectives to be able to soundly assert that people were not on the same page.

Perhaps stronger than my fear of being wrong, I feared disappointing expectations within the organization. Feeling like an outsider in an organization with a complex historical narrative, I wanted to really understand and follow the norms of the organization, at least until I figured things out. I didn't want to make assumptions (though I made many assumptions and kept them to myself), and I wanted to be seen as valuable to the organization.

To lead, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) assert that you must put yourself and your ideas on the line; leadership is not safe. In fact, true leadership entails disappointing expectations and taking risks (Figure 29).

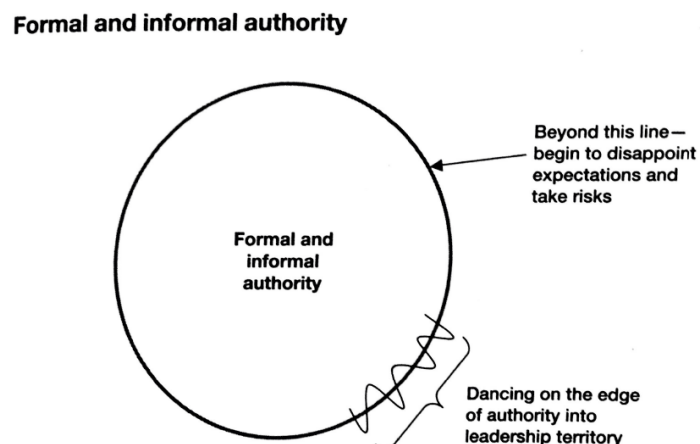


Figure 29. Formal and Informal Authority

Source: R. A. Heifetz, A. Grashow, & M. Linsky. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world* (p. 32). Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

I recognize that shifting from upholding the status quo to leading authentically through risk-taking requires a shift in mind-set. Kegan and Lahey (2009) state that a socialized mind is “shaped by the definitions and expectations of our personal environment,” and a self-authoring mind is able to “step back from the social

environment to generate an internal ‘seat of judgment’ or personal authority that evaluates and makes choices about external expectations” (p. 17). To engage in the work of leadership, I must work toward a more self-authoring mind. I must trust my instincts. I must honor my perspective. I must create space for my voice. *Tengo que ser cómoda con mi misma.*

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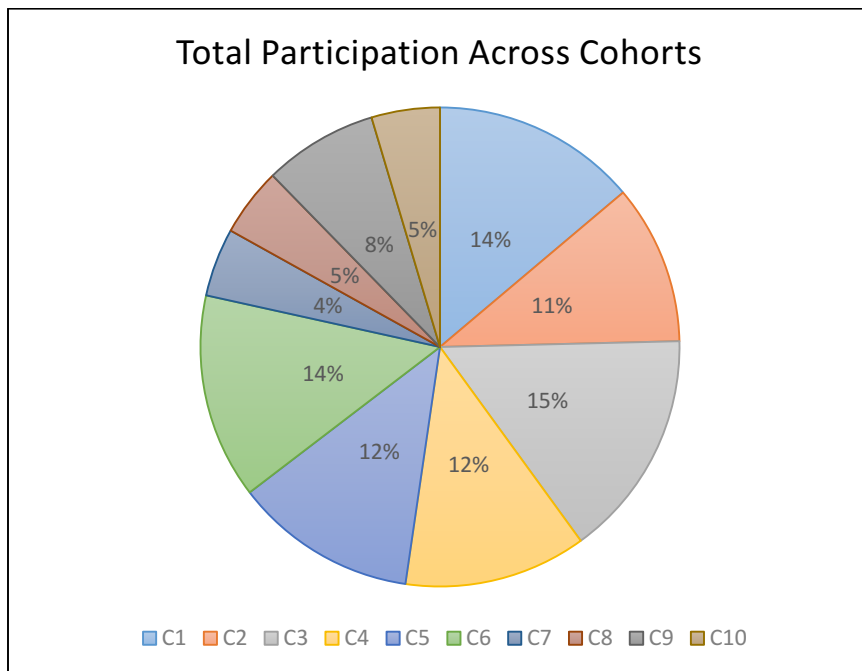
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Appendices

