What would it take to make NY State a leader in racial and economic justice?

I. Intro/Overview

Without the support of Unbound Philanthropy, The Long Island Unitarian Universalist Fund, and an Anonymous Donor from upstate New York, this report would not have been possible. Thank you! We’d also like to extend special gratitude to the Engage NY steering committee for its advice, thoughts, and support during the opening of its fun, eye-opening, and impactful Hudson Valley tour in May 2019. Finally, if you find the content, tone, and recommendations of this report helpful, it’s only because of the over-the-top support we received from Cara, Jerry, Julia, Lisa, Maria, and Sol. Many thanks to all...

No less than four years ago, the Hagedorn Foundation wrote a report entitled, The Empire Strikes Out. It lamented the fact that the Pew Foundation had just rated New York the 48th worst state in the country for voter participation by 17 performance indicators. The report presented a series of recommended reforms that would elevate the state to the progressive powerhouse it once was. Our nonprofit, governmental, and philanthropic partners loved the report but told us that there was NO WAY the recommendations could get implemented for at least a decade due to the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC) and the dynamic of three white men in a room making political decisions on behalf of 19,950,000 residents.

Fast forward to 2019, two of the three white men are in jail and have been replaced by people of color—one of whom is a women, the IDC was voted out of office and is now just a bad memory, many voting rights reforms were passed and implemented, Housing Justice protections sailed through the senate and were signed into law, and incredibly, undocumented immigrants can now apply for and obtain drivers’ licenses.

What was the recipe for the Big Apple Turnover and how do we keep the momentum going? The ingredients and suggested cooking recommendations follow:

- Section II provides the context of inequality in New York State prior to the Turnover.
- Section III assesses the demographic changes that drove the electoral shifts.
- Section VI provides a timeline of key upcoming decisions
- Section VII analyzes the ways investment by funders made change possible
- Sections VIII and XIV provide recommendations for funding a racial equity agenda

II. Pre-Turnover: Racial and Economic Equity (and Inequity) in New York State

To understand the significance and causes of the Turnover, some context is necessary. While NY has often led the nation on some steps toward equity, such as the $15 minimum wage and Paid Family Leave, it is still one of the most unequal states in the nation, and many of the policies enacted in the past at the state level have maintained or increased the inequities that deepen both economic and racial inequality.

New York has the greatest economic inequality of all 50 states. The Economic Policy Institute analyzed the ratio of the income of the top 1% to the income of the bottom 99% nationally, as well
as in each state, and found that New York State was the worst. In fact, the average annual income of
the top 1% is 44.4 times as high as the average annual income of the bottom 99%\(^1\).

Economic Inequality is not new, but it has increased drastically since 1980. In NY, the top 1% of
earners take home 31% of all the income. The share of income captured by the top 1% is rising
more rapidly in NY than in the US\(^2\).

The impact of inequality is worse for communities of color. For example, the unemployment rate
for people of color in New York is higher than for white New Yorkers, and the median hourly
wages are lower (with the gap in wages growing over time)\(^3\).

The deep economic inequality and racial inequity in New York State led to dissatisfaction with status
quo leadership and helped fuel advocacy campaigns and electoral challenges. The boiling frustration


\(^3\) [https://nationalequityatlas.org/data-summaries/New_York](https://nationalequityatlas.org/data-summaries/New_York)
combined with demographic shifts and a rapidly changing national political context to transform election outcomes in 2018.

**III. Pre-Turnover: Demographic Change Underlies Electoral and Policy Changes**

Demographic changes have fueled the shifting power dynamics throughout New York, and policymaking is finally reacting to these swings. Below and over a mere four-year span, you can see the vast changes in Rochester, the Hudson Valley, Syracuse, Buffalo, and Long Island, some of which contributed to the election results of 2018.

Taking those trends a step further, in Figure 1 below, PolicyLink - PERE National Equity Atlas project that around the year 2035, New York will become a minority-majority state. The white population

---

4 Adapted from data from https://nationalequityatlas.org/data-summaries/New_York
will hit 48.2% representing a 36% drop in population growth from its peak of 75% in 1980. In direct contrast, the Latino population will have grown 141% during the same time period to represent 22.9%, from its low of 9.5% in 1980. Blacks will be 14.8% and Asians, 11.7%. If you have doubts about these projections, look below at the growth of the Hispanic community on Long Island since 1970.

5 https://nationalequityatlas.org/data-summaries/New_York
One might think these trends are merely a phenomena limited to downstate New York, however a recent series conducted by the New York Times will quickly dispel that myth. Below, you’ll see a series of charts demonstrating the growth of the nonwhite populations in the suburbs of some of the largest cities throughout upstate New York.

Even though demographics project minority-majorities in New York by 2035, this does not mean that racial equity will magically become the status quo. One need not look further than Texas, Arizona or New Mexico to see how the Hispanic populations are treated in those states despite their outsized numbers. New York funders need to start investing now to not only continue the transitional momentum that began in 2018 but also to strengthen the capacity for coalitions to continue holding officials accountable to their constituents and to push for legislative reforms that can help bring about true equity throughout the state.

**IV. 2018 Elections Transform the State Senate**

The New York State Senate changed dramatically in 2018. Seven incumbent Democrats lost their primaries to community-based challengers who ran on issues of equity and fairness, and eight previously Republican seats were won by Democrats, most of whom ran on an agenda of change. The Senate went from a Republican majority to a Democratic majority, and more importantly, it shifted to a majority that is dominated by senators committed to racial equity.
The Nation summed up the electoral impact in its post legislative session article about the transformation of the senate by saying: “A year ago, any of these policies would have been impossible to achieve. What changed? The big shift that enabled such massive wins for tenants, for immigrants, for the climate, and for all New Yorkers came last September when seven Working Families Party candidates ousted seven Democrats who had thrown control of the state Senate to Republicans.”

**Change in Majority**

Since the NY legislature operates with rules that give the majority party virtually full control of the process and the proceedings, the shift to a Democratic Majority meant new leadership, new committee chairs, and a shift in the policy agenda of the Senate and therefore of the legislature.

- Prior to the election, the Republicans held 31 seats, and 1 Democrat supported the Republican leadership, providing the 32 votes necessary for Republican control. In addition, the ‘Independent Democratic Conference’ (IDC) of 8 Democrats worked in coalition with the Republicans to run the Senate. The mainstream Democratic conference had 23 members.

