



# Tawanna Black of the Northside Funders Group, Marina Lyon, former foundation executive, Ann Mulholland of Minnesota Philanthropy Partners

## Invite foundations to the table

A Civic Caucus Review of Minnesota's Public Policy Process Interview

*January 27, 2017*

Three current or former foundation executives advise the Civic Caucus to ask foundations to send someone to the table to participate in deliberations over improving Minnesota's public-policy process for studying and resolving community problems and over other public-policy issues.

Former foundation executive Marina Lyon believes the person a foundation sends to participate in public-policy deliberations should not come as a representative of the foundation, but as someone who might have a different experience from other people already at the table. She notes that foundations have become much more involved in public policy themselves.

Tawanna Black of the Northside Funders Group advises the Civic Caucus not to underestimate the power of foundations to bring a different lens to policymakers about the interconnection among issues. And she says working with corporate philanthropy is a way to weave in private-sector leaders.

Ann Mulholland of Minnesota Philanthropy Partners believes philanthropy should be involved in three areas of need: (1) addressing basic needs, like food and shelter; (2) teaching people how to prevent big, catastrophic issues from happening in their lives; and (3) dealing with root causes of problems. She also expresses deep concern over protecting our democracy by ensuring freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom to gather and protest.

## Biographies

**Tawanna Black** is executive director of the Northside Funders Group, a collaborative of 20 corporate, community, and private foundations and public-sector investors. The members are committed to aligning investments to catalyze comprehensive, sustainable change in North Minneapolis.

Black's diverse career destinations have had one common theme. She's been the chosen leader to build consensus among individuals, organizations and companies with varied backgrounds, experiences and motivations, so they can move toward one common vision with extraordinary results. She comes to the Northside Funders Group with over 15 years of groundbreaking work transforming organizations and communities in Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska and Minnesota.

Black also lends her expertise to several boards. She is president of the Minneapolis-St. Paul chapter of The Links, Inc., and a trustee of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota. She was named, in 2016, one of the nation's Top 25 Disruptive Leaders working to close racial gaps by Living Cities; in 2017, one of *Twin Cities Business Magazine*'s 100 People to Know; and, in 2017, one of *Minnesota Business Magazine*'s Real Power 50.

**Marina Lyon** is head of content for Grow, a financial technology company based in San Francisco. She directed the Carl and Eloise Pohlad Family Foundation and the community involvement and giving of Marquette Financial Companies from 1998 to December 2015. Between 1998 and 2002, she also directed the work of the Minnesota Twins Community Fund.

Prior to joining the Pohlad Foundation, Lyon worked at Piper Jaffray Companies as director, Foundations and Government Relations; at the McKnight Foundation as a program officer; and at the Citizens League as a researcher. She has B.A. and J.D. degrees from the University of Minnesota.

**Ann Mulholland** is vice president of community impact for Minnesota Philanthropy Partners, a philanthropic network that includes The Saint Paul Foundation and Minnesota Community Foundation. In this role, she works to ensure that Minnesota Philanthropy Partners' resources support nonprofit organizations and community efforts that build community capacity. She also strives to partner and lead on priority community issues.

Prior to joining Minnesota Philanthropy Partners in 2010, Mulholland spent five years serving as Saint Paul's deputy mayor.

She serves on a number of community boards and initiatives, including The Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood, Generation Next, East Metro Strong, Minneapolis Saint Paul Workforce Innovation Network, MinneMinds, The Nature Conservancy and the Minnesota Wild Foundation. She has a B.A. from Indiana University in telecommunications and political science.

## Background

Since September 2015, the Civic Caucus has been undertaking a review of the quality of Minnesota's past, present and future public-policy process for anticipating, defining and resolving major community problems. On Nov. 27, 2016, the Caucus issued its report based on that review,  *Looking Back, Thinking Ahead: Strengthening Minnesota's Public-Policy Process*. The Civic Caucus interviewed

Tawanna Black, Marina Lyon and Ann Mulholland to hear their reactions to the report and their ideas on how to implement its recommendations.

