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SPEAKERS

Monique Curry-Mims, Valerie Johnson

Valerie Johnson 00:00

Hello, and welcome back to beyond philanthropy. I am Valerie, I'm here with Monique and I am now calling this the episode that almost wasn't. There were a series of technical and human errors in the last week, and we are recording this for the third time, but it's going to be the best one. So we know that. So what we're here to talk about is it has officially been three years since the world declared a global pandemic, and a lot has changed and a lot has not changed. And we kind of want to touch upon some of the things that have changed as a result of the pandemic, and then talk about what's coming, and what the future of philanthropy might look like, as a result of the fact that we had a global pandemic. So first things first, Monique, what has changed in the last few years?

Monique Curry-Mims 01:03

Well, you know, what is that saying? I don't know, why do I keep forgetting this thing. As much as things change, they stay the same.

Valerie Johnson 01:11

Yeah.

Monique Curry-Mims 01:12

You know, I think that when the pandemic first hit, there were all these changes, you know, foundations were going above the 5%. So we know that is something that they can do, and they switch to general operating. So that's also something we know that they can do. But at the same time, as we have, I don't want to say come out, because I still feel as though we're still in it, but just maybe not in the heart of it anymore. We've gone back down below the 5%. And we've gone back to program, for operating in that program's operating costs. And I think that it's not all, it's not everyone, you know, I said as part of the trust based philanthropy peer exchange, and are a lot of us in that space that are trying to actually figure out how to be more trust based in our approach and instill more of these attributes into our daily practice. But on the other side of it, there are a number of foundations that have just gone back to

status quo as if the world hasn't changed. And our situations haven't gotten more dire. So. So yeah, that's, that's what has changed but hasn't changed.

Valerie Johnson 02:22

Yeah, I think, I and I have said this recently. We, they knew what to do. Like, I think that blows my mind that foundations knew exactly what they needed to do to get money out quicker when they saw an urgency. They knew it needed to be shorter applications, they knew it needs to be less reporting, they knew it had to be less decision time from submitting something to actually getting something. And they made it happen. And I know it wasn't super easy to make those changes for the foundations, because it was very different to what they normally do. But I would say some, some folks have kept some or all of those changes. And that's greatly appreciated. Some of them have not. And one other change that I saw that I like that I hope stays while simultaneously being annoyed by it as the person pulling the information is the move towards comparing demographic information across your staff, your board and the community that you serve. It's I love it, I love I love that we're tracking that I love that foundations are interested in that I love that the focus is shifting towards the community. But we don't have the mechanisms in place, per se, to be tracking all of that demographic information. I was putting a survey together recently for our board to get that survey information, demographic information, rather. And I had to go through like 25, 30 grant applications to make sure that I was asking all of the questions that I could possibly be asked in the next year on any grant application and check in see how I was asked all of those questions just to make sure that I was asking it in the right way. And that I was getting information that I was going to be able to turn into multiple statistics later based on how the funder actually asked the question, which is just a lot of work. We're, we're not doing that for our staff currently. So we do have some demographic information that we track for our staff, and then some that we don't, so at the moment, I'm just reporting what I do know, but I'm sure at some point, funders will expect me to report all of it, and not just the stuff that I'm currently tracking.

Monique Curry-Mims 04:30

You know, I find it interesting because one, you know, I am one of those funders, not one of your funders, but a funder who is focused on that and making sure that, you know, people have gotten caught up in the word diversity. It's becoming like any word that at the moment where people make it their own and often stray away from what the actual definition is. So you know, organizations might say like, Oh, we've got a board that's Black and it's like, that's great. But black African American does not mean diverse. And that's coming from a black African American, it does not mean diversity. But also, it's great that you have that black, you know, that majority African American Black Board, but is that inclusive of the people that you serve? And looking at it two ways not only is an inclusive, like, what is the actual makeup of your community that you serve, and making sure your leadership is kind of in comparable numbers to that. But also, if you are serving North Philadelphia, but you don't have people from North Philadelphia on your board, you have all of these African Americans that are from the mainline and Mount Airy, and everywhere else, outside of where you serve? I think that we're missing the point of that. So if you're being really authentic, embracing inclusivity, then your diversity just shows up. And it shows up in a way that is authentic and real to what needs to happen. But on the other side of that, looking at the trust based philanthropic approach, a lot of that work is kind of supposed to be done by the funder, right? It is taking the work off of a nonprofit, and funders knowing what's going on.