- Post the 2018 election, the IDC is gone, and there are now 40 Democrats and 23 Republicans.

The eight seats that shifted from Republican to Democratic were all in areas experiencing demographic change and intensive organizing. Four were on Long Island, three in the Hudson Valley, and one in a changing area of Brooklyn/Staten Island.

---

**Change within the Democratic Conference of the Senate**

While a shift in which party controls the majority impacts the policy agenda, who is part of that majority is at least as important to the potential for an equity agenda. Six of the eight members of the Independent Democratic Conference were defeated by community-based challengers, as was a seventh incumbent Democrat. The seven primary winners were all women and/or people of color (4 women; 3 men of color; 2 women of color), and all ran on an agenda of change, especially on issues that impact low income and working-class people, and communities of color. This significantly impacted the discussion and dynamics within the Democratic conference -- changing what issues are brought to the table, and what ends up under serious consideration with a possibility of passage.

**Diverse, Inclusive, Leadership**

It is also worth noting the major demographic shifts in leadership. Leadership plays a key role in moving, or blocking, a racial equity agenda, especially in Albany which has had a ‘three men in a room’ structure of top-down decision-making. The partisan breakdown is no guarantee – both parties have long enacted policies that drive systemic racism. What is crucial is legislators and leaders who are committed to equity.

For the first time ever, a woman (Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Yonkers, District 35) is now part of the ‘three men in a room’ negotiations between the Governor, Senate and Assembly. For the first time ever, both houses are run by African American leaders (Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Bronx, District 83, and Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins). The Senate shifts have also meant more women and more people of color leading key senate committees. Less noticed, but equally as important, the Speaker chose Crystal Peoples-Stokes, Buffalo, District 141, as Assembly Majority Leader (the top leader under the Speaker). The Assembly Majority leader has traditionally been from upstate. In the past that has meant a white man, reflecting the traditional view of upstate as white and conservative. With Assembly-member Peoples-Stokes ascension to Majority Leader, upstate is now represented by an African American woman from the state’s second largest city -- a very different lens on upstate that can help drive an equity agenda.

**Regional Differences**

With 40 members, the Senate Democrats have a solid majority and can pass legislation even when a few members disagree. However, the differences between their districts lead to some regional tensions between New York City, upstate and the suburbs. The deliberation on housing issues, drivers’ licenses for immigrants, legalization of marijuana and other issues revealed the importance of those regional differences as new policies are put forth. As funders and advocacy groups consider statewide strategies, it will be important to take these regional differences into account, and to consider ways to engage communities in each region in key policy debates.

**V. Strategic Investments that Turbocharged Transformation**

In early 2019, state policymaking in New York began to shift toward policies that increased racial and economic equity. There was a greater emphasis by the Governor and state legislative leaders on both racial and economic equity. For example, when the Governor announced his agenda for the first 100 days of his new term, he called it the “2019 Justice Agenda.” The newly elected legislature similarly came into office with the goal of passing early legislation to address critical inequities in the state.
As a result of the policymakers’ commitment, and strong long-term advocacy and organizing work by many constituencies in every part of the state, significant new policies were enacted during the 2019 legislative session. Each of these policy changes reduced barriers to racial and economic equity, and there were several significant structural reforms enacted that will create long term shifts in power and equity. From expanded voting rights to criminal justice reform, from tenant protections to climate justice, from drivers’ licenses to farmworkers’ rights, New York State became a leading state on policies that will advance equity.

The New York Times article summing up the session captured the momentous nature of the shift with its headline: A Profound Democratic Shift in New York: ‘We Seized the Moment.’ And their quote from the Working Families Party summed up the nature of the shift: “For far too long in New York, our government was the best government real estate and Wall Street donors could buy,” said Bill Lipton, the New York director of the Working Families Party, a progressive third party. “Time and time again, the interests of the many were ignored, and the agenda of a wealthy few was enacted. That era is over.”

Demographic changes helped fuel electoral shifts, but those shifts would not have happened without long-term strategic investments in civic engagement and base-building. Further electoral shifts will continue building momentum for more policy changes that will move the state toward deeper racial equity. At the same time, even with electoral change, the dramatic policy shifts in 2019 would not have happened without substantial and relentless organizing by grassroots groups across the state. Long-term (and short-term) investments by foundations made that organizing possible.

We took a closer look at two of the biggest policy victories in 2019 – the new rent laws and driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants – to identify key lessons for funders on what worked, and what more was needed. These examples also show two different approaches to how groups collaborated at the statewide level, how the upstate-downstate divide was bridged, how funding was shared, and how narratives were shifted to create the climate for such far-reaching policy shifts. There were similar statewide coalitions on the other big issues, including criminal justice reform, climate justice, and fair elections (campaign finance reform); we chose housing and drivers licenses as examples that showed larger lessons.

**Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance and Housing Justice for All**

The Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance was formed in 2018 to lead the campaign to win strong tenant protections in the state legislature in 2019. It describes itself as “a diverse coalition of tenants, homeless people, manufactured housing residents, and advocates from across New York.” It included groups from every part of the state: Long Island, New York City, Westchester County, the mid-Hudson Valley, the Capital Region, the Southern Tier, the Mohawk Valley, Finger Lakes and Western New York.

New York Communities for Change brought together a core group of 12 statewide and regional groups and unified them around a shared statewide platform that called for “stronger tenant protections, an end to evictions, and an end to homelessness in New York.” Robust statewide outreach brought over 70 organizations into the coalition, and with them, brought the varying needs

---


9 Core groups are listed here: [https://actionnetwork.org/groups/upstatedownstate-housing-alliance](https://actionnetwork.org/groups/upstatedownstate-housing-alliance).
of tenants and homeless people in each region of the state into the first ever truly statewide strategy for housing equity.

The coalition’s success in passing expanded rent regulation and new tenant protections far exceeded anyone’s predictions. The real estate industry in NYC had long been one of the largest funders of election campaigns, including the Governor’s re-election campaign, the Senate Republicans, the IDC, and key Assembly members. Albany watchers knew the political shifts of 2018 had reset the table, but still expected the real estate industry to successfully block major changes. In fact, after the legislative agreement was announced, the New York Times headline read: “Titans of Real Estate in ‘Shock’ Over New York Rent Law Deal.”

