NEWARK NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP RESILIENCE FUND

YEAR ONE · 2025–2026

Built With Newark.

Newark's philanthropic and nonprofit leaders came together to create a jointly governed fund focused on strengthening nonprofit leadership and organizational capacity.

This is what the first year produced.

NEWARK
NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP
RESILIENCE FUND

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As of 9/15/2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A fund Newark built together.

What Newark created. In 2025, Newark's philanthropic institutions and nonprofit executives established the Newark Nonprofit Leadership Resilience Fund — a jointly governed fund investing in nonprofit leadership and the organizational capacity that supports it.

What makes the Fund different. NNLRF elevates capacity strengthening from supplemental support to intentional philanthropic investment. The Fund was created with Newark's nonprofit sector: nonprofit leaders hold the majority of seats on the Governance Committee and share real authority over strategy, selection, and where the Fund invests.

What Year One accomplished. The Fund established its operating foundation, listened to Newark's leaders, identified its first investment priority, assembled the partners with the expertise to deliver on it, and launched its inaugural Community of Practice.

What Year One taught us. Newark's nonprofit leaders generally understand what strong governance looks like. The difficulty is sustaining it consistently — between meetings, across roles, and over time.

What comes next. The first initiative completes its evidence cycle at the January 2027 convening, learning extends more broadly across the ecosystem, and the Governance Committee shapes the next investment from sector priorities and Year One evidence.

YEAR ONE AT A GLANCE

$1.7M+	$285K	$120K	46	12	24
Committed to Date	Investment in the Board Transformation Community of Practice	Catalytic Implementation Grant Pool	Newark leaders Engaged	Inaugural Organizations	Paired Leaders

WHAT NEWARK BUILT

A fund created with the sector it serves.

Newark's nonprofits carry the city — its youth, its housing, its arts, its environment, its families. They have held through recessions, a pandemic, and decades of shifting public policy while continuing to deliver. That durability is Newark's asset, and it is where this Fund begins.

Philanthropy has long invested in the programs and outcomes Newark nonprofits deliver. NNLRF complements that investment by focusing directly on the leadership, governance, and organizational capacity that sustain those outcomes over time.

Strong governance helps organizations plan beyond the immediate term, prepare for financial disruption, support executive leadership, and sustain mission delivery through change. Leadership capacity is civic infrastructure.

Where the Fund began. NNLRF was created with a commitment to strengthening nonprofit leadership — board and staff — and the organizational conditions surrounding it. It was also designed to listen. Rather than opening with a fixed menu of programs, the Fund built an intentional process for Newark's nonprofit sector to help identify where investment could be most catalytic.

Built with the sector, from the start. Nonprofit executives and philanthropic partners developed this Fund together. Its priorities, values, and approach came out of sector conversations across 2023–2025, before there was a name on a grant agreement. Willow Bees Group serves as fund administrator, coordinating implementation, Governance Committee support, and partner delivery.

Why governance came first. Six listening sessions with 46 executives and board members produced one consistent finding, and the Fund's first initiative answers it directly. Governance is where NNLRF started. It is not the boundary of its purpose.

Philanthropy has long funded Newark's programs.
This Fund invests in what holds them up.

SHARED GOVERNANCE

Governed together.

The Fund's most consequential Year One decision was about who decides. In November 2025, NNLRF seated a Governance Committee of Newark funders and nonprofit executives with authority over strategy, selection, and investment priorities. Nonprofit leaders hold the majority of its seats.

PHILANTHROPIC PARTNERS

Four seats

Jared Boone
Schumann Fund for New Jersey

René Deida
Prudential Foundation

Sharnita C. Johnson
Victoria Foundation

Aaron Turner
Community Foundation of New Jersey

NONPROFIT LEADERS

Five seats — the majority

Nayibe Capellan
Programs for Parents

Mark Comesañas
Newark Opportunity Youth Network

Vesta Godwin Clark
St. James Social Service Corporation

Peter Rosario
La Casa de Don Pedro

Khaatim Sherrer El
Clinton Hill Community Action

Staffed by Willow Bees Group · Nicole Butler, Fund Lead · Kareem Willis, Ph.D., Project Manager

The Governance Committee has decision-making authority over Fund strategy, selection, and investment priorities. Newark nonprofit executives and philanthropic partners exercise that authority together.

Community voice sits inside the decision.

WHY IT MATTERS

- **Accountability to Newark.** Capital decisions answer to people who live with the results.
- **Community voice in capital allocation.** Newark's perspective sits inside allocation decisions rather than being consulted about them afterward.
- **Shared learning and stewardship.** Funders and practitioners see the same evidence at the same table, and direction holds through staff changes because authority rests with a governing body.

THE INVESTMENT THESIS

What we invest in, how we work, and what we seek to strengthen.

