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SPEAKERS

Monique Curry-Mims, Valerie Johnson, Vanessa Briggs

Valerie Johnson 00:00
Hello, and welcome back to beyond philanthropy. I am Valerie I'm here with Monique and we have a very special guest with us today. Vanessa Briggs has agreed to join us. So before we get too far into it, I want to toss it over to Monique to say hi, and then we can get to know Vanessa.

Monique Curry-Mims 00:19
I'm going to say hi very quickly, because we've got a lot to talk about. And you know, us we don't want to go off topic too much and have us here forever. But Vanessa, I say is my fairy godmother, because when I met her, she put me on to this amazing path in life that I am on now. So I'm just gonna just jump in and let Vanessa introduce herself and tell you all why she's amazing.

Vanessa Briggs 00:44
Wow. thank you for having me. As as you said, Vanessa Briggs president and CEO of the Alliance for Health Equity, I thoroughly enjoy the work that we do at the Alliance. Monique, I want to thank you for inviting me and having this conversation with you. Because I do believe it is time to disrupt philanthropy, and how we go about what we're doing, and really engaging community. So I am eager to jump right into this conversation.

Monique Curry-Mims 01:14
Well, let's let's jump in then. So what does disrupting philanthropy really mean to you?

Vanessa Briggs 01:19
You know, I, people ask me this question often. And and I think I'm sort of landing on, if we just sort of dissect the definition of disruption it, it means break apart, like just tear it apart, break it apart. And I think as it relates to philanthropy, it really is sort of taking this radical approach by practicing our grant making differently, our community investments differently, with the ultimate goal that we're really trying to transform past practices, systems, structures, policies, service delivery, because clearly what we

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have been investing in the past, I think we can do more and have a greater impact. And so it just, it just means that we have to successfully challenge ourselves to sort of break the norm and the status quo. That's how I sort of think about disruption in philanthropy.

Monique Curry-Mims 02:19
That I mean, that's a lot you know, Valerie and I are always like burn it down, you don't want to like completely burn it down. But it needs to be some kind of radical changes that are happening in this space. So this season, we're really trying to create a roadmap for disruption, because there's all these different practices the trust based philanthropy practice, which is growing, there's a community centric practice. And in the midst of it, we're all just trying to figure out what that means for our individual organizations in reality, right? So we're saying let's burn it all down, we really can't burn it all down. So what is that process? And I think that part of it is we've gotten into this cycle where nonprofits do a lot of things, because Foundation's asked them to, even though it might not be what they want to do, or like, Oh, I've got to chase those dollars over here, because no one's funding the work that actually needs to be done. Or we've got to implement some new program protocol, because the funder wants us to track some random thing. So we're gonna start with foundations, right? We're gonna start with the grant making side of things. So in your perspective, like even in your journey from moving from Brandywine health, to evolving to Alliance for Health Equity, you know, what does that future look like? What is the possibility of what you're doing and what you think can be the sector can be doing?

Vanessa Briggs 03:39
Yeah, I mean, I think when you think about disruption, and everything that you talked about, how philanthropy has sort of laid the groundwork for the nonprofit sector to jump through hoops, right,

Monique Curry-Mims 03:53
right.

Vanessa Briggs 03:54
And so in order to disrupt and sort of think about the future of philanthropy, it does take, I believe, courageous leadership, it takes collective action, just to continue to challenge the status quo. And so when I think about the future of philanthropy, I actually think about philanthropy, and nonprofits are leading their work with value. I think oftentimes, people have values and guiding principles, and they're just nice things to have on the website. And they're really nice buzzwords, but really the challenges are people leading with their core values, particularly when we think about justice and equity and community participation and engagement because that's where the disruption really needs to take place. And if you're going to live out those values, that means your work has to look different. And so that's sort of what I think the future of philanthropy should also look look at. I also believe that when we think about the future, we have to start leaning more into changing of spending policies related to foundations. We know traditionally private foundations give out 5% of their of their endowment. I believe that the future of philanthropy should not be in a straitjacket to say only 5%. Because we know that the issues, the social economic health issues and justice issues that we're really trying to solve are very complex. And it takes a little bit more than 5%. And sometimes it's not just about the dollar, but why not use the endowment and the dollars to really make these radical changes that we're that we're trying to