What led to the Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance surprising success in expanding rent regulation and tenant protections (and what were some impediments)?

The key factors were: 1) True upstate-downstate collaboration and engagement; 2) long-term base-building among tenants; 3) a surge of additional funding for the final 6 months of the campaign, and an additional surge for the final month; 4) an organization that drove the creation and growth of the coalition and provided central staff for the coalition as a whole; 5) a wide range of groups involved from those who could do aggressive direct actions in multiple cities to those who could put a personal face and story to the fight in smaller communities; 6) the strength of the electoral side of the movement.

Upstate - Downstate collaboration - Business interests, landlords and politicians in New York are all expert at using the upstate-downstate divide to weaken movements for justice and provide excuses for failing to address policies that increase inequality. As NY Communities for Change looked ahead to the expiration of rent laws in 2019, they knew that had to overcome that divide or it would be used to defeat them. They took several steps that created the level of deeper collaboration and solidarity that made victory possible:

- Investment by coalition leadership in relationship building among groups and grassroots leaders. They held four retreats before the campaign started with 40 to 80 leaders from across the state. The retreats built trust, helping to overcome the concerns from upstate groups that NYC leaders didn’t understand upstate needs, and wouldn’t fight for them. The groups all made an explicit commitment to fighting for each other’s needs.

- Understanding regional differences. Coalition leaders took the time to learn about the issues in each community and build a shared understanding of the differing needs in different parts of the state.

- Building a rural-urban-suburban coalition, and building a multi-racial coalition, including white rural tenants (including manufactured homes), while also maintaining a racial justice lens. This made it so that all legislators could ‘see’ their constituents in the campaign.

- Organizing to get legislative hearings across the state. The hearings the legislature held were an effective tool for engaging people statewide, and enabled legislators to hear and see the voices of impacted people in each region.

Long term funding for building a base and leadership of directly impacted people - The victory was largely due to the consistent, persistent and large base of tenants who were organized

and vocal, mostly in NYC. While the upstate-downstate alliance was crucial, the depth and breadth of the tenant base in NYC drove the issue and made it impossible for NYC legislators to come home without passing strong tenant protections. This type of transformational policy needs legislative champions who won’t back down, and the NYC tenant base (and electoral history, see below) made that possible. This tenant base existed and was mobilized because NYC housing/tenant groups were consistently funded, enabling them to build a base over many years. Key funders included Ford Foundation, Neighborhood Funders Group, Mertz Gilmore and the City of NY. It’s an important side note that many groups had significant NYC government funding over the years - this funding was primarily for tenant assistance, and those assistance programs helped create a strong base of active tenants who knew their rights and wanted to fight for more rights.

Upstate, there were only a few pockets of a long term strong tenant base, (most notably Take Back the Land in Rochester and Community Voices Heard in Newburgh), but the Public Policy and Education Fund of NY had built a base of low and moderate income people through their parent-organizing and criminal justice reform work in many upstate communities, and was able to engage that base in the campaign. PPEF’s Upstate Housing Coordinator was also able to engage smaller housing groups in communities across upstate and support their involvement in the Alliance.

Had there been earlier funding for upstate tenant organizing, it would have filled some of the gaps and strengthened the coalition and the campaign.

Surge of funding at the time when there is an opportunity to win - It was critical that a set of funders had the flexibility to put significant resources into the coalition to make it possible to quickly scale up in late 2018, after it became clear that a new Senate majority created the possibility of significant steps toward equity. It was also important that funding went to the shared effort, and the coalition leadership was able to decide how to best allocate and distribute it. The added funding paid for a statewide coordinator and media team and was shared with key groups via subgrants. In addition, the NoVo Foundation provided support for an Upstate Coordinator (via Public Policy and Education Fund of NY) and some upstate organizing on short notice and with a large grant in late 2018. This was not a project they had planned to fund, and they had not previously funded statewide work in this way. NoVo’s ability to provide this funding on short notice was critical to the success of building upstate involvement and voice in the Alliance.

What else could have helped? There were several important funding challenges that weakened the campaign and put added pressure and stress on the leading organizations in the Alliance:

- **Amount** - While fundraising was successful, there was not enough money raised for the work that was really needed. The coalition desperately needed more central staff, including a full-time digital coordinator and a logistics coordinator, but could not afford either. In addition, every group at the core of the campaign had to supplement the project funding by using general support resources to do enough work to win. This not only placed stress on the groups, but it also meant that in those regions where groups were not already engaged enough to put their own resources into the fight, there was a lack of adequate mobilization.

- **Timing** - The campaign would have been stronger had the surge of funding come earlier. The Alliance raised $650,000 into the coalition plus additional money that went directly to groups, but a lot of that funding came at the end when donors saw the campaign in the
news every day. They needed earlier money to build the coalition relationships and structure, and much earlier to build a strong enough base upstate.

- Limitations on Funding for Grassroots Lobbying - The limited amount of funding available for the lobbying activities of the campaign was a barrier for many groups. The groups that had general support c4 funding used it to pay for their lobbying costs, which put heavy demands on their resources. Other groups were not able to do the level of grassroots lobbying work that was necessary.

**Early commitment and central coordination from a lead organization** -- New York Communities for Change put their resources into developing, creating and driving forward the Alliance. While having a broad coalition is important to moving transformational policy change, it is often the case that there needs to be a core organization (or two) for whom the issue is their top priority. The investment made by NYCC (and their sister organization NYCOFI) in senior staff time to build relationships and trust, raise funds and kick off the coalition was essential.

It was also important that the Alliance decided to dedicate some of the shared funding to pay for a statewide coordinator and an upstate coordinator. Groups felt those coordinators were accountable to the whole coalition, and they had the capacity to work with all the groups consistently.

**A wide range of organizing tactics and organizational capacities** - The coalition included a range of groups that had different styles and approaches to the work. This proved to be an important asset, since different tactics worked at different stages of the campaign and in different regions.

Aggressive direct-action tactics played an important role. There were groups within the Alliance that were able and willing to use direct action tactics that put significant community pressure on legislators. Not many groups could, or would play this role, but it was crucial that a few could and did. NYC legislators knew they had to deliver, and as the campaign built, key legislators outside NYC were feeling the heat too. Having c4 funding was crucial for this type of lobbying activity to be possible, and so was the willingness of some groups to suffer the backlash from elected officials and other insiders.