Appendix A: 2013 Alumni Event Attendance

NYCDOE Closing the Opportunity Gap Initiative (1.9.13) 27 Total APP Alumni Participants
Improving Your Web Presence (2.25.13) 6 Total APP Alumni Participants
NYCDOE Special Education Reforms – NYCLA Session (4.11.13) 10 Total APP Alumni Participants
NYCDOE Special Education Reforms – NYCDOE Session (5.13.13) 16 Total APP Alumni Participants
“American Promise” Film Screening (5.13.13) Approximately 50 Total Participants
School Visit (5.13.13) 4 Total APP Alumni Participants



Appendix B: 2015 NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering, Qualitative Survey Results

Coding Alumni Needs

	Inspiration		Non-cognitive/Social-
	Network of Support		Emotional Supports
	Instructional Strategies		Understanding and Addressing
	Adult mindset shift and growth		Racism
			Learning from exemplars

Survey results: Open-ended questions:

<i>Title</i>	<i>Please describe the aspect of this programming that was most beneficial to you</i>	<i>Please describe the aspect of this programming that was least beneficial to you</i>	<i>Additional Comments</i>
Principal	Obviously, the student panel and spoken work piece; I needed this to keep me in the fight. As a woman of color leading a school, I face much of the same burdens that our students do, but how do I create space for all of that in a school?	The timing was tight—I'm ready for a retreat ☺	Thank you for putting your money where your life is, this feels meaningful and authentic and I needed it.
Other	Listening from the young men was so inspirational!	-	-
Principal	Listening to the young men speak	Maybe a little less time to mingle at the start	-
Assistant Principal	Hearing the perspective of the young men today	-	-
Coach	Hearing from the young men who told their stories so honestly. I thank them. Getting behind their eyes makes our work more meaningful and authentic!	-	-
Coach	The reconnection to what matters most. As coaches, we influence school leaders to take action on behalf of young people that we serve.	-	-
ELL Instructional Support	Great program overall. Enjoyed listening to the panel of students share out their personal anecdotes	N/A Great balance of activities	Ways that APPers can connect and network with each other, and share our

			expertise and support each other??
Deputy Director ELLs Bronx	Student Panel—the real stories come from students.	N/A	The meeting was well planned and it met my expectations
Principal	Student panel reminded me of the importance of the teacher-student relationship and social pressure. Real-world application engage the youth! Q&A audience to panel	Scholastic welcome—but I know it is polite ☺	Food was great. Perhaps less meat because the Paris conference is right now and meat consumption accelerates climate change.
Principal	Hearing the experiences of the presenters, who are well spoken and who represent themselves well.	Some more on how the students were/are able to overcome the challenges	I am curious of next steps— The framing of a collective group to begin this work in a new way—To make this transparent. We each do “styles”—how can we share practice which can be duplicated?
Parent Coordinator	The experiences shared by the young men	-	-
Principal	Hearing from the brain trust. Understanding the strengths and needs of the young men who shared.	-	The ideas shared truly touched home and provided experiences to think about and use to improve the work we do in our schools.
Principal	Listening to the panel. Fidel’s poem.	-	-
Other	The panel of students	-	-

Principal	Hearing from students	Seeing colleagues	-
Principal	Being reminded of why we do what we do amongst the piles of crap we deal with each day.	Where is the vegan food? Pepsi was a nice touch.	
Assistant Principal	The student panel		Provide additional learning opportunities in this area.
Principal	The young people were inspiring	We spent a lot of time discussing the problem. We should have access the leaders more.	-
Assistant Principal	Student panel—hearing compelling stories from actual young men of color!	None	Thank you!
Assistant Principal	The student panel was POWERFUL.	I would have liked more time to network.	
Principal	Always highlight our students and we will always be doing the right thing.	-	-
Teacher-LAP 3 program	I can't lie, I really appreciated the spoken word speaker, Mr. Fidel		I feel that the networking could have been facilitated a bit more, because I would have liked to meet some more of the APPers.
Principal	The voices of the young men to hear their needs. I recorded and will be sharing their testimonies with my staff to continue the work we are doing within our community.	N/A	-
Guest	Hearing from the youth	N/A	N/A
Other	Hearing from the young men.	N/A	-
Other	The panel, spoken word artist. Great dialogue.	N/A	N/A
Teacher, LAP 3	Hearing the young men speak about their experiences with our educational system and how we can improve our performance to better serve our students.	-	-