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do. And so that sort of leads into more and more foundations are thinking about mission-led investing, social impact investing, moving all of their endowment into social impact investing. So beyond traditional grant making, I think that's what the future of philanthropy needs to look at. And then I also think this notion of collaboration, we always want our nonprofit partners and our grantees collaborate, collaborate, collaborate, but I do believe in the philanthropic sector, we don't necessarily practice what we preach. And so I believe that collaborative investing, collaboration among foundation leaders, and philanthropic and other philanthropists should take place because it does take this whole collective action to sort of address some of these issues. And then the last piece, I think, which is critically important, is data, and how we're gathering data, and how we're actually using data. If we're leaning much more into this participatory process, lifting up community voice, doing collaborative funding, we can't just go back to traditional quantitative data to say, Oh, we've measured impact. So we really need to think about and look at how we're approaching data collection, how we're using that data to demonstrate impact, and more importantly, who's actually defining impact? So for me, that's what we're, I think, the levers in philanthropy, when think about the future, that's where we really need to lean into,

Valerie Johnson 07:12
well, you just, there's so much.

Monique Curry-Mims 07:15
It's awesome.

Valerie Johnson 07:16
I want to dig into like, all of that I'm over here taking notes, like where do I want to start? So I'm going to try and start back kind of at the beginning of your answer with like living your values. As an organization. I think that is an amazing concept that people maybe don't understand what that means or even like, the breadth and depth of what that means, especially for a foundation. So I'm wondering if you can just dig a little bit more into what it looks like to be living your values and where you are.

Vanessa Briggs 07:46
Yeah, I mean, I think it's, interestingly enough, my journey. At the Alliance for Health Equity, I kind of started out as the CEO, President, CEO for Brandywine Health Foundation and quickly learned as I started to acclimate myself to the foundation, the work that it did, I started with its values, because I really wanted to understand what was driving the decisions in terms of how the foundation was engaging community, doing, it's grant making, utilizing its community investments. And as I read the values and started having conversations with community members, for the first year, I sat back and I listened, I made no changes, because I wanted to really fundamentally understand what did people think about the Brandywine Health Foundation. And it was clear to me, what we had written on paper in terms of our core values was not how people were perceiving us. And so when I say sort of living out and leaning into your core values, I believe that your guidepost, that's how you should approach your work. And so at the Alliance for Health Equity, we really looked at and refreshed our core values as a result of going through a new strategic plan. And we wanted to center our work on equity. And so now we're asking ourselves the question, well, what does equity mean? And how are people going to perceive that, quite frankly, when when I started, and I said, I listened for the first year, people knew the

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Brandywine Health Foundation for its fundraising activities, and A festival. It knew nothing about our grant making. It knew nothing about the impact of our grant making. And quite frankly, when we talk about equity as a value, I often heard that Brandywine Health foundation is not accessible because the mere building that our headquarters are located in historically didn't allow Black people in this building. And so how is that exuding equity for our organization? So that's like a really concrete aha moment that I realized like three months into my tenure at the Brandywine Health foundation. So that's like a clear example for me, it's like you can't have these values, and then do practices that contradict against those values. Love the cat.

Valerie Johnson
For our listeners, my cat Spartacus is being really aggressive about snuggling my face right now. I really love how deep you went with living your values. I mean, I think when you think about that, for Foundation's, most often, it's where you're investing your money, which is important, and definitely something you should think about. But I don't know anyone who's gone as deep as to look into the history of the building that you're located in and really think through the values of that. So I think that's amazing that you do that. And the other thing you said that I wanted to kind of deep dig into was collaborating from the nonprofit side. I love collaborating, but also I don't love forced collaborating, because the foundation requires in order to receive a grant. So I'm curious, you know, how you how you envision foundations collaborating and partnering together? And and do you think that you still want nonprofits to also collaborate when it makes sense or all the time? Or how do you see that playing out?