All three have been interviewed previously by the Civic Caucus. See Black's Aug. 19, 2016, interview, "[Foundation collaborative aims to change the way philanthropy works in North Minneapolis](#)" ; Lyon's Jan. 29, 2016, group interview, "[What's old can be new: Learn from past success to produce sound new policy proposals](#)" ; and Mulholland's May 6, 2016, interview, "[The community knows best: foundations should invest in building the community's capacity to solve problems.](#)"

## Discussion

### *Marina Lyon's opening remarks.*

**The  November 2016 Civic Caucus report on improving Minnesota's public-policy process is the right way to go, especially on the process.** Former foundation executive Marina Lyon praised the report and suggested several possible additions.

- Things are very different from the 1980s, when Lyon worked at the Citizens League. Foundations have become much more involved in public policy themselves, she said. "We're in a different time, with very different leadership—and not just at the national level."
- A lot of people get into policy because they have one thing that matters to them and that seems to rise above all. "I don't know how many generalists there are, but I still am a huge fan of them," she said. People are inundated with information today. "So, it's even more important to have people come and be willing to put aside whatever it is they came with and listen."
- So many foundations are very involved in policymaking and trying to be involved in other aspects of it, Lyon said. "That's not a bad thing, it's a good thing. But their voice maybe should be at the table." Perhaps the Civic Caucus, she suggested, should ask foundations to send someone to the table to participate—not as their representative, but as someone who might have a different experience. But there should be one degree of separation. People shouldn't come representing the foundations, because that would limit their participation. Most of the foundations wouldn't want that, either.

There are people from diverse organizations who have some experience in public affairs. "Having them experience the Citizen's League's process would be a very good thing," she said. "And it would bring different voices to the table at the same time."

- Partner with a group like [College Possible](#) , a Minnesota-based organization that has now expanded to five other states. Founded in 2000, it makes college admission and success possible for low-income students through an intensive curriculum of coaching and support. "They help an enormous group of very diverse, very bright students," Lyon said, "and many go to colleges around here."

She suggested inviting the group's founder and CEO, Jim McCorkell, to the Civic Caucus to get more information about the organization. "A separate group of college students could certainly add to the process," Lyon said. "It would give an entirely different perspective."

- Lyon noted the importance of the Citizens League board's involvement when she worked there. And she said the League's program committee process was central: developing the charge to the study committee, being very specific about what issues the League was trying to get at.

### **Tawanna Black's opening remarks.**

**Don't underestimate the power of foundations to bring a different lens to policymakers about the interconnection among issues.** Tawanna Black of the Northside Funders Group said that's true because grantmakers change their focus areas often. "A funder today that's focused on education and economics might be focused on arts and health in five or seven years," she said. "While for grantees that can be bad, what it can mean for the partnership between the philanthropic sector and the public sector is a lot of information and being able to see the connections among areas that on the ground can seem very different and disparate. For a grantmaker, it can seem like there are a lot of connection points."

Working on the Northside with low-income people, Black said, it's obvious that their lives are not in silos. "They don't experience health and unemployment separately. The issues are connected. They don't experience education, workforce and unemployment separately. They don't experience the barriers of transportation and food separately. They experience those things together, so you need to solve for them at the same time."

Foundations often have deep knowledge bases about the intersection of these issues and solutions, she continued. "They have seen nonprofits solve them together. They've seen churches and faith groups solve for those things together. They have different perspectives, because often the public sector has not been pushed to solve problems together, across departments or across geographical boundaries from cities to counties to states. Because of their resources, the public sector can afford to solve them in silos. There are massive departments that have been allowed to solve problems with massive layers for a long time."

She advised the Civic Caucus to think about the knowledge that foundations could bring to the table.

**Foundations have the ability to bring resources for applied research to department heads and to staff, who often have to implement the strategies, the policies, and the goals that policymakers have decided.** Black noted that Gov. Mark Dayton established a goal that the workforce of the State of Minnesota should reflect the diversity of the state's population. "He created a Diversity and Inclusion Council and staff positions, but no one knew what it would actually take to achieve that or if it was even possible," she said.

