

An Equity Education

Reflections and Lessons Learned on our 2023 Training Mandate

PPGNY's Commitment to Equity

Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY), an affiliate recently established in 2020, has been heavily influenced by the confluence of factors in which we got our start: a merger, a global pandemic, and a nationwide groundswell of anti-racism work in response to, and in solidarity with, the Black Lives Matter movement.

It was in our beginnings that we vowed as an organization to dedicate ourselves to such a racial reckoning: we created a mission statement to explicitly identify ourselves as a “committed partner to advance equity and improve health outcomes for all” and we formed our “Equity & Learning” department (E&L). E&L was assembled for the purpose of being a transformation agent, a catalyst for change, an accountability body requiring our organization to do something different and prioritize improving the experiences of patients, community members, and staff of color.

The few years since have been marked by an unprecedented infringement on human rights and attacks on bodily autonomy, making PPGNY's commitment to equity even more critical. The services we provide are now more important than ever in this post-Roe society, with record-breaking passage of anti-LGBTQ legislation and calculated efforts to scrub all institutions of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion—or DEI—work.

In 2023, our E&L team and the organization at large met this moment by emphasizing education via an affiliate-wide equity training requirement.



Unlearning and Relearning: The Reasoning Behind a Training Mandate

E&L approaches our internal work via two channels: **Learning & Culture** and **Equitable Systems**. While this continues to be the team's structure, we strategically prioritized learning in 2023. This decision was rooted in the E&L department's initial purpose: to transform the organization. Transformation calls for individual staff members to share an understanding of why change is necessary (to improve outcomes for patients, community, and staff) and how we can make it happen together.

It is because of this, alongside staff feedback about their experience of the process, that E&L made the case for a return "back to basics" by way of this mandate; we created a level-set to support all staff in developing the foundations of an equity analysis.



Equitable Systems

operationalizes and holds the organization accountable to equity standards by forming and reinforcing policies, protocols, and structural change.

Learning & Culture

develops and deepens an equity analysis through facilitating trainings and creating brave spaces for staff to confront inequity.

2023 Equity Learning Spaces



DEI Collective

is a professional development space to build diverse community and develop a shared understanding of equity concepts.



Equity Fundamentals

is a foundational, intersectional equity training series which introduces racial justice frameworks and strategies to counter bias to build trust across difference.



Affinity Caucuses

have differing goals, but all provide opportunity for staff to gather based on identity to build solidarity and heal from or address inequities.

2023 Participation By-the-Numbers

- 1140 staff visits in DEI Collective Meetings
- 527 staff visits in affinity caucuses
- 329 visits in "Equity Conversations with Dr. Lake" a bonus equity learning series
- 309 staff members completed the "Equity Fundamentals" training series



Causes for Celebration

Building Relationships

A tenant of anti-oppression work is to build relationships; in order to do our job as professionals in the equity field, it proved necessary for E&L to focus on creating a feeling of collectivism and connection amongst our colleagues. Familiarity and trust lay the foundation for the groundswell towards transformative and sustainable change.

Spaces like the “Equity Fundamentals” training, DEI Collective, and affinity caucus are some of the few—if not the only—opportunities for staff to convene across roles, departments, and geographical distance. Honoring this, they are designed to provide staff with a place to express themselves, show up more authentically, and to get to know each other better. These moments to heal and build solidarity are especially felt in PPGNY’s affinity spaces, as we work with the backdrop of organizational, local, and global issues that directly impact us and our ability to do our jobs.

While PPGNY offered race-based affinity spaces prior to 2023 (including Black, Latine, Asian American Pacific Islander, and white caucuses), this year the Equity & Learning team was eager to bring forth and formalize the option of a monthly LGBTQ+ caucus, facilitated by our external partner **Mx. Aida Manduley (they/them)**.

When asked about their experiences in caucus this year, here’s what some staff had to say...

“I really appreciated the development of the LGBTQ+ caucus this past year. With all the attacks on this community, it was nice to have a safe place to exist and talk each month. It was also nice for PP to recognize that this is another group that at times feels under attack.”

“I appreciated the larger attendance in some of the spaces - especially the white affinity group which was often sparsely attended before the mandate. Having a larger group often lead to unexpected points of view in those meetings.”





“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

— Audre Lorde,
A Burst of Light

Solidarity Conference

PPGNY’s equity education sprung to a national platform when Planned Parenthood Federation of America spotlighted a workshop created and facilitated by Pamela Davis, Senior Director of Learning & Culture (she/her) and Naomi Cunningham, Director of Learning & Culture (she/her), titled “The Healing Power of Gratitude”, for the national Solidarity Conference held in December.

Inspired by Audre Lorde’s argument for self-care, this workshop sought to create community with Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) participants across affiliates via self-reflective journaling, discussions on joy and gratitude, and strategy around care and support so as to continue our vital work while divesting from white dominant cultural norms. Conversations like this affirm the centering of BIPOC colleagues’ well-being is imperative, especially when traditional approaches to DEI work tend to cause harm by pandering to white audiences.

Commitment from the Top

In 2023, both our C3 and C4 boards received tailored equity training, affirming our organization’s dedication to improving staff and patient outcomes in using both a “bottom-up” and “top-down” approach. Knowing that our PPGNY boards are also partaking in equity-related efforts increases buy-in from staff who value and respect leadership that models an embodied commitment to the culture we are collectively striving towards. The E&L team looks forward to a continued collaboration with the External Affairs department and the boards via workshops on the application of an equity analysis when shaping political and advocacy strategies.