NNLRF invests in the conditions that allow strong nonprofit organizations to lead and deliver on their missions. The areas below describe where the Fund can invest as sector needs emerge, rather than a menu fixed at founding.

WHAT WE INVEST IN

- Board leadership and governance
- Executive leadership
- Succession planning
- Financial sustainability
- Fundraising and resource development
- Organizational capacity

HOW WE WORK

- Communities of Practice
- Peer learning
- Convenings
- Coaching
- Catalytic capital
- Cross-sector partnerships

WHAT WE SEEK TO STRENGTHEN

- Stronger nonprofit organizations
- Greater organizational resilience
- Stronger leadership
- Shared sector learning
- A stronger Newark nonprofit ecosystem

Governance became the first investment because Newark's leaders named it — and because it sits upstream of much else. Boards set strategy, steward finances, hire and support the executive, and carry continuity through transition. Strengthening governance first creates conditions the other areas depend on.

WHAT NEWARK TOLD US

Governance is understood. Sustaining it is the work.

In March 2026, at the Fund's public launch, BoardSource facilitated six listening sessions with 46 Newark nonprofit leaders — 28 executive directors and CEOs, and 18 board members. The question: what does strong governance look like, and what makes it hard to practice consistently?

> Board members and executive directors share an aligned definition of governance: strategic leadership, an effective board–CEO partnership, and stewardship of mission and community impact. Setting direction alone emerged repeatedly across the sessions.

WHERE PRACTICE STRAINS

- Momentum is strong in board meetings and fades between them.
- A small group carries most of the work because engagement varies.
- Information and expectations are shared unevenly across the board and CEO.
- Board decisions do not consistently translate into follow-through. Post-meeting follow-through surfaced as another recurring challenge across the sessions.

> “You're relying on a few people to keep things moving.”
>
> ~ Executive director/CEO, NNLRF listening sessions

Board members tend to describe governance by its structure — committees, roles, meeting decisions. Executive directors describe what it takes to make that structure work between meetings. Sustaining governance is a practice question, and practice changes through sustained support. That is what the Fund invested in first.

Read the full BoardSource findings ›

THE FUND'S FIRST INVESTMENT

The Board Transformation Community of Practice.

The Fund's first investment answers what Newark's leaders named. It goes deep with a limited number of organizations to make governance sustainable in daily practice.

What it is. A cohort-based Community of Practice grounded in BoardSource's Purpose-Driven Board Leadership framework. Each organization participates as a pair — Executive Director or CEO alongside Board Chair — through collective learning sessions, learning pods, and one-on-one consultant support.

What organizations receive. A Governance Deepening Fund of $120,000 is available to participating organizations. Each organization may apply for a grant of up to $10,000 to support implementation of priorities identified through its board action plan. Leadership Newark provides board development training and Board Match & Connect to strengthen board capacity and composition alongside the cohort work.

THE ARC OF THE ENGAGEMENT

01 Kickoff

Consultant matching, learning pods, and the learning calendar.

02 Assess

A full board self-assessment surfaces each governance picture.

03 Plan

Boards build action plans with consultant support.

04 Convene

A January 2027 convening closes the cycle and measures what changed.

What NNLRF will measure. By January 2027, participating boards will have completed a governance baseline, identified organization-defined priorities, developed an action plan, deployed catalytic capital against those priorities, and documented early changes in governance practice.

> “Honest is better than enthusiastic. This is not an exam — it is a partnership.”
>
> The stance the cohort was designed around — grounded in the wisdom organizations already hold.

THE FUND'S FIRST INVESTMENT · PARTNERS IN THE WORK

Complementary expertise, assembled around one problem.

NNLRF did not build this initiative alone. Each partner brings a distinct capability, and together they cover the full arc of the work.

BoardSource

Governance expertise and assessment framework.

Facilitated the listening sessions, provides governance training, and anchors the cohort in the Purpose-Driven Board Leadership framework and board self-assessment.

Nonprofit Professionals of Color Collective (NPPOC)

Cohort facilitation and individualized consulting.

Leads collective learning sessions and learning pods, and provides one-on-one consultant support to each participating organization, representing 144+ hours of consulting support across the cohort.

Leadership Newark

Board development training, recruitment and matching.

Provides board development training and delivers Board Match & Connect, strengthening the composition of participating boards alongside the governance work.

Willow Bees Group

Fund administration, coordination, and implementation.

Serves as Fund administrator, staffs the Governance Committee, and coordinates implementation and delivery across partners.

The Fund's role is to assemble and coordinate. Newark already holds the governance expertise, the facilitation capacity, the board pipeline, and the organizations doing the work — NNLRF brought them to the same problem at the same time, with capital behind them.