Appendix C: 2015 NYCLA Alumni Network Gathering Commitment Cards

Coding Alumni Needs:

	Inspiration		Non-cognitive/Social-
	Network of Support		Emotional Supports
	Instructional Strategies		Understanding and Addressing
	Adult mindset shift and growth		Racism
			Learning from exemplars

Commitment Cards

<i>Name</i>	<i>Interested in PLC?</i>	<i>What would you like to share?</i>	<i>What would you like to learn more?</i>	<i>Additional Comments</i>
[REDACTED]	Yes	Our peer mentoring program	Academic coaching-supporting students that are no longer attending school and supporting shifts in mindsets of adults	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Working in partnership with COSEBOC to serve our students	Sustainable ways to do this work in an authentic way How do you attempt to do anti-racist work w/in a racist system? Identifying the roles of allies. What is the role of white folks in this situation?	Thank you for tonight. This was inspiring. Let's do this!
[REDACTED]	Yes	Mentorship, curriculum		
[REDACTED]	Yes	How to connect with young men, how young men learn, training in restorative practices, developing school cultures based in mutual respect	How to help	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Strategies for creating a developmentally supportive environment for all young people	Instructional practices/programs that genuinely and dramatically close the achievement gap in outcomes	For those of us that embrace and commit to this purpose, and work hard at it, this continues to

				be a problem of practice
█	Yes	Office of interschool collaboration “answer in the room”, learning partners	Learning more about successful schools that successfully support young men of color	
█	Yes	Academic rigor through flexible programming	Everything, honestly. Maybe building an alumni network	
█	Yes	Family outreach to integrate my school’s community	Other school structures that have been successful on improving the education of boys and young men of color	APP#9; Inspirational reminder of why we do what we do
█	Yes		More opportunities to be inspired; examples of schools that have effectively provided community and family supports to demonstrate academic achievement	Thank you for this!
█	Yes		What Susan Green is doing at her school. Building agency	Thank you for putting a spotlight on this work. I am consistently concerned about the education of black and brown boys, especially reaching out to those who have been in punitive institutions.
█	Yes	Literacy skills for the 21 st century	Changing mindsets within staff members about the importance of building relations with struggling students	

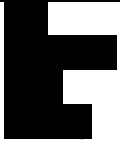

[REDACTED]	Yes	<?>		With heartfelt appreciation to you for validating my moral inspiration
[REDACTED]	Yes	Getting parents on board to serve students	How to change the student mindset and work	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Professional learning circles; effective programs for ELLs; co-coaching, mentoring, advisory	Data analysis; learning circles, study groups	Thank you for making this event a great success. I truly enjoyed the student panel.
[REDACTED]	Yes	Curriculum design relevant for boys of color	Leverage points for the work that will support our work together	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Advisory, peer meditation, staff development on equity; restorative practices	Circles- restorative approach to conflict; data analysis; authentic audience for black boy's writing	Let's commit to have youth voice; part of the grant presentation requirement should be youth participation
[REDACTED]	Yes	How and when do we teach teachers to like black and brown boys	Changing mindsets of teachers	
[REDACTED]	Yes		How to create a safe space in the school for boys of color.	
[REDACTED]	Yes		How do we balance EO and success for boys and young men of color and using support to support youth of color to create opportunities	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Work around multi-cultural curriculum and anti-racist pedagogy	How to build a network for/of educators to write, document, and demonstrate possible	