A Variety in Voices

Mandating trainings gifted the E&L team with insight into the various orientations that folks have towards equity frameworks and practices. This variety is rooted in differing levels of academic, professional, and, most importantly, lived experiences. This affirmed our decision to ground our organization as a whole in the basics of an equity analysis to ensure that all colleagues are brought along meaningfully on our journey in improving outcomes for our fellow staff, patients, and community members.

As E&L members, we also were reminded of where we could improve our own relationship to the work: we were re-educated through robust partnerships with a skilled team of external partners. This outside expertise reinvigorated the work because hearing the same thing from the same people grows old—instead, conversations were shaped with fresh perspectives from both new facilitators and participants. It also allowed E&L the spaciousness necessary to pause, reflect, and make pivots as the roll-out of the training mandate presented challenges.

"The PPGNY Board of Directors has been fully engaged in both our in-person and virtual equity trainings this year, facilitated by Liberation Consulting. Our learning, questions, and discussions are intentional and leading us toward greater awareness and accountability. And for that, we are grateful."

*-Robin Sigman, Equity Board Chair
(she/her)*

"The ongoing journey of infusing an equity framework into all of what PPGNY does takes everyone. I am so grateful to each and every member of our organizational community - staff and volunteer Board members alike – for committing the time, energy, and heart space to work toward building a world in which we want to live. "

- Wendy Stark, CEO (she/her)



Opportunities for Growth

The Digital Divide

The E&L team found that there were inconsistencies in our colleagues' access to technology; many folks—especially those in patient-facing or community-facing positions—did not have access to their own device, and if they did have a computer, many lacked cameras and/or microphones.

Being that the virtual programs involved in the Equity Training Mandate are meant to be highly participatory spaces that encourage sharing from staff, this tech gap notably restricted folks' ability to make human connection and contribute to conversations, which influenced programmatic design by limiting the types of activities possible. Individuation and confidentiality were also difficult to achieve when devices were shared amongst multiple participants.

Evolving Participant Dynamics

Our learning spaces were previously opt-in, where folks would elect to partake in conversations related to identity, equity, oppression, power, and privilege. When this type of effort moves from optional to mandatory, motivations for and feelings about the work can differ and challenge the dynamic of the learning space.



“To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination.”

— bell hooks,
Teaching Community

Organizational Capacity

Our colleagues across PPGNY are responsible for incredibly important work throughout our dozens of health centers and within various communities—there are the real-time demands of seeing patients and being in classrooms which impacted staff’s full participation. Staff have shared with the E&L team that it was difficult to achieve a balance between seeing to their daily responsibilities and attending equity trainings, though equity training is necessary to effectively care for patients and be in community.

Departmental Capacity

Typically, if organizations even commit to DEI, the team or department responsible for holding the work is small and/or under resourced, which translates to small impact or output. While PPGNY and our Equity & Learning department are not immune to staffing or capacity issues, we stand strong in our value that anti-oppression work cannot happen by the hands of a few people, but only through a collective.

Simply put, without the collaboration of our internal and external partners, it would not have been possible to actualize our goal of ensuring that all staff have access to our foundational equity training series alongside a menu of other monthly learning spaces.

The Equity & Learning team is deeply appreciative of the labor of love that the following folks have provided to us:

Toyin Augustus (she/her)

Hideko Akashi (she/her)

Judy DiMatteo (she/her)

Lyssa Ichikawa (they/she/anti-binary)

Dr. Johnny Lake (he/him)

Morgan Little (she/her)

Aida Manduley (they/them)

Jessica Rivera (she/her)

Carissa Rountree (she/her)

Malcom Shanks (they/them)

Ellen Tuzzolo (they/them, she/her)

“I really appreciated Dr. Lake and all the external facilitators because he put these elevated concepts into accessible language, incorporated storytelling, and an opportunity to reflect for people.”



Adverse Impacts

Many may be familiar with the phrase “white silence is violence,” often spoken in Racial Justice spaces wherein BIPOC leaders and advocates point to the lack of white partnership in thought, word, and action. Many white colleagues have shared that they feel hesitant to move from presence to participation in the learning spaces out of fear of “saying the wrong thing.” While self-introspection is an important practice, this focus on perfection obstructs the group’s progress and places further burden on the BIPOC colleagues with whom the goal is to repair relationship.

It is inevitable and only human to have missteps as we unlearn and relearn our histories, how we’ve been socialized, and how we engage each other, however the reality of this is experienced differently by program participants depending on identity. While BIPOC participants lean into vulnerability and shoulder the emotional labor of carrying conversations forward, white people benefit from the learnings that come from others’ openness while finding protection in staying silent.

Moving forward, as we reflect upon what it means to encourage and solicit vulnerability in a mandatory equity learning space, our goal is to continue building confidence and foster trust amongst each other to more equitably diffuse emotional and intellectual labor. This will ultimately build solidarity across differences so that a groundswell of momentum may bring us closer to more equitable outcomes for all.



2023 Take-aways

Exploring a training requirement of this magnitude was an educational process in and of itself for the Equity & Learning department. We look forward to refining the process as we move into the next calendar year, being responsive to and inclusive of our colleague's feedback and designing with the goal of positively impacting staff and patient experience across identities. Here are some of the lessons we learned alongside the organization:

- *In order for us to progress as a collective we need to meet people where they are and go along on the journey together*
- *A core tenant of anti-racism work is community building; garnering and cultivating TRUST in order for us to learn together*
- *Iteration is key*
- *We can't do this work alone- we need partners and participants, they are our teachers*
- *We are all students in these spaces*
- *We have to take risks as participants and not just view on the sidelines in this work*
- *Pivot & adjust- this work is fluid and ever changing, as educators we need to always be oriented towards flexibility*

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