At the same time, it was also important to have smaller, community-based groups that were able to bring members to meet with policymakers and share their personal stories about how existing pro-landlord policies were impacting their families. This enabled legislators outside NYC to learn about the impact change could have for their own constituents.

**Electoral power was critical** - No matter how strong the Alliance, or how smart and strategic the organizing campaign, no victory would have been possible had the Senate not been transformed by the 2018 elections. The victories in both the general and primary elections were crucial and would not have been possible without many years of civic engagement, base-building and direct electoral work by grassroots organizations, by labor unions and by the Working Families Party.

- Winning the Senate majority - The Republican majority had made clear that they were on the side of the real estate industry and planned to stay there and block reform as they had in every previous rent fight. Only a Democrat-controlled Senate would have been open to policy change on housing.
- Winning 2018 senate Democratic primaries - Even with a Democratic majority, the policy victories would not have been possible had the real estate backed Democrats stayed in
power. The defeat of 7 incumbent Democratic senators by tenant champions not only eliminated some of the most pro-landlord Democrats, it also created a strong block of senators firmly committed to tenant protection. At the same time, the primaries also created the fear among the rest of the legislature in both houses that they could be primaried if they failed to deliver for tenants in their district.

- It is also worth noting that many of the 2018 senate primaries were run on the narrative of fighting real estate (including the challenger’s decision to refuse to accept real estate money for their campaigns) - that helped establish the pro-tenant framing and narrative for the legislative fight, which was a crucial factor

**Green Light NY Campaign**

Since the 2007 tragic rollout and calamitous capitulation of Former Governor Elliot Spitzer’s Executive Order to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses, New York officials have been terrified to raise that specter again. Yet despite the ghost stories, in 2015 the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) began laying the foundation for what would become the “Green Light NY” campaign at the National Immigrant Integration Conference, held in NY and hosted by NYIC.

It decided to tackle this issue because immigrants from across the state cited this as their number one need and request to the advocates with whom they worked, not because the political moment was right. Yet if it was going to be successful, NYIC would build the campaign on many of the key lessons learned from 2007: 1) There would need to be a truly statewide coalition with real participation and leadership from outside New York City. 2) It would need to create a phalanx of unlikely allies and messengers that would stand strong even during the inevitable pushback. And 3) It would need to build a durable and rapid response media campaign that would be both capable of educating the public and pushing back on misinformation.

To start, NYIC hired several new organizers – in Buffalo, Syracuse, Westchester and Long Island - with its own funds, as well as a $100,000 seed grant from the Hagedorn Foundation. It worked with key allies such as the Fiscal Policy Institute to conduct an analysis of states with pro-driver’s license policies and develop both a fiscal impact study and an industry-specific impact analysis. At the same time, it worked with several key anchor groups in strategic locations across the state to form a group that would become the Campaign’s official Steering Committee – a group that was critical throughout the campaign, managing different regions throughout the state with the NYIC leading as the state convener. (https://greenlightnewyork.org/get-to-know-the-coalition/).
Similar to Housing Justice for All campaign, the passage of Green Light NY in 2019 came as a welcomed surprise to supporters, funders, and officials. The elements of success were:

**Strong, Transparent Central Coordination**: NYIC knew that if it was going to take the lead, it would have to be transparent, collaborative and willing to negotiate compromises across the Coalition. Once the steering committee was formed, most campaign-related expenditure decisions would be made collaboratively, fund-raising efforts were shared by the Coalition and engaged Steering Committee members, and members knew what funds were available and how they were being spent. Still, there were tensions throughout: who’s making the decisions? Should money go to TV ads, or to local organizing? Which organizations should get resources? Etc. By the end however, the tensions had largely diminished – enough trust had been established that the key coalition members were acting (often at major political cost) on behalf of the Coalition, instead of for their own organizations.

**Multi-year Investments In Statewide Infrastructure**: Several foundations (Ford, Hagedorn, NY Community Trust, NY Foundation, Veatch, and the North Star Fund) from across the state had invested time and resources in supporting statewide organizations such as the NYIC, the NY Civic Engagement Table (NYCET) and the Advocacy Institute (AI), so the basis for upstate-downstate collaborations was no longer a daunting or foreign concept. Investments such as Hagedorn’s and Ford’s investment in Long Island and the Hudson Valley helped build crucial support and pushed local coordination throughout the state.

In 2018-2019, several foundations recognized the opportunity and made significant investments, such as the NoVo Foundation, the Four Freedoms Fund, the Brooklyn Community Foundation, the Westchester Community Foundation, Dyson Foundation, and the Fund for New Citizens – supporting the costs of a coordinator, local grassroots organizing, media buys and other critical actions that made the campaign a success.
In the end, the leadership and true partnership by several key funders with the NYIC ended up as an important factor. The initial Hagedorn investment signaled to the philanthropic community that driver’s licenses was a live issue again, in a way that reinforced the NYIC’s efforts to build the Green Light NY Coalition, which in turn validated the growing funder support. By working as true partners in a carefully coordinated strategy, funders played a critical role from the beginning of the campaign.

**Broad, Inclusive Truly Statewide Coalition:** From the beginning, the Steering Committee was dedicated to a truly statewide approach, and lifted the importance of actions in the Syracuse, Buffalo, Rensselaer, Hudson Valley, Westchester, and Long Island. In the graphic above, the hub leaders helped coordinate messages, actions, and pushback in real-time to almost every single local oppositional event - which both surprised local officials who did not expect resistance and demonstrated the seriousness of the campaign to other elected officials.

Critical to the success of the campaign was the robust membership that the NYIC has built over the past 6 years across the state, from Erie County to the East End of Long Island. By the time Greenlight was signed into law, over 300 groups from across the state had joined and fought with the coalition, holding nearly 100 different actions and engaging thousands of supporters. From service providers who turned out clients to events to grenade throwing organizers that overtook key officials’ offices, all coalition members had a lane in which to work and build support or pressure for the legislation.