Vanessa Briggs
Yeah, I mean, that's a very loaded question, but a very great question. And so I'll sort of attack it from the foundation side philanthropy, and I do think that philanthropy needs to collaborate. And we've done it historically, by just pulling resources together our dollars, you put some money in, I'll put some money in, and then let's see how that plays out. I think it goes beyond that. I think it's pooling of resources, because one foundation oftentimes cannot solve these deep complex issues that I sort of mentioned earlier. And so it does require large investments from a variety of places. I also believe that there's diversity among foundations with their own mission. So we know that we're trying to solve these complex issues, and there's a social issue component to it. There's an economic issue component to it, there's a health issue component to it, right, individual members and communities don't show up in silo with one problem, they come with a boatload of problems. And so in each foundations, right, they may have specific expertise, bandwidth, to be able to address a specific issue, but we're doing it in collective action. And so I think that that's why this is critically important for philanthropy to come together. Now, if we want to think about practicing what we preach. And we're also asking our nonprofit sector to collaborate. I do also think that that minimizes confusion, I would say, from the very end users who need the services of the nonprofit organizations, oftentimes we hear community members and residents say, everyone's doing youth serving programs what's the difference between program a program B, program c, I need youth service organizations to meet my needs for my teenager. But I also have these other issues that compound why I need help with my teenager. So again, this whole notion that let's address the whole person, the whole community, and again, no individual nonprofit can do that. And so that's why I fundamentally believe it's important for the nonprofit sector to collaborate, that the caveat to this, for me, is the co creation of the solution. It cannot be prescribed by philanthropy

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because they may have deep pockets, research, expertise, knowledge, and you have the nonprofit sector who may know how to execute programs. But what's often missing is the community voice. And so I believe collaboration goes beyond just philanthropy collaborating within its own right, nonprofits collaborating. This has to include community voice, not only to identify problems, but to to co develop and build the solution as you're building community power. That to me is the sweet spot of collaboration.

Valerie Johnson 14:19
Can I just say,

Monique Curry-Mims 14:20
You are singing my song.

Valerie Johnson 14:24
You're my hero. I love everything that you have said so far. Yeah, this is amazing. I'm gonna stop talking. Let Monique ask questions.

Monique Curry-Mims 14:32
No, I mean, so you know, that is the ethos of the work that I do, really focusing it in community voice. And I think that there's still that struggle with foundations and nonprofits when it comes to collaboration, right? So I remember having a conversation with a funder that said, Oh, well, your organization does x, it was a youth development organization, right. And we fund this other organization, and you guys are very similar. But like you do it a little bit differently, you know, if you guys came together like I would we would put more money into that effort. And I was like, Oh, awesome, right? So put that back to the executive director. And he was like, That's bullshit. Like, we're not doing that. And I'm just like, but the funder saying, and so there's still this uneasiness. I feel like with nonprofits to collaborate. Now, I will say COVID forced those organizations to collaborate, and now people are now rethinking the ways that they can collaborate. But I still think that, and I don't know if it's that competitive hat that people are still wearing, and not really thinking about the community itself, or just the fact that within this space, the dollars are so limited, I guess that's still that competitive hat. And they're not a lot of general operating dollars. They're very program specific. So if my program does x and the other program does y, how was that money being split? You know, what is it going to take for that admin and overhead for that, for that collaboration to work? And is that going to be funded? So when we talk about, you know, foundations collaborating, and then nonprofits collaborating? What are your thoughts? And are there any ideas or case studies that you have around how a funder has successfully created funding for something that still exists? Not that like, it was a one time grant and one time thing, but really grew that collaborative effort for that community? Yeah.