She said through funding from the McKnight Foundation and MSPWin (a regional workforce funders collaborative), consulting teams from the Carlson School at the University of Minnesota are working with the Diversity and Inclusion Council to help advance workforce goals. "The team came back quickly with a lot of excellent data that has helped make the goal tangible," Black said. "That's a resource foundations have at our fingertips all the time, but we often don't think of making it accessible to the public sector or think that the public sector needs it or has the capacity to act on it in real time."

The Civic Caucus could challenge foundations to better leverage their resources in financial, social and intellectual capital as integrated resources within and alongside the public sector, she said. "We have these resources and often deploy them for nonprofit organizations. But in this era, as many federal and state resources that have been available to address these issues are likely to shrink, those are opportunities that philanthropy can bring to bear."

**How do you give a seat at the table to folks who often don't have one?** Black said it's important for philanthropy to have a seat, because foundations have learned some things. "Government initiatives often have a seven-year or 10-year horizon," she said, "where foundations often make a two-year or three-year commitment, so there's an opportunity to bridge that gap. There's also an opportunity for philanthropy to identify people to be engaged in that work who otherwise wouldn't know how to get to the table."

Black called the equity appropriation the Legislature made last year "two steps forward and three steps to the left." Even though it resulted in some good allocations to good programs, "we're not in a better position as a state to address the devastating racial and economic inequities than we were before those investments, especially when you consider the number of grant programs that were discontinued in communities of color and the structure of several appropriations."

She asked how the philanthropic and public sectors can partner in ways to build new relationships and build stronger coalitions that last beyond a legislative cycle. "I think that's something there's an appetite for," she said.

"Corporate philanthropy is a way to weave in private-sector leaders," Black continued. "I didn't see as much of that noted in your report's recommendations. You should think about the diversity within the field of philanthropy. Don't forget the corporate sector and their ability to engage in ways that are different and unique from the community and family foundations." More and more, companies are trying to connect their corporate goals to their corporate foundations. As examples, she cited the health-related foundation of Blue Cross and Blue Shield and investments in workforce development and small business development by Xcel Energy.

#### *Ann Mulholland's opening remarks.*

**Our very democracy is at risk.** According to Ann Mulholland of Minnesota Philanthropy Partners, we're at a unique moment. "The basis of how public policy is made is at risk," she said. "Citizen participation is at risk, as shown in situations like having voice when there's a debate at the Capitol over who pays for public safety at a protest. If there was ever a moment to pause and reflect on where you have been, where you are going and where you're putting your energy, it's now. It's time to get grounded in democracy again."

**We all need to spend time and energy in root causes.** Mulholland agrees with that notion from the Civic Caucus report. She said there are a time and a place for (1) dealing with basic needs, such as food and shelter; (2) teaching and informing folks how to "swim"—how to prevent big, catastrophic issues from happening in their lives; and (3) dealing with root causes.

"That's where the Civic Caucus is deeply rooted," she continued, "and I appreciate that you're in that space. We, as a foundation, believe that we have a role in all three of those spaces." She said we shouldn't write off victims of a system that hasn't been serving them so that they've ended up in a very challenging place. Dealing with basic needs is important.

**It is important that philanthropy be involved in all three areas of need.**

Mulholland said there is merit in building stronger and better food shelves that are more culturally appropriate. They must get the right kind of food in the right way to the people who need it most. "There is merit in philanthropy being in and remaining in that space of addressing basic needs," she said.

And there is merit in requests like those from College Possible, [The Sanneh Foundation](#) and many other organizations that are teaching, mentoring and working hard to eliminate disparities in opportunity by lifting people up and helping them find a better path, she continued.

And finally, there is merit in systems change, like the work to reform our outdated workforce system. "At MSPWin (a funders collaborative), we are supporting a legislative agenda that would align the state's Workforce Development Fund toward outcomes rather than programs," she said. "We should be thinking about targeting those funds to support those who are in need of work with specific training for the jobs our community needs to fill—that is, what the market is looking for. Shouldn't we bring those two things closer together and redesign how our Workforce Development Fund is functioning?"

**The Census is vital.** Mulholland said we ought not ignore the upcoming Census, because public policy, public resources and representation are driven by the outcomes of the Census. "That it is all going online should not be lost on any of us," she said. "There are positives and negatives to that. I have great fears about communities that may be left out. We need to pay attention and be sure we are supporting efforts to get full participation."