**Creative Campaign Strategies - Unlikely Allies, Messengers and Tactics:** The Coalition successfully recruited outspoken supporters from law enforcement, business, and religious institutions – critical in demonstrating that the coalition truly had a broad base from many different sectors. The support and flexibility of funders was critical - JM Kaplan provided support for TV and media buys that helped increase support among suburban communities by 10%, and the Four Freedoms Fund provided C4 support for targeted media and efforts that put elected officials on alert that this fight was not going to be easy. A funder that wishes to remain anonymous provided its own polling, a lobbyist, and access to a high-end marketing firm; while these were not direct dollars for the campaign, they were invaluable contributions that helped pass the bill.

This creative, broad approach – ranging from grassroots tactics, to conservative business support, to creative TV and media – is becoming more of a necessity in a politically complex state like New York and will probably become the norm for future campaigns. In fact, the New York Times coverage cited many of these actions as essential to the final win.11

**Sharp Electoral Tactics and 501(C)(4) Strategy:** Repeating what was written for Housing Rights, this victory would not have been possible had the Senate not been transformed by the 2018 elections. The victories in both the general and primary elections were crucial and would not have been possible without many years of civic engagement, base-building and direct electoral work by grassroots organizations, by labor unions and by the Working Families Party. Recruitment of these new progressive champions to the driver’s licenses cause happened early and often, and the boldness and outspoken nature of these new legislators helped drive the issue forward.

11 [https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/17/nyregion/undocumented-immigrants-drivers-licenses-ny.html?fbclid=IwAR3V9fuGJJt7ZTwvUbcokPYKs1Kr-AVbqoacZhLIx-0VLPoBiBXbwYk0gFc](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/17/nyregion/undocumented-immigrants-drivers-licenses-ny.html?fbclid=IwAR3V9fuGJJt7ZTwvUbcokPYKs1Kr-AVbqoacZhLIx-0VLPoBiBXbwYk0gFc)
501(C)(4) activities and the threat of future electoral efforts also played a critical role in the success of the campaign. Make the Road Action drove consistent direct actions and other hard-hitting tactics that put intensive public pressure on legislators throughout the campaign. It had also established immigrant organizing as a critical force in key elections in 2018 (and previously) and had successfully made support for immigrant rights a criteria for progressive support of candidates. Make the Road Action’s ability to demonstrate the electoral consequences of lack of support from vulnerable legislators was a necessity - without the flexibility to hit directly and hard from the c4 side, advocates doubt or strongly question whether they would have been able to move either the Senate or the Assembly to a winning majority. While C4 activities were critical to this victory, there was a lack of adequate c4 funding – a gap that needs to be addressed to keep New York State moving toward racial equity.

**Common Elements of Support that led to Victory from both Campaigns**

Not only do these hard-fought wins benefit thousands if not millions of New Yorkers but they also provide some valuable insights to funders throughout the state.

**Upstate-Downstate Alliances:** Transparent, multi-racial coalitions with shared decision making has taken away the legislative wedge tactics of old—pitting upstate organizations and officials against downstate, and vice versa. By sharing a common strategy and establishing the ability to rapidly respond to attempted political peel-offs in different parts of the state, housing advocates and the Green Lighters stunned officials in Albany with quick, consistent, and on-message counter punches. Now that legislators are aware of these new dynamics, they will adapt their strategies accordingly which means that philanthropy must provide support to strengthen these statewide networks.

**Base-Building Support:** In both campaigns, the base was seemingly omnipresent, resilient, creative, and relentless. Over the years, NYS foundations deserve a lot of credit for investing in the growth of this important organizing infrastructure. They must continue doing so while also supporting the connective tissue such as the New York Civic Engagement Table and the Advocacy Institute. These institutions increase the strength, sophistication, and political acumen of all nonprofits that are or want to be engaged at the state level. Lastly, while both bills passed, they could have used more support from small towns and rural communities. Moving forward, it would benefit everyone to build bases of support in those communities as well.

**Multi-Year Support for Long-Term Campaigns, if clearly stated on both ends, pays dividends:** The Housing Stability and Tenant Protections Act of 2019 and the Green Light NY Bill were not expected to pass this year but the grantees fighting for these bills knew that they would win eventually.

In 2015, when Darren Sandow was the Executive Director of the Hagedorn Foundation and Steve Choi approached him for support to kick off the Green Light NY campaign, Steve very clearly stated that this would be a multi-year campaign with no real expected chances of passage until 2020. Each year when Darren had to report to the board, Steve would give him odds on the bill being introduced in that session. It became a running joke at board meetings because those odds rarely got above 25%. However, what wasn’t a joke was the depth and breadth of the statewide coalition being built to support the effort. Reporting this progress made the foundation’s board less hesitant to renew Hagedorn’s commitment to the campaign.
In addition to the long-term support, it was crucial that some foundations had the flexibility to provide significant last-minute funding to the coalitions as it became clear that victory could be possible.

**Central Coordination:** Both campaigns benefitted from a trusted organization that was willing to take the lead, invest its own resources, tackle the early fundraising, and build shared leadership with members of the coalition. Long-term support for the core organizations that have this capacity and play the connecting role in multiple campaigns and statewide (or at least in multiple regions) is an important part of building the infrastructure that can move transformational policy change.

**Flexible Funding:** Both campaigns benefited from long term support that enabled them to build strength when they were not in the midst of an intense campaign, and they also needed an infusion of project funding for the final 6 to 9 months. General support funding was especially important to the long-term base-building, leadership development, relationship building among groups and strategy development. Funders who provided that general, flexible support enabled the groups to build these capacities long before anyone knew there was going to be a moment when rapid change would be possible. General support for the connective tissue in groups like the NY Civic Engagement Table also enabled the core groups to be ready to go when the time came. Conversely, both campaigns suffered from the lack of c4 support available. It’s clear that the c4 electoral work, and the c4 grassroots lobbying and direct-action tactics are essential drivers of policy change, yet there are few sources for this type of funding.

**VI. Timeline for Maximum Impact**

The combination of demographic changes, changes in the national political context, and intensive investment and work have led to some rapid changes in New York State over the past year. The changes in representation have already led to significant steps forward toward equity. Yet, at the same time, there are not yet the right factors in place to move a full equity agenda. This will only happen when communities of color can move beyond inclusion to real empowerment.