Vanessa Briggs 16:28
I mean, I think there's many examples across the nation that have been successful. So when you think historically back, when the word coalition was the big buzzword, right, and everybody wanted to build a coalition around a specific topic, I can actually say that I think that was the very, very beginning of thinking about collaboration and partnerships differently. And to this day, there are still these coalition's

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that exist, that address these broad, broad issues. So I think that there is some value to collaboration and partnership. I can't name one specifically off the top of my head, I just sort of think about the overall strategy and the evolution as how do we get to a point where we went from sort of coalition building and multiple people getting together to address one issue to now we're trying to address multiple complex issues and quote, community voice, co create. And so it has evolved over time. And so I think part of the strategies that the philanthropic sector is really trying to wrap their head around. And I think this is where the uniqueness comes into how you want to implement it. And you mentioned it at the top of the call it is through trust based philanthropy. And I think it's broad enough to say that it does require general operating support, it does require multi year funding. So let's just remove the barrier of the competition and chasing money. Let's give the nonprofits the money that they need know that it's long term, I actually think it's beyond two years, I like to sort of think about it from a phased approach that if you think about community based participatory research, and you pull some of their best practices, they traditionally have this planning phase that's funded, then from there, and that's where the co creation actually happens. Then from there, the funder funds implementation, five, seven years, and then their sustainability for another three years, that's the direction that we really need to go in. Because we're not going to solve food insecurity, poverty, the wealth gap in a two year funding cycle, it's just not going to happen. And so we need to fundamentally think about the issues that we're trying to have great impact, which are traditionally grounded in equities in systems and practices. And so that just takes time to dismantle some of these things. And, and I think the collaboration is the way to go. But the missing ingredient is across the philanthropic sector, are we thinking about investments from a long term perspective? And to me, that's often the conversation. That's not part of what we're talking about, where we're investing and doing things like that, and trying it out at the Alliance for Health Equity. And boy, was that a transformation for us to get away from individual grants programs service delivery to say, Nope, we're only going to fund partnerships, collaboration, we're going to build capacity, do some training, let you identify what the issue is, then fund you to continue to plan. Then you tell us what your implementation phase is going to look like. Then we're going to fund that for five years. Oh, and by the way, we want you to select the organization. because you all have to collectively work together, we're not going to tell you that is it gets to your point, agency a agency b doing great work, but we want you to work together, we're not going to tell you to do it, you guys figure that out. And so it's just really thinking about the work differently. And I think we're so stuck in tradition, that it's comfortable, that it's comfortable for us. But I will always go back to the data. Like if your health foundation like we are, we certainly care about health, I look at the data have, we improved the overall health of the community, over the last 18 years since we've been in existence, I don't see the needle going in the right direction, given the amount of investments that we've made in the community. So it just makes me fundamentally say, we've got to do things differently. Our money alone is not going to solve these issues. So we have to pull together. And we've got to get people to work differently together.

Monique Curry-Mims 18:49
Preach!

Valerie Johnson 20:58
So I think this is the perfect segue into the other thing that we really wanted to dig in with you today, which is at the Alliance for Health Equity, you true champion that you are, have made a lot of changes.

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And things look very, very different there now than they did you know, a few years ago, 10 years ago. And I'm wondering, personally, how did you do that? I think is the the short version of that question. But like, how did you get people on board? How did you convince folks to like, get away from the way things have always happened and like get out of their comfort zones, and like, the undertaking that you have taken on was so significant. And I think it's amazing to hear what you're doing now. But I'm sure that it was not easy to get from where you were then to where you are now. So I think that's the part that I would love to dig into a little bit. So tell us how you are as amazing as you are? That's that's the question.