So going back to what has changed, but not changed. I think that all of these things are happening without the voice of community involved, right? Like we're still sitting in our silos, funders talking to other funders, and no one is actually involving the community in those processes. That was the best way to learn about the community by being in the community. So they put the money into the community, they didn't talk to them about how it needed to happen. They just saw all these reports and got together and said, Let's, let's give it or they talked to nonprofits and nonprofits here, what they were struggling with, and what they saw. But again, it's still a third party story, like there's still not involving the community. And I guess that's more of a community centric approach. Right. We talk about it in terms of fundraising, but I think it also just has to come back to a community centric philanthropic approach. So yeah, I think that it's been very interesting. The last two years, there have been a lot of things that have been like, oh, my gosh, and we could do this we can, we can go into that utopian kind of world and coming together. But then at the same time, it's like, okay, we did that. That was fun. We need to go back to our regular scheduled program. Yeah, not everyone. You know, we had a great episode last month with Vanessa, and what they're doing at the Alliance for Health Equity is amazing. I wish all foundations would move in that direction. But that's not right for all foundations. But I think that all foundation should be involving the community in some way, shape, or form.

Valerie Johnson 07:36

Yeah, absolutely. It's, I just don't think it's that hard to involve your community. Like, I don't know why it takes like consultants and strategic planning. And, you know, I just, I think some foundations make it harder than it really needs to be like, if you want to hear from the community, just like, go visit the community, talk to the people there.

Monique Curry-Mims 08:00

I will say, as a consultant that does consulting and strategic planning, I think that sometimes hiring a consultant gets you out of your head. Right?

Valerie Johnson 08:08

Good point.

Monique Curry-Mims 08:09

Because you don't really know where to start, where to go. And sometimes you do, but you're doing it through your own bias. Right. And so you really are missing the point of things. You know, I was having a conversation with a nonprofit recently, where, you know, I was talking to them about their, the diversity of their board. And they're like, you know, we're trying, you know, because I tried to be on trend to try to catch up with the Joneses. But at the same time, they're like, Oh, we hired so and so you know, her? And I'm like, so you have you are a predominantly white organization that serves maybe not predominately white population. And then you hired a rich white consultant to help you. And then on top of that, that was two years ago, and your board is now still trying to figure out how to implement these changes. Yeah. And it's just like you're trying your say you're trying because diversity is a thing. So you're, you're trying to do it and show that you're trying to do it. And I got all my air quotes, I keep saying "trying" people, I wish you could. But it's not that hard. Just do it. Like, okay, now that you've

gone through the consultation, right, if you didn't know where to start and how to do it, that's one thing. But you've already gone through the consultation. So now what?

Valerie Johnson 09:20

Exactly, yeah. Fear of change, I think is the answer to that. And we've been through two years of catastrophic change now, in the way that we live our lives. So you would think that people would be more willing to just dive into it. But one thing you touched upon, is that Foundation's all kind of have conversations with each other, you know, like we have something called philanthropy network here in Philly, we have the trust based philanthropy group. There's lots of different ways for funders to talk to each other. There are not a lot of ways for funders to talk to nonprofits that they're granting to. And there's not a nonprofit organization. So I do want to preface this with I do not want an overseeing arm that oversees all nonprofits and tells us what to do. But I do envy the philanthropy network and that it's all of the foundation's that operate in Philadelphia. Not all of them, most of them have a membership to the philanthropy network. And then they have these really, you know, insightful group conversations and you know, membership events where they can talk to each other and talk about how they're funding what they're funding who's doing what. I'm certain they talk about nonprofits when they're there, because the majority of their work is centered on nonprofits. And I want that for nonprofits. That for all of us, because, you know, I think we've mentioned this before, but the poverty rate in Philadelphia has hovered at 25% for a really long time now. And there's a lot of resources and a lot of energy and a lot of time that's going into Philadelphia's nonprofit landscape, and nothing has changed. Some things have changed, but at the same time, the poverty rate is still what it is. So we're all kind of hitting the side effects and not the cause.