**Questions and Discussion.**

**Are there cases where a small group of people has changed public policy and made a difference in society?** An interviewer asked that question. Mulholland cited the example of the City of Saint Paul revising last fall the makeup of the Civilian Review Board that monitors the Police Department. Following the revision, no police officers serve on the board.

She said at first, the votes for the revision weren't there on the Saint Paul City Council. A small group of citizens organized at the neighborhood level and was able to convince two members of the City Council, both of whom had been endorsed by the police union, to change their votes, so the revision passed.

Lyon brought up new rules in the securities industry about putting client interests first and eliminating conflicts of interests on corporate boards. Now people are calling for removing conflicts of interests on all kinds of boards, whether private or public. A former Citizens League researcher, Lyon said that was a hallmark of the Citizens League in earlier times. "We didn't allow that on League study committees," she said. "It didn't happen." People with special interests on a topic weren't allowed on study committees. Instead, the committees brought them in as resource people to speak to the

committees. The Citizens League wanted people to come to the study committees with open minds to listen and learn.

Lyon said the Citizens League is a bit different now. Now, it likes having people with expertise in issues on the study committees to build consensus. "I can't disagree with that," she said, "but their credibility is hurt in the long term. The process the Citizens League used to have was much more authentic and much more real. You can find lots of people without conflicts who are willing to sit at the table."

Black cited the example of MN Girls Are Not for Sale, a Minnesota Women's Foundation campaign to stop sex trafficking in Minnesota. The Women's Foundation stepped up and put money up for a five-year campaign. "This is a great example of a foundation stepping in and challenging the state to meet the foundation's investment," Black said. "Police departments across the state are proactively arresting people who are sex traffickers because of this foundation's work."

**Are there existing groups that are sufficiently diverse, comprised of generalists without special interests, and getting at root causes, not symptoms?** An interviewer asked that question, saying the speakers had laid out those three conditions for the kind of group that might really make an impact on public policy. Is it the business community or the academic community? Who comes closest?

Lyon responded that she'd "have to think long and hard about a group where you could find all three of those conditions." She said perhaps the Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota would be willing to propose something with those elements.

Mulholland said the Itasca Project has tried to meet those conditions, especially in its earliest days, but it probably hasn't met the condition of having sufficient diversity. She also named the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood. "It's made up of people who are among those most impacted and is focused on root causes," she said. But she wondered if those people would be considered generalists.

**Home life for the majority of American kids is seriously defective in healthy growth physically, emotionally and intellectually.** An interviewer made that remark and said these deficiencies have driven up the costs of primary and secondary education. He said the Minneapolis School District is spending \$20,000 per student this year. The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (formerly MnSCU) spends one-fourth of its instructional budget teaching remedial classes.

"What goes on at home is considered private," the interviewer said, "and then we have to pick up the pieces. The schools can't go back to root causes and we can't hold them accountable for making a difference other than just giving them more money."

He said the University of Minnesota "does not deliver the goods. We just give it the money and hope for the best. There's no accountability. We're almost falling behind while the world is moving ahead in destructive ways."

Black responded by saying, "It's one by one. It's each human being. I don't need a program or a law passed to tell me I need to care differently. I just need to do it. At some point, we stop expecting 'them' to change and realize the change can start with one individual caring enough to engage with a parent

and help him or her approach a child's education in a different way." Black said this also means that a parent has the ability to approach a teacher and encourage that teacher to approach educating children differently.

There are some programs that are starting to change that, she said, like the Northside Achievement Zone. "They're intervening with parents and teaching them they have to do some things differently. Some things have to shift at home and at school." She said there's also a problem with teacher bias. Teachers who expect poor performance of certain kids and then teach to that expectation must be taught how to recognize that bias and shift their expectations.

Lyon agreed and said there's not a policy solution to the problem. Often you're dealing with a system that's protecting its organization and its members, who are going to do anything to stop something that doesn't serve their interests.