Vanessa Briggs 21:53
Oh, thank you. Thank you for that. And I certainly can't take credit for all the transformation that that's taking place at the Alliance, it actually started with the board and their leadership and the team. So it's certainly I'm just sort of like a conduit to kind of make it happen. But it really started with the board. And without going way, way back. I've been at the Alliance for about four and a half years. And I think to answer your question, it actually started with the board, making a bold move to hire its first African American president and CEO. And this is on the heels of following someone that had been there for 16 years. So that alone set precedents in terms of, we're doing things differently, because we now have a different leader. And so with that they gave the charge of this new leader, which is me I'm very gracious and humbled to be able to do this work is that they said to me, we don't want Same old, same old, we want a public health framework, because we know the issues that we're addressing are very complex, and it can't be done in isolation. So now they're singing my song because I have a public health background. And so fast forward. The board again, ceded power, when we had to do our strategic planning. So we didn't use a traditional approach to strategic planning, where it's like a subset of the board and they make the decisions. And then we do some key informant interviews and focus groups and surveys. I was like, I don't want any of that. I want this to be solely community driven. Because my first year I sat back, and I listened, and I realized how disconnected the Brandywine Health Foundation was from the community. They didn't know who we were, we were known for parties and festivals. And no one knew what we did with grantmaking. And so I said, this strategic planning process is going to be community driven. They designed it. They implemented and facilitated discussions. And we framed our let's talk community gatherings as a way to not only just engage, but for us to sit back and listen, one of the lessons that I learned from that quickly, was just watching my staff react to that. They said, well, Vanessa, how come? We're not? How come we're not up in the front talking about who we are and what we do? And I said, because it's not about us. So again, just that shift in mindset that this is about the community, if we're trying to identify future strategic priorities, why is it about us and what we've done in the past? Isn't it about what the community needs and helping to shape priorities? And so that was very telling to understand the mindset of even the team. And so it's taken time for us to sort of take a step back and say, it's not about us and all the great work that we do and what people think we do. It's really about listening to the community. So so with that being said, launched a new brand new strategic plan completely community driven and landed on priorities that I think we talked about earlier in this call, partnerships, so we have a strategy around integrated services that's going to, I won't say force, but it fosters partnerships. And then the one strategy that I think we're most proud of is our community voice. It was loud and clear going through our strategic planning process, that community said, We are tired of the nonprofit's coming in and putting their programs and services on us and not asking us what

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we want, and how is it working. And we don't have a voice in any of these programs that are thrust upon us. And so we're proud of having a strategy that centers community voice. And so that's the beauty of using a community driven strategic planning process. It was twofold. It allowed us to deepen relationships within the community, it changed a perception of who we are. And it allowed to center our work in equity. And so that was like the beginning of the transformation. Now, the conversations that we had behind the scenes with the board and doing this work, it was challenging, because I often remember having a conversation with my board to say, when you made the decision, you wanted to hire a person of color. Were you aware of how receptive the community was going to be community in the broadest sense, from members, residents to donors we're a public charity, so we also raised money. And I had a lot of challenges with our donor base, they were not as accepting of having a person of color lead. And so we had a lot of hard conversations around that. And I've just fundamentally remember this conversation to say, well, when you made the decision to have a person of color, how did you know that the community was ready to accept this. And so that was some of the challenges that I sort of had to overcome. I'm still not 100% there. But it's, it's been challenging, because it may, it may look good to say, look at us look at what we've done. But there is implications to that. Because the community in the broadest sense, may not be receptive to it, which could also impact your ability to transform and execute. And so that's been some of the challenges that we have had at the Alliance. But over the years, I think the approach that we've taken is, we're going to center our work on our mission. So that allowed me to right size the organization and get rid of activities, programs, initiatives that didn't ground our mission, freed the staffs time up to do programs like a nonprofit justice equity Institute, like so now, we're like leaning into equity and justice, because this is what we knew the community was looking for. It allowed us to lean into our community voice initiative. And so by freeing up and getting rid of things that the majority felt, was what we were known for, were the things that didn't align with mission. And so I can say that, going back to the strategic planning, and using a let's talk community format, has allowed us to build relationships and center our work on equity. So that's a little bit about how how we kind of got got to where we're at. And it was the board, I just so applaud the board to say, You know what, Vanessa, we are not the same organization, I now need you to take us through a rebrand, and I'm like, Oh, my goodness. And so we took the charge, the team took the charge, and they said we need a name that represents who we are, what we believe and what our values are. And so that's how we landed on the Alliance for Health Equity, strengthening communities as our new name and that's as of October 2021.