Monique Curry-Mims 11:17

Yes, we're not hitting, we're not getting to the root of the issue. But also, as you're saying that, you know, I love the philanthropy network, you know, I've spoken at Sparks, I attend their, their coffee, I've attended sparks, even before it was sparks. And I do think that the one thing that is missing, though is okay. So you know, foundations that there's that there's the Council on foundations, there's all these other groups, but then there's nothing for nonprofits like that not even like on a city levels or anything that is authentically bringing nonprofits together around professional development, and things like that. But I also feel like we we get into our little cliques and have these conversations, right. Like, I know that right now. There's like a African American leadership...

Valerie Johnson 12:07

African American development officers?

Monique Curry-Mims 12:10

No, they're like, it's like black EDs of like a black led nonprofits that they get together and talk. But I feel as though there's still that disconnect. Right? So got your foundations over here talking. And you've got your nonprofits over here talking, but no one's talking together. But we're all supposed to be working together to get to the root of this issue. And if that even get to it, but put a bandaid on or whatever we're supposed to be doing this, we'll be together, right. But we're really not doing that. So, I mean, I would really love for that to be a change, right, that we're that we're all working in tandem together. And it's not

like the nonprofit's over here. And the foundations are over there. And it's still creating that power dynamic that still exists, right, like the power dynamic is not gone away. And that needs to change.

Valerie Johnson 12:54

Yeah. Okay, we've already picked like six high level things that we want to see change. So let's talk about something that's a little bit more concrete, as, you know, just the way philanthropy is moving. And the world in general, is we got our first NFT donation recently. And I was so skeptical, I hate to say it, but I just had a random phone call from a guy who said it's coming. He said, Hey, I'm a digital artist, and I'm doing this series of row homes in Philadelphia, and to commemorate my 100th piece, I want to donate the proceeds to your organization. And I was like, Okay, great. So, you know, I ask them questions, like, you know, how's it gonna work? And you know, what you need from us, and yada, yada. And I think my last question was, and how much do you expect the auction to bring in and he was like, you know, they usually bring in 10 to \$15,000. And my jaw just kind of like dropped and I was like, Excuse me?

Monique Curry-Mims 13:49

Yeah, that's what a digital work of art is going for.

Valerie Johnson 13:53

So then I was baffled, but I was like, Yeah, sure. Okay, great. Cool. Thanks. And then a couple days later, the auction went and I was watching it, but I was having such a hard time understanding what it was actually going for, because it was like 1.2, tessera I don't even know what the word is, but it was all these acronyms.

Monique Curry-Mims 14:10

Yes, like, you know, ether Ethereum, and Bitcoin and Manna and polygon. And so I've jumped headfirst into this space. Yeah. And I actually just wrote an article on decentralizing philanthropy in the age of the metaverse because there are so many individuals like that, that are that are socially focused, but at the same time, as there are just like, there are several foundations that are that have that progressive mindset, right? The Metaverse is shaping up to bring in all of our attributes, the good and the bad. And while we need to focus on not creating the same cycles of disparity within the metaverse, we also have to make sure that we're not forgetting about the cycles of disparities in the real world, right? So the fact that this individual was like, I'm doing this in the metaverse, and I want it to come back and have a positive effect in the real world. We need more of that. And I think that, because that's the way we're shifting, I mean, we're humans and we evolve. And I mean, even before this recording, I was in decentraland, with my son looking at an art show, right? Like, it is it is, yeah, it's crazy.

Valerie Johnson 15:26

So for people who have no idea what that means, I'm like on the edge of not knowing what that means, like, what does that What did you just do?

Monique Curry-Mims 15:34

So there are a lot of different so Metaverse is not like just a Facebook thing that Mark Zuckerberg came up with like, in the fall, right? There are a lot of virtual spaces. So there is decentraland, which is what I was in earlier. There's also one called spatial there's all these different spaces where you can just get on like on your computer, you don't even need your Oculus headset or whatever, and just interact virtually with an avatar in a space. You know, Friends have had parties there a friend of mine who used to have an art gallery in Old City. She now has an art gallery in the metaverse. So yeah, I mean, it's it. It is. And that's the thing, right? Like, all these brands are now you can now buy designer clothes in there. Justin Bieber did a concert in there, standing on top of a car driving around the metaverse like it was it's been crazy, right? So all of our real world attributes are now coming into the metaverse into this virtual space is in philanthropy of a real world attribute. And now that individuals are figuring out how to be philanthropists in a way that they haven't before, right? I think I think traditional philanthropy needs to decentralize and follow suit.