Mulholland said she doesn't think the issue is about parenting alone. "Some of the root causes of what's happening in K-12 education have nothing to do with parenting, but rather conditions parents are dealing with," she said. "When there are 16,000 Minnesota children who are precariously housed or homeless, I wouldn't advise a parent to put education first. I would advise that parent to put housing first. When parents are struggling with housing and a good job, it's impossible to put what happens in the school day first."

She noted that Saint Paul's Promise Neighborhood was given an additional 50 vouchers for rental housing. When the organization tracked the families, it found that one child went from being two grades behind in reading to two grades above in one school year. The child went from missing 50 to 60 school days in a year to less than 11, because he had a bed to sleep in.

"If you want to focus on root causes, I wouldn't start with the parents alone," Mulholland said. "I would look at the conditions parents are facing. We have to ask ourselves, 'What are the conditions we're accepting as a society?'"

**A big issue is the allocation of resources at every level.** An interviewer made that comment and said there is also institutional lag and institutional inertia. "We have large higher education institutions acting without much regard for what's going on in the community," he said. "They want to protect what they have."

The University of Minnesota and Minnesota State put in budget requests to the Legislature without any reference to public schools or to any kind of partnership, he said. "School districts are looking only at their own district. At what point do they consider the whole community? That's where some external organizing should take place—to put pressure on those institutions and the Legislature to consider more the community interest."

Mulholland responded that positive things are happening in both the Saint Paul and Minneapolis school districts. She said there is an aging teaching force in Saint Paul and a need to recruit teachers who represent the district's students, who are incredibly diverse and speak 80 languages.

To aid with finding such teachers, she said, the Saint Paul District has partnered with the University of St. Thomas. The district identified 25 of its own employees, who are very diverse and represent the

district's students. The 25 employees are going through a teaching program at St. Thomas, where they get scholarships and extra support. When they complete the program, the district will immediately hire them as teachers.

Mulholland said the University of Minnesota is doing the same thing with the Minneapolis School District. "Those are the moments where our higher education institutions are paying attention and they're acting like their customers are the K-12 systems," she said. "That just gives me hope."

**How do we show people that democracy works in the current political climate?** An interviewer asked that question and said he's afraid that "people have given up on democracy." Mulholland responded that key issues are participation in democracy, voice, the ability to protest, the ability to be heard and the importance of the Census and how it drives public policy.

She feels the first page of the summary in the Civic Caucus Report made it sound like the change in demographics in Minnesota is a negative. "I believe it's a positive. We are a better community and we are a better country because of the richness of the people who live here. You need to embrace that. It's not about being tolerant; it's about embracing and hearing people differently. How people communicate and talk is different today. Protests are as much a part of democracy as anything else." She said when you hear debates at the state Capitol and at the federal level about limiting rights of protests and speech, "you should be scared and shaking in your shoes."

The protests at the Fourth Precinct police station in Minneapolis over the police shooting of Jamar Clark and the protests over the police shooting of Philando Castile were "needed and appropriate and just," Mulholland said. "The day we put limits on the rights of protesting, we are no longer the United States of America and the State of Minnesota—no matter who's doing that protesting and whether we agree with them or not. I think that is at risk today, more than ever."

**Is Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone a good model to follow?** Responding to that interviewer question, Lyon said she believes the reason Canada has had the success he has had—in addition to having enormous amounts of money—is that he had a captive audience in a public housing project. "In many ways, he and the staff could control the environment," she said.

She said the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) in Minneapolis has faced a very different set of circumstances. In the Harlem project, there was no housing problem, since the participants lived in public housing. There is much more mobility among NAZ participants, so there is more turnover of kids in the program.

**Having a stretch goal you'll never reach is not a bad thing.** Lyon gave that response to an interviewer's question about whether producing goals—such as eliminating homelessness—is helping or hindering public-policy efforts. Lyon spoke of her 10 years on the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency (MHFA) board. "We could spend all the money that agency has and it won't end homelessness," she said. "There are things we can't end. We can make strides, but we can't end them. I think it's important to get people with mental illness or drug addictions off the street. There are existing programs that could help."

She said Cathy ten Broeke, State Director to Prevent and End Homelessness, is trying to make use of money and services that are already out there.