Monique Curry-Mims 29:01
Well, congratulations, that you came through that on the right side of that as well. I want to go back to something you said earlier about impact. So now that you're taking this community center community voice approach, and you realize that historically, your organization has not been making the impact in the community that you guys wanted. What does Impact Reporting look like for you now? So when you're putting that money out, you know, what are you expecting back in terms of what the nonprofit's are doing? And how are you comparing that to your mission in the work that you're trying to do?

Vanessa Briggs 29:39
That is a great question. And that is constantly evolving as we speak. And so we've leaned into trust based philanthropy. And so recognizing that the onus of the data collection to sort of measure impact is

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now on the Alliance. Less on the nonprofits to report out. So we don't want them to waste time writing these glossy reports. And so we shamelessly adopted a tool that we got from one of our colleagues at the Headwater foundation who's doing trust based philanthropy and they have a tool that's more of an observational tool. But it has very, very specific questions around the value and benefit of partnerships. And what did that lead to very specific questions around equity, and how the nonprofit themselves are measuring equity, and how does that translate to what community thinks equity is. And so we use this tool in an interview format. So it's more qualitative data that we're sort of focusing on right now, both from the nonprofit sector to do these interviews on an annual basis. And then we collect the data and then aggregately sort of put together, this is what the story is telling us around this particular funding initiative. We haven't quite figured out the quantitative data piece just yet. And so we're still sort of working on what's the appropriate way to capture that, what are the tools that we want to use for that. But the other piece beyond just talking to the nonprofit sector, and using this tool to get qualitative data, we're also exploring, we have this initiative called collective impact. And it's made up of about 15, nonprofit organizations all working together, but they're grounded in sharing data into a common database, we're now taking a pause and say it was the community that identified the issue. We're pulling the nonprofits together to look at their data to say is your Service Delivery actually working? We're taking a pause and incorporating community voice. And so we're working on putting together process and structure to now go back to the community and say, we've got these 15 organizations all working together, pulling their data together around homelessness, employment intensive case management, and this is how they're measuring their success. You tell us what success looks like from your perspective. And so we're circling back and making sure we embed that community voice into the process. So again, it's I think, right now, for us, we're sort of still in the development stage, when it comes to that, but I just don't believe it's an annual report that's written that the staff don't have time to read, oftentimes don't know what to do with the reports. And it doesn't allow us to think through and transform grant making, and even work with our nonprofit and community to redesign program and service delivery. So that's kind of how our approach is. So I don't have an easy answer for that. But I think the message under that is, it does take creativity, I do think it needs to be customized per Foundation, depending on your capacity, your mission, etc. So this is the best that we have right now. And we're learning and our community is definitely telling us, You know what, you are wasting time doing this, because this is really what we need. And this is what we think success looks like. And to me that is critically important. If you're going to also get other funders on board, to pull their resources and all their talent together to address complex issues.

Monique Curry-Mims 33:39
When we met, and we were having a conversation on sustainability. You know, you told me go read this. And you know, and learn about that. Right. And I did, right? And I was like mind blown. So in this process, what would you share with our listeners? Or what things helped you in your journey? Whether they were books or articles or case studies, if you can recommend anything to help others in this process? What would it be?