Valerie Johnson 16:53

I that's just gonna I mean, I'm, I have a hard time wrapping my brain around it as a 35 year old millennial who did not grow up with technology. But you know, had a computer in my dining room that we all shared by the time I was in like fifth grade, you know, whatever, went through the world of instant messenger. I can't wrap my brain around this. So what I'm imagining is like, how hard it was for nonprofits to go to virtual events when the pandemic introduced introducing this, like, well, now you could just have a virtual art gallery show for your nonprofit and donate the proceeds to the nonprofit like I can, I can so see, like, half of you just be like, Oh, my God, what did you just say,

Monique Curry-Mims 17:39

Right?

Valerie Johnson 17:40

It's gonna be a tough change.

Monique Curry-Mims 17:42

It's a tough change. And it's something that we need to all get educated on, and not educated from, like someone who's trying to sell you or from some company, right? Because it's going to be so technologically focused, that is actually in there. And they're not even part of the philanthropic landscape. So they're not actually able to talk to it in a way that we would understand and how to use it. But I mean, there are so many different things there that are possible, like the NFT, you got the way that NFT works. So NF T's are non fungible tokens. And there are pieces they can be art, they can be music, like the rapper, Nas, he was selling a song as NFT. I tried to get on on it. But that's a whole story for another time. But every time it's fun, every time that record plays, if you own the NFT of the song, you got a royalty from it. And exactly right. It's not like I own a piece of Nas's music, that that would have been awesome. It's awesome for the people who got it.

Valerie Johnson 18:41

Yeah.

Monique Curry-Mims 18:41

And the way the NFT works is that whoever has is the original creator, you know, they get royalties in perpetuity, which is something that foundations are familiar with, right? So anytime it gets sold, because they often get sold on different exchanges, like open sea and things like that. That's another platform. Their original creator always gets a cut. And what if the original creator made a comp made a contract to share that what the nonprofit? Or what if nonprofits are such as all these arts based nonprofits, right? Like, what if they were what do they end up creating NFT's and they sell them every time it's sold. That's a donation back to that nonprofit.

Valerie Johnson 19:26

Yeah, I'm already trying to figure out how my nonprofit could come up with and sell NFT's like we're about to start a social enterprise, we're about to start a social enterprise junk hauling business and just sounds like so much more work to like haul junk seven days a week then to like create some digital artwork that.

Monique Curry-Mims 19:44

I mean it's not so easy as like just hop into Photoshop and create something you got there's there's minting and gas fees and it's in layer like it's a lot that goes into I took a class and I was just like, I don't have the time to build, like create these like I have a whole plan for how collection. I'm like, I have to hire an artist that can do this. I can't. But, but it's something that's real that we're moving into. And I think that our sector has always felt like had issues with technology. Right?

Valerie Johnson 20:12

Yeah.

Monique Curry-Mims 20:12

And, and we were all forced into it because of the pandemic, but what the pandemic also did was run us headfirst into the fourth industrial revolution.

Valerie Johnson 20:23

Mm hmm.

Monique Curry-Mims 20:24

So, yeah, I mean, it's, it's a new frontier out there. But it's one where, you know, individuals, they can do a lot more, and I don't say like, they're not doing a lot more, because if we all look at those charts, it's like individual's cover, you know, X percent of giving, even though 70% I always question that though, because my individual donors and some of my nonprofits, they have their own foundations, and they have very deep pockets. Right. When I would have galas, my table sponsors would be people. I didn't get companies to sponsor my tables, I would get people to sponsor \$10,000 tables, and they were just filled with their friends, right? Like that's a different type of individual, but they're considered still consider individual. So always get a little like, when people like individual's copper. I'm like, those are still the same people who have foundations, though.

Valerie Johnson 21:18

Yeah, there's not like, it's not like you and me make up 70.

Monique Curry-Mims 21:23

Exactly. But you could do that in the metaverse. And that's what's crazy.

Valerie Johnson 21:31

So I think that is where then we have to talk about.

Monique Curry-Mims 21:35

I want to be proper here, you and I can do that.