There are key milestones over the next few years that create an opportunity to make major steps forward in enabling communities of color to be fairly represented so that an equity/justice agenda can move more fully forward. These include the Census in 2020, redistricting in 2021, and the potential for building increased civic engagement in communities of color in each election cycle from 2020 - 2022. It will also be important that communities win structural reforms that make it more possible for their voices to be heard. This will include further voting reforms: ballot measures for the constitutional amendments to allow vote by mail and same day registration will have to pass in 2021; automatic voter registration and felon re-enfranchisement have not yet been passed; and NY desperately needs campaign finance reform to limit the impact of big money on elections so voters have an equal voice. It may also include changes in other rules, such as greater powers of home rule, or more equalization of power between the Governor and the legislature, or other ways of making it easier for communities to have a say over their own future.
VII. What will it take to keep NYS moving toward justice?

Given this timeline, investment in community-based groups during 2019 and 2020 can be especially impactful. Strong work on the census will increase the impact of redistricting on the power and representation of communities of color. Strong organizing on redistricting will further enhance the voice of communities of color. Intensive base-building and civic engagement over the next 2-3 years in the regions with the greatest demographic change will increase the power of the growing communities of color, making a racial equity agenda much more achievable.

Short-Term Opportunities

Some geographic areas of the state provide greater opportunity to defend or elevate the voices of communities of color in the next few years. Here are our recommendations for Short-Term Opportunities:

1. **Rochester** - As the map on page 15 demonstrates as well as the fact that Green Light NY made it one of its hubs, funders should provide resources for Civic Engagement work in the city of Rochester. Out of a population of 206,284, 46.6% of the population is white, 35.9% is black or African American, 13.5% is Hispanic, 3% is Asian, and 1% is Native American. It is one of the only minority-majority cities in the state. Building leadership and civic engagement skills now will not only be transformative in the future but can further empower the political leadership of people of color. Three women of color are currently running for City Council in 2019.

While the City of Rochester government reflects the demographics and racial equity agenda of the majority of Rochester residents, their voices are not as well heard at the state level. Increased civic engagement and outreach will make the needs of communities of color in Rochester more relevant state policy-making, which will benefit communities statewide.

2. **Hudson Valley** - As stated many times throughout this report: without the hard-fought, political victories of 2018 in the Hudson Valley, New York State would most likely still be conducting business with three men in a room. Yet, those victories are not without risk.

We can expect a backlash in the Valley on driver’s licenses, tenants rights and criminal justice reforms, so it will be important that groups have the capacity to educate the public about these new policies, and build public support. Several of the new officials that were elected into office throughout the Valley are considered vulnerable—especially during a presidential election where turnout is traditionally higher than usual.

We are again recommending civic engagement investment throughout the Valley, maintaining previous levels of support for current grantees, but also providing for expansion into many rural and small town areas where grant support is non-existent but hardened organizers have been working for years—as the Engage NY site visit demonstrated for all who attended. We consider these investments to be the second most important of our short-term opportunities.

3. **Long Island** - Once regarded as the fortress of white, male, leadership in the senate, Long Island is no longer that bastion—but it’s close. All Long Island senators voted against Green Light NY. This is due in part to the rural constituencies in the east but it is also a product of one of the major funding sources for civic engagement work spending-out at the end of 2017. The Hagedorn Foundation helped create the Long Island Civic Engagement table to the tune of $400,000+ annually. Needless to say, that level of funding has dropped significantly and could use an infusion of dollars to sustain and augment the work of local nonprofits in the civic engagement arena as well as to provide for the statewide
coalitions that provide support. Long Island will also be home to backlash similar to what we described in the Hudson Valley, and resources for outreach and public education on the issues is critical to defending hard won policy changes.

4. **Implementation of New Policies** – As we’ve discussed throughout the paper, 2019 was a year of transformation policy change at the state level – laws were passed that have the potential to significantly increase racial equity over time. However, the new laws will have little impact without effective local implementation. For example, the housing bill allows localities to enact rent control, but the localities have to pass those laws. Raise the Age requires handling young people in family court, but the localities have to create the local court capacity to do that right, and the services to go with that. Same for other criminal justice reforms. Early voting requires a minimum amount of early voting locations, but the counties choose how many and where they are located.

Groups are eager to work with local elected officials to develop strong local implementation plans, and to advocate for local policies that will maximize the racial equity impact of the new state policies. Funding for these organizations to do the implementation work is urgent and crucial.

Support for this work will also provide a path for local grantees to start connecting to statewide work and vice-versa. The groups that led the statewide campaigns will also need resources to support local groups working on implementation, and the local groups will need resources to take on these major new opportunities.

5. **Engage NY** - Funders need to ensure that Engage NY thrives and survives. Before it closed its doors in 2017, the Hagedorn Foundation provided a two-year grant to make sure Engage would be able to devote full-time staff to strengthen upstate-downstate funding alliances and collaborations. As many readers will acknowledge, Lisa Fasolo-Frishman has made breakthroughs on several fronts, but that funding is about to come to an end and funders must step up and make sure that work continues.

**Regional Equity Fund (REF)**

Once NY Counts 2020 comes to an end, we believe that investments should, to the extent possible, flow through the creation of a pooled Racial Equity Fund that creates a Statewide Grants Committee, allows for Regional Flexibility, and sets Priority Regions/Hubs (see figure below).

As the statewide census work has proven, when funders from across the state join forces, not only does this lead to the cumulation of significantly more grant dollars, but it also promotes the creation of coordinated, strategic, and focused funding strategies that include input from traditionally geographically bound funders. It also helps leverage millions of public dollars and resources.

Based on our conversations with funders from across the state, not only have there been serious discussions about the concept a REF, but there is strong support for its creation. We believe that the Fund should be established and managed by Engage NY, a trusted organization both upstate and downstate, with funds housed at community
foundations throughout the state thereby demonstrating state unity for racial equity.

Drilling down, funders stated that any such Regional Equity Fund should be comprised of three core elements: A Statewide Grants Committee, Regional Flexibility, and Priority Regions/Hubs.

**Statewide Grants Committee**

Again, NY Counts 2020 has developed a structure for setting priorities, coordinating activities, and regranting that engages voices from across the state and provides a balance of power in the decision making on all levels. Rather than reinventing the wheel, we would suggest that once the funders decide to create a REF, they should extract the statewide decision-making elements that worked best from the census work and mold it into the leadership structure for the Racial Equity Fund.