Vanessa Briggs 34:05
Yeah, I mean, I think early on when I accepted the charge at the Alliance, I remember one of the first books that I read, because I come from the nonprofit before then I was in health care. But

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predominantly, my career has been in nonprofit. So I kind of understand what nonprofit goes through when it comes to accessing resources. So let's just put that out there. And so I remember reading this book called giving done right, effective philanthropy and making every dollar count. And it's by Phil Buchanan. He's the president and CEO for center for effective philanthropy. So that was one of my very first books as president and CEO of the alliance that I read. And I just remember thinking about how that book, when I'm reflective now actually has shaped my views, and it sort of gave me a pathway to start Put some of these things into practice. So the book really lifts up philanthropy's role to sort of promote fairness and equity. And so that kind of stuck with me particularly knowing historically, my the community that I serve, felt that we were not accessible. And so maybe that's why equities in our new name, I don't know. But anyway, that that kind of stuck with me in the book also resonated with sort of addressing the underlying causes and sort of shifting from less of a charity mindset to more of a philanthropic mindset. And so that sort of allows us to kind of get into sort of the systems based approach to the work to get to root causes. And then more importantly, this whole notion of lifting community voice. And so the book was, it was just very profound. And I like to read books that are very succinct, and kind of gives you the framework, but gives you enough latitude to adapt and make it flexible to how you're trying to implement your strategy. So that would be be one book that I would certainly recommend, because it resonated quite a bit for me, because I was charged with transforming our foundation from a charity mindset to more of a philanthropic mindset. And I think that that book sort of lifts, lifts up all those notions,

Valerie Johnson 36:30
I'm looking forward to reading that book. I think what obviously, what you have done at the alliance for health equity is amazing. But for folks who are at the very beginning of that journey, I think it's really scary and overwhelming to figure out where to start, and kind of how to begin to move in this direction. What advice do you have for somebody who is you four and a half years ago? Or maybe even before that, who's on a board who's thinking about doing something like hiring you? What advice do you have? Like, What are the things that you know, folks should start with? Just final thoughts on that.

Vanessa Briggs 37:07
Yeah, I mean, I think I do think it starts with leadership. I really do. And part of my journey was pre planned before I even got there. And that was because the board had fundamentally made a decision, we need to do things radically different. So by getting bored buy in if you're, you know, Executive Director, President CEO, and you know, you fundamentally want to transform your organization, it requires bringing your board along if it's not coming from them. And so that, to me, is a great place to start. So I would start there. And then I would also, at the same time, listen to the community differently. Don't listen to the community through the eyes of your grantees, or your nonprofit partners. Because I do think that there is value to establish relationships. Especially if you're a local philanthropic organization, establish those relationships with the communities that you serve, get to know who those community leaders are advocates, you will hear and learn things differently than it being translated from your grant partners in your nonprofit and your grantees. So I think starting there is a great place to start because you're going to hear things differently. So getting board buy in leadership, at the same time, listening and listening intently, but differently from your community. Oftentimes, in the philanthropic sector, we're so busy doing the work and getting dollars out the door and putting processes and

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strategies in place. And we rely on our nonprofit partners to do the work. I'm not saying replace them to do the work. I'm saying listen, so that you can translate and hear what you're hearing. So to me, that's two pivotal places that I would start you can't reshape and recreate, if you don't know, and have trusted relationships with the very community that you're trying to serve.

Monique Curry-Mims 39:06
Yeah, that is a powerful statement. And I know that's something that a lot of, you know, there's this there's this triangle between foundations, nonprofits in the community, and each has its own perception of the other one. And I think that's always a missing component all the way around. Whereas you said like the nonprofits putting their programs in the community without community voice, foundations, creating grant cycles, and nonprofits are like what are you doing? And then the communities are like, but we need the money here. So it is this like this vicious triangle. So there needs to be collaboration within the three and not just within the peers of each other. So I think that that's an amazing idea. This has been an amazing session. Again, like I said, You are my fairy godmother. Anytime I talk about you I say that.

Valerie Johnson 39:52
She actually does, I've heard her do it more than once.

Monique Curry-Mims 40:01
It is not a lie. Like I said, meeting you put me on a path. And I just I don't know if I've ever said it. But thank you like, honestly rom the bottom.