Valerie Johnson 21:39

We are the most proper today, my cat is attending our podcast recording and being held, I'll share a photo actually, on our social media channels, its quite ridiculous. Now she's looking at me like I'm nuts. So I think that's where we need to talk about the digital divide. And yeah, how it's just like society moving in this general direction, then we're just poised to leave more people behind. I mean, the digital divide really is the new redlining which I will attribute that quote to my boss, because she says it a lot. But, but it is.

Monique Curry-Mims 22:15

And if it is the way when it will be it will definitely be in this. And that's why I was saying like, we have to make sure that those real world issues are not forgotten about. Yeah, brought into the space because I mean, soon as as soon as the metaverse was introduced by by Zuckerberg, the first thing I thought about was Ready Player One, were in that movie. Everyone was living in like a junkyard, but they all had their Oculus headsets. And then there were the corporations and the wealthy people who kind of lived in and I'm not mixing movies, but lived in the Capitol with all their, you know,

Valerie Johnson 22:54

Hunger Games!

Monique Curry-Mims 22:54

With all their shiny, you know, apartments and buildings, right? They didn't have that junkyard world. And the people in junk yard were just scraping by, right? So I don't want that to be this. Like, we shouldn't want that to be this. And it's shaping up to be that way. Because these people don't have access. They don't have internet, they don't have the technology. I probably only know about this stuff. Because we were in a pandemic on a lockdown. And I had nothing more to do but to learn. Not everybody had the ability to do that. Yeah.

Valerie Johnson 23:29

Some of us were doing puzzles with our cats. And working in real life, you know? Yeah, it's, it's a it's a lot. So to wrap us up, you know, for the episode that almost wasn't.

Monique Curry-Mims 23:49

You know, guys, I'm actually this is our third recording of this episode we've been going through it was this episode. And every time I'm like, shoot, we're leaving out things that we said that were awesome before, but we're trying to get this out to you guys.

Valerie Johnson 24:04

It's a it's been a labor of love this month. But I had a memory popup on Facebook today that our first our very first episode ever went live a year ago today. So maybe it was meant to be. So moral of the story is that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

Monique Curry-Mims 24:24

Yes.

Valerie Johnson 24:25

And a lot about philanthropy that has changed in the last year or two because of the pandemic also has reverted to status quo. And also there's a really scary technological revolution coming and it is here, stop. Scary. There's a really scary technological revolution coming. So if you are not figuring out NFTs and not just how to accept NFT's as an organization because I think that's where all the webinars and all the learnings and the white pages are on right now. Like there's so much more to learn about.

Monique Curry-Mims 24:59

Yeah, to the digital world crypto exchanges and yeah, digital archaeologies Yeah, virtual spaces. Metaverse is not just on Facebook or Mark Zuckerberg but he's building right what he's that doesn't even exist. They're already virtual spaces that have been out before he called did his thing right and in, in your art gallery was in what are your art show was in one of them.

Valerie Johnson 25:26

So yeah, it was and to that donors credit and my stupidity, he did raise \$15,000. And he converted it to dollars and then donated to us. So thank you donor for the 100 rowhomes collection. And yeah, I'm scared. I'm gonna go on the internet now. First the afternoon. And I guess I just feel like you're always like 10 steps ahead of the curve with all technological advances. So you're just going to be my, my mentor through through the next 10 years of technology. That's what's gonna happen. Yes. So I think we've we've covered a lot and almost everything that we have covered in the last two recordings of this episode.

Monique Curry-Mims 26:11

Yeah, I just want to say, no matter what you learn, if you or anyone else that are really trying to understand what's going on in the metaverse or virtual spaces. And I think what is important in all of this, is that we somehow tries to find a way to do it together, whether it's working with foundations as a nonprofit, whether you're a foundation, nonprofit, and you're not working really hand in hand with the community. And making sure that as we all learn and jump into our Metaverse space, that our organizations are thinking about how we provide our services in a way that will not leave our

communities behind. I think that that's what we need to come to an understanding around is that if we're here to make a difference, we're going to have to make it in the world in virtual worlds now.

Valerie Johnson 27:08

That's it.

Monique Curry-Mims 27:09

That's it. Well, enjoy your day, everyone. This has been beyond philanthropy.