Within that framework, we would recommend the creation of regional committees to establish priorities and a regional set of grant recommendations that run parallel to the overall goals of the Racial Equity Fund (see Figure 3 on page 23).

**Priority Regions/Hubs**

With Green Light NY, regional hubs were critical for providing coordinated state actions, rapid response feedback and action, and an echo chamber back to the central steering committee as to needs and priorities. Although major investments that will require sustained support, regional hubs are a necessity in a state with a population of 19.88 million people.

**Regional Flexibility**

For those foundations that find it difficult to support initiatives outside of their service area, they could still participate in statewide work and strategic thinking by either serving on a regional committee, or by agreeing to directly support pieces of the regional recommendations produced by the committee, or both.

This flexibility would go a long way on bringing community foundations, smaller foundations, and geographically bound family foundations into discussions which have traditionally been out of range for them.

**After the Racial Equity Fund has been created**

Here are our recommendations (Figure 3, page 23):

**Empowering Communities of Color**

Fundamentally, a racial equity agenda can only be achieved when communities of color have the power to demand it. Even with the electoral shifts in New York (which themselves would not have happened without empowered communities of color increasing their participation), the policy shifts would have been far more modest had there not been the relentless community demand for transformational change. Three types of investment create the core conditions for empowerment: leadership development, civic engagement, and base-building through community organizing.

Nonprofits across the state and in each region provide leadership development and training. We encourage foundations to provide targeted resources to focus on developing the skills, political education and voices of leaders of color. This
recommendation can be accomplished through direct support to local groups, support for training conferences, or through the Racial Equity Fund.

Without **grassroots organizing**, tenants would have significantly less rights and power, and immigrants would not be entitled to receive driver’s licenses. Organizing provides directly impacted people a pathway to activism and collective action, and it provides a context in which leaders get the ‘on the job’ training that classroom leadership development cannot provide. It is the core of any empowerment strategy and it’s what creates a collective demand for change, with community support to back it up. Grassroots organizing was key in both victories, and in all the other major policy changes passed in New York in 2019 and needs to continue to be supported. If foundations find it difficult to support this type of work, here again, the Racial Equity Fund can play a key role in helping grant dollars reach these organizations.

**Civic engagement** is the third pathway to empowerment. It is a systematic approach to increasing participation through regular and consistent mass outreach in communities with low participation rates, particularly in communities of color where low participation has resulted in lack of power to shape public policy and electoral outcomes. Outreach led by community members, either as volunteers or as paid canvassers, has proven to be effective in building the trust and engagement necessary to increase voter turnout and public participation in other ways. Support can be provided directly to groups that organize mass outreach programs, or through the New York Civic Engagement Table, or through the Racial Equity Fund.

Key to this recommendation would be providing support for the NY Civic Engagement Table (NYCET) to provide shared services, training and quality control, and/or providing scholarships for local nonprofits to become members of the NYCET. Members receive access to the Voter Activation Network, Catalist, and training on how to use all these advanced civic engagement tools. Plus, they become part of a statewide network of organizations working for change.

Finally, even though the housing bill that passed is a huge victory for tenants, it will only be effective for individuals and families if local officials pass legislation putting the state law into effect in their communities. The same is true of implementation of many of the new policies. Funding for **Local Progress**, which provides support to pro-equity local elected officials, will help them with implementation. Holding local officials accountable will also be important, which is best achieved through funding grassroots organizations who can provide public support for those officials that do stand strong and take principled stances on important issues, and public accountability for those who don’t.

**Supporting Coalitions**
The lessons from 2019 clearly show that coalition building is critical, that it needs to cross regional barriers and unify upstate and downstate, and that requires support for the staff time and meetings that make deep collaboration possible. Funds need to be available to host **policy and strategy retreats between upstate and downstate organizations**. Again, we think that the Racial Equity Fund could play that role, but funders would have to embrace these efforts and investments.

Many organizations such as the NY Immigration Coalition, Make the Road NY, Public Policy and Education Fund, etc. are looking to expand their work statewide, into rural areas, small towns, and other under-organized parts of the state. They are seeking to expand the base and support the growth of upstate-downstate coalitions, but more often than not, they are expected to make these expansions with 100% of their own resources which slows down this process significantly. As we saw with the Green Light campaign, just a few staff made a world of difference in a relatively short period of time. In the case of the housing work, the funding for a statewide coordinator and an
upstate coordinator were essential for engaging smaller existing groups. If funders made grant dollars available for groups to expand statewide staffing, success on many other issues will continue.

It’s also clear from the case studies that regional hubs can make a big difference. There are three approaches that have worked effectively: 1) funding a local anchor group in a region to support and coordinate collaboration, as happened in Green Light NY; or 2) funding statewide groups to support and coordinate joint work in multiple regions, as was done in the Upstate Downstate Housing Alliance; or 3) funding the NY Civic Engagement Table to support a network of groups doing outreach and civic engagement in a region as has been done in the Hudson Valley, with the LI Civic Engagement Table, and also for census work. We have no doubt that with a network of regional hubs, New York State would become the leader of Racial Equity in the country. Regional Hubs would serve as the nerve centers of leadership and training, civic engagement, capacity building, and communications.

We would recommend: Buffalo/Western NY, Hudson Valley, Long Island, New York City, Rochester/Finger Lakes, Syracuse/Central NY, and Westchester. LICET and NYCET have already created the core of these hubs in the Hudson Valley and Long Island.

Finally, having learned the lesson from Gov. Spitzer’s failure, the Green Light campaign recruited and lifted up representatives from the insurance industry and police to speak about the advantages of having immigrants with licenses. This made it more difficult for skittish representatives to get on the wrong side of the issue and helped blunt pushback. However, recruiting this new flank to the battle required dedicated time and effort and resources. If funders were to dedicate a pool of funds for nonprofits to reach out to unusual allies, this would be a tremendous new resource.

**Communications and Message Development**

If funders in NYS want to empower communities of color, they need to invest in communications work by grassroots groups and communications training for grassroots leaders. It was clear in both case studies that shifting the dominant public view of the issue was necessary in order to move transformational public policies and will be critical to defending those policies from backlash.