			practices in racial and social justice	
█	Yes	Strategies for school improvement (in high needs districts)	Collective impact strategies; community improvement philosophy	Have been a part of other NYCLA PLCs— scheduling is difficult sometimes but I would like to support this initiative
█	Yes			I am willing to become a thought partner and participant in the work
█	Maybe	Poetry, facilitator of writing and poetry and community relations	Spoken word	This initiative needs to discuss, formulate, boldly state and more consistently toward...the accomplishment of concrete, specific, measurable time bound research and goals
█	Yes			I loved the forum. I'm ready to do what is necessary
█	Yes		Collective ideas and supports to strengthen ties with youth	Panel was wonderful and allowed us to gain a real understanding of the fears and needs of

				our young men
[REDACTED]	Yes	All boys group	Social-emotional support	
[REDACTED]	Yes	11+ years as a transformation principal who turned around a school that was failing the students in Washington Heights		C1
[REDACTED]	Yes	Still giving some thought to this	What partnerships exist for our most at-risk school communities that can support students/families socially and emotionally? This is bigger than schools...really	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Bringing the gap between teachers and students together	Working towards racial equity and helping people of color reach their dreams	
[REDACTED]	Yes	How to connect with and inspire students once they are already locked up (and while they are locked up)	How to connect resources with people that need them most	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Progressive discipline strategies I am using at my school	Specific strategies to develop cultural diversity and tolerance and at the same time promote academic excellence and emotional stability for every child	Thank you for such an inspirational evening
[REDACTED]	Yes	Lunchtime book club for boys	Specific strategies to motivate boys of color and get them moving on the path!	Thank you for the opportunity to make a difference!
[REDACTED]	Yes	Strategies that research and experience have shown to move young men of color toward success and the pedagogy that supports it		

█	Yes	Creating system and strategies for classroom instruction	What other schools are doing	
█	Maybe	We have a men's club founded by one of our grads who has become a teacher at our school; support group and career/counseling for our young men to provide additional support and help with character development		
█	Yes	How to mentor new teachers	Building a network of black male educators high school → principal	Mentoring young men to give back
█	Yes		Ways to embed opportunities in the curriculum for student to engage in real life (world) activities that are relatable. Also, curriculum that focuses on youth development (social learning)	
█	Yes	The power of collaboration	Ways to impact their social/emotional beings	
█	Yes	Ask me again next year	Curriculum designed to engage in real world problems/solutions; building positive culture/making positive decisions	
█	Yes		Organizational strategies to get "buy-in" from the learners	Let me know how I can make this happen in my district
█	Yes	Restructuring ELT (renewal school) to incorporate activities students have chosen; COB relationship building	Systems that will help my school reach my young boys of color	

[REDACTED]	Yes	Building relationships with staff and families to increase student achievement	Developing social and emotional competencies	
[REDACTED]	Maybe	Site visits; best practices	What's working at middle school, elementary school, and high school	Thanks!
[REDACTED]	Yes	Building relationships; providing opportunities	Everything that can help me improve the education for my boys and young men of color	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Health and mindset	The different programs that are available for the youth	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Implement policies within the system that steers them away from prison		The issues start with the policies. Teachers need to be more understanding of young black boys' cultures
[REDACTED]	Yes	I am still in a learning posture	How to balance the rigor of the CCLS with the social-emotional supports boys and young men of color need	LAP #3
[REDACTED]	Yes		Building networks of critical friends/colleagues in BK/D19 to shape practices, resources, etc.	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Driving school wide literacy practices	Effective strategies for high school men/boys	
[REDACTED]	Yes	Best practice for school leaders and school based staff	Professional development for school leaders/district leaders	
[REDACTED]	Maybe	Growing a culture and mindset shift to support boys of color		

	Yes	Changing teacher mindset; building relationships/connections with students; modeling that behavior and celebrating it in others	How to build hope in students who have lost it	Best NYCLA event ever! Much love to Ruby!
	Yes	Reflective leadership practices; building teacher capacity in developing empathy for inner city youth	How to find more men in my community to mentor my boys; Where to find the financial resources for students and staff to provide opportunities within and beyond the walls of the school	APP III