Vanessa Briggs 40:09
My pleasure. And I've probably was just speaking from the heart. I mean, I vividly remember the first time that I've met you. And it was around sustainability. And I was like, well, sustainability is not just money, you know. And you were like, really

Monique Curry-Mims 40:23
So wait. Have I told this story? Let's tell this story really quick. So we were at an event and I won't throw people organization under the bus, we were at an event that was about transparency between foundations and nonprofits. So I was there representing a nonprofit, and Vanessa was there representing a foundation. So it was a whole half day workshop. And we were whiteboarding and things like that. And at the end, the final activity was for the foundation's to decide or to say what they needed from nonprofits to be more effective in nonprofits, or to say what they needed from foundations. So we set up the table. I was the spokesperson for the nonprofits. And the first thing was sustainability, right? These issues are multi year, right? We're gonna bite down on them, you should bite down on them with this give us multi year funding, like you shouldn't just do one year. And she was like, Do you think that that means money in my head? I'm like, yes. But I had to check with my cohort. I was like, Guys, is this what we think? And everybody said, Yes. And I'm like, Yeah, that's what we think. And she said, you know, respectfully, we don't care about you. Like, if you go under today, if we go under today, what happens to that change that you're making in those communities? How are you making that impact sustainable? And I was like, wait, what? And then the moderators were like, whoa, whoa, whoa, ladies,

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this is getting too heated, and they canceled the conversation. And we were like, We're just talking! I know, two powerful black women, we can't have this conversation. So we took it offline at the end, but it was, yeah, she was like, go read this government definition on sustainability and read this and read that. And yeah, it just totally changed - it made me quit my job. It made me start my firm. Yeah, because I started thinking, why are we doing this? Like, I look at all the data, we're not making the change. And I keep getting on my soapbox saying we can't keep expanding programming, or we're not really impacting the people that were already programming. And I was just like, I gotta get out of here. I've got a, I've got an I spent a year like, taking workshops and classes and just building myself and getting that. And then

Vanessa Briggs 42:23
And now look at you.

Monique Curry-Mims 42:24
I know, right, again, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. We're not we're off topic is bound to happen, it was bound to happen.

Valerie Johnson 42:32
We amost made it ot the very end.

Monique Curry-Mims 42:34
We almost made it!

Valerie Johnson 42:36
But honestly, that was really good off topic. I love to hear it. People supporting people, women, supporting women, y'all do your thing. And honestly, like just inspiring each other. I think like, I'm super every time I talk to you, Vanessa, but like, especially today's super inspired, I want to take this back to my nonprofit and figure out how I want to do it. So hopefully, you'll have many fairy God children in the future.

Vanessa Briggs 43:01
Oh wow, I don't know, I'm just sharing my knowledge, and I think it's, it may be off topic, but as as I hear you recant the story. I do think that that particular moment in time allowed both of us to sort of think about things differently, and just challenge and disrupt what we know sustainability actually means. And so even back then we were sort of thinking about it. I was certainly thinking about it from a different perspective. Being in the nonprofit and again, jumping through the hoops of philanthropy, chasing dollars, and then the dreaded question on an application or call for proposal, how are you going to sustain this work? And then the canned answer has always been I need more money. And so I think that's sort of what spurred that whole entire conversation because it's much deeper than the resources not to, to mitigate that that's not important. But it's more than just the dollars, it really is about the impact and the capacity that we're actually building in the community. So but again, we can go off topic with that. I just thoroughly enjoy talking to you and just watching your company grow and the great work that

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you're doing and you know, anything that you need for me, I am here to help and support. I am your number one fan and cheerleader, for sure.

Monique Curry-Mims 44:25
Aw, thank you, I appreciate that. Well, I want to thank you again for joining us. On behalf of Valerie and myself. This has been an amazing time of conversation and I want to thank our listeners for once again joining us and just want to remind you that this is beyond philanthropy. See you next month guys.

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