Again, the Racial Equity Fund could play a significant role in moving resources to groups that

---

**Empowering Communities of Color**
- Leadership Development & Training
- Grassroots Organizing
- Civic Engagement
- Elected Officials (support & accountability)

**Supporting Coalitions**
- Upstate-Downstate Collaboration
- Statewide Staffing
- Regional Hubs
- Unusual Partnerships

**Communications and Message Development**
- Elevating Voices of People of Color
- Shifting the Narrative
- Media Training
- Ensuring Accountability

---

Figure 3
could most effectively elevate the voices of people of color, begin to shift the narrative, provide media training, and ensure that the hard fought victories of 2019 are implemented by holding officials accountable, in part, through communications and messaging work.

National organizations like the Spin Academy (now part of ReFrame Mentorship) could be brought in through the Racial Equity Fund or the regional hubs to provide this training, or groups could be provided with funding to send staff to national training programs or existing statewide training like the Justice Works Conference or NYCET’s bi-annual training conference.
VIII. Our Ingredient List for Short- and Long-Term Success

Short-term Opportunities ($500,000+)

1. Provide civic engagement support for organizations in the City of Rochester (p. 19)
2. Sustain and strengthen civic engagement support in the Hudson Valley (p. 19)
3. Bolster civic engagement funding throughout Long Island (p. 19)
4. Fund work on local implementation of statewide policy gains (p. 19)
5. Give grant dollars to Engage New York to ensure that current staff remains (p. 20)

Maintaining Momentum ($2.5 million+ annually)

6. Build support for statewide connective tissue (p. 17)
   a. Advocacy Institute—general support and scholarships to nonprofits
   b. NY Civic Engagement Table—general support and scholarships to nonprofits
   c. Statewide staff and coordination capacity in anchor groups (p. 22)
7. Create a Racial Equity Fund to support:
   a. Empowering communities of color (p. 21)
      i. leadership development (p. 21)
      ii. grassroots organizing (p. 21)
      iii. civic engagement (p. 22)
   b. Supporting Coalitions (p. 22)
   c. Communications and Message Development (p. 22)
8. Maintain and bolster civic engagement support throughout Long Island
9. Give grant dollars to Engage New York thereby ensuring that current FTE staff remains

Bottom Line

If your foundation believes in the concept of racial equity, now is the time to invest in New York State: Demographics, political shifts, solid organizing work, inspired leadership, and statewide connectivity have all contributed to monumental changes in the way New York now conducts business. If you’d like to see this continue, you must invest because EVERY DOLLAR COUNTS! Do you think your $5,000 grant can’t possibly make a dent in a $2.5 million price tag? Wrong. Your $5k grant to an organization doing organizing work in remote parts of Rochester or the East End of Long Island makes a huge difference.

Once the Regional Equity Fund is established, however, you must stretch. The beloved Kevin Ryan a Program Officer from the NY Foundation, a 100yr old regional grantmaker in NYC and only NYC, managed to convince his board—with the assistance and full support of his Executive Director, that in order to impact the lives of the most vulnerable residents of NYC, they had to invest his time and foundation dollars in connecting the nonprofit and funding communities statewide.

“QUOTE from Kevin” “QUOTE from Maria”
Once you’ve gotten your foundation on-board, first, congratulations! Now, and this is as equally important, you must continue these investments. Don’t get us wrong, remain vigilant and ask grantees the tough questions, but if you’re happy with the answers, continue giving! Thank you…
Karen and Darren
**VIV. Big Apple Turnover**

We couldn’t bring this paper to a close without a tasty full-circle bonus. To continue spreading the turnover across the state, we present you with the Classic Apple Turnover recipe from Erren’s Kitchen, ([https://www.errenskitchen.com/apple-turnovers/](https://www.errenskitchen.com/apple-turnovers/)) Enjoy!

**Do you have a classic Fall dessert that you just ADORE?** I have a few, but one of them is definitely these Apple Turnovers!

**Growing up, my Mom would make these as a special treat** when we went back to school. It remains a nostalgic, fall favorite to this day.

**Who doesn’t love Apple Turnovers?** I mean a hand-held dessert, made up sweet, warm apples and cinnamon baked in pastry – what’s not to like?

**Why this recipe works:**

- **Using a mixture of brown sugar & granulated** gives the perfect amount of sweetness.
- **The cinnamon & nutmeg** marry perfectly with the apples in the filling.
- **To save time,** puff pastry is used for the crust.

The best part is that these Apple Turnovers are really simple to make. Kids will love helping make this easy cinnamon-spiced dessert, so get them to join in!

**It’s All About the Apples**

Whether you like them sweet or tart when baking with apples be sure to choose the right variety. Look for an apple with a crisp bite so they stay firm when cooked.

**Some Good Examples:**

- Golden Delicious (my favorite)
- Granny Smith
- Gala
- Honeycrisp

**How to Prep the Apples for the Turnovers:**

Start by peeling, coring, and chopping the apples. When Apple peels are cooked, they tend to get chewy. It’s always best to peel the apples first.

**Apples brown quickly,** so be sure to coat them with lemon juice.

**Using Frozen Puff Pastry**

The best way to thaw frozen puff pastry is in the fridge, overnight.

Frozen puff pastry is a convenient choice, but it does require a little planning since it can’t be used frozen. It needs to be thawed before it can be baked and doing it overnight in the fridge best approach.
This allows the puff pastry to become pliable without over-softening.

**Plan B** If you forgot to take your pastry out of the freezer and need to use it quite soon, all hope is not lost!

You can thaw it at room temperature. The key is to use it when it’s just ready to be rolled, but before it softens so much that the dough is limp and the butter is melting.

**How to Make Apple Turnovers:**

Add the apples to a bowl and coat with orange juice.

Add brown sugar, granulated sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, cornstarch.

Add melted butter and stir to combine.
Next, roll each sheet of puff pastry to a 12-inch by 12-inch (30cm by 30cm) square. Cut each sheet into 4 squares and make sure they stay chilled until you are ready to use them.

Brush the edges of each square with the egg wash.

Neatly place \( \frac{1}{3} \) cup of the apple mixture on half of the square.

Fold the pastry diagonally over the apple mixture and seal by pressing the edges with a fork.
Place on a pan and brush each one with the egg wash.

Bake for 20 minutes, until browned and puffed.

Allow to cool 5 minutes and then drizzle with the cream cheese icing.

These are best served warm, but they’re wonderful leftover too!

Enjoy every last bite!