THE INAUGURAL COHORT

Twelve organizations at the center of the work.

Selected through a trust-based process designed as a search rather than a competition. Each organization joined by board resolution, with both its chief executive and board chair committed to the work.

Brothers Building A Better Nation
Quadeer Porter

Greater Newark Conservancy
Wilson Cano

Ironbound Community Corporation
Hazel Applewhite

La Casa de Don Pedro, Inc.
Peter T. Rosario

Lincoln Park Coast Cultural District
Anthony Smith

New Community Corporation
Simone Gagneron

Newark Symphony Hall
Talia L. Young

Newark Youth Career Pathways
Kaleena Berryman

St. James Social Service Corporation
Vesta Godwin Clark

South Ward Environmental Alliance
Kim Gaddy

The Gem Project, Inc.
Amanda Ebokosia

Unified Vailsburg Services Organization
Arthur J. Mockabee

A paired commitment. Governance does not transform when only one seat is in the room. Twenty-four senior leaders entered the work together — a deliberate test of whether governance change holds better when executive and board leadership move as a pair.

YEAR ONE

What Year One accomplished.

In twelve months, NNLRF moved from an idea shared among Newark's leaders to an operating fund making its first investment in Newark organizations.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Created a community-led philanthropic fund for Newark's nonprofit sector
- Established shared governance, with nonprofit leaders holding the majority of seats
- Engaged 46 Newark nonprofit leaders across six listening sessions
- Identified the Fund's first investment priority from what the sector named
- Assembled three delivery partners with complementary expertise
- Selected 12 organizations and 24 paired executive and board leaders
- Launched the inaugural Board Transformation Community of Practice
- Committed $285,000 to the inaugural Board Transformation Community of Practice
- Established an additional $120,000 of catalytic capital with participating organizations eligible to apply for grants up to $10,000
- Established a baseline for learning and evaluation

THE YEAR, IN MOTION

NOV 2025
Full Governance Committee established

MAR 28, 2026
Public launch and BoardSource listening sessions

MAY 2026
Inaugural cohort selected

JUN 9, 2026
Cohort kickoff at Equal Space

SUMMER 2026
Board self-assessments (baseline)

FALL 2026
Action planning and catalytic capital process

JAN 2027
Culminating convening and remeasurement

The order mattered. Governance came first, because a fund that disburses before settling how it decides spends its first year improvising. Partnerships, operating systems, and evaluation followed, then the cohort. Year One produced a cohort — and the system that makes the cohorts after it possible.

HOW WE WILL LEARN

Outcomes will be measured, not asserted.

The cohort launched in June 2026. Its results are not yet available, and the Fund will not claim them before the evidence is in. The framework separates what NNLRF controls, what it seeks to influence, and what it contributes toward, so no claim outruns its evidence.

DIRECT OUTPUTS

What NNLRF controls

Cohort participation, coaching delivered, action plans developed, Governance Deepening Fund grant applications, awards, and deployment, and Board Match & Connect placements.

Trackable now.

NEAR-TERM OUTCOMES

What NNLRF seeks to influence

Board–executive alignment, governance practices adopted, board composition, and implementation of board-defined priorities.

Measured baseline-to-close at the January 2027 convening.

LONG-TERM CONTRIBUTION

What NNLRF contributes toward

Organizational resilience, ecosystem-level coordination and shared learning, and a healthier Newark nonprofit sector.

Years two and three, and beyond.

What partners will see in early 2027. A baseline-to-close comparison from the BoardSource self-assessment; the share of boards that completed action plans; how catalytic capital was deployed; and board-composition changes through Board Match & Connect. That evidence base is what shapes the Fund's next investment.

NNLRF does not claim to create organizational resilience alone. It works to strengthen the governance, leadership, and resource conditions that make resilience more possible.

WHAT COMES NEXT

What Year One positioned the Fund to do.

Three lines of work carry the Fund into its second year. Each traces back to what Newark's leaders named.

UNDERWAY

Complete the first evidence cycle

Catalytic capital deploys this fall, and the cohort remeasures at the January 2027 convening. Findings will refine the model before it is offered again.

IN DEVELOPMENT

Extend learning across the ecosystem

Broader opportunities for sector learning and connection across the six priority areas Newark named. Delivery approach and partners are being finalized.

BEING SHAPED

Develop the next investment

Leadership pipeline and succession surfaced as sector priorities, and executive transitions are among the moments organizations are most fragile. The Governance Committee is shaping this initiative now.

THE THREE-YEAR DIRECTION

YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO	YEAR THREE
Build + Launch	**Deepen + Expand**	**Institutionalize + Sustain**

We are here

> NNLRF will grow deliberately. Evidence from the first initiative, available funding, operating capacity, and Governance Committee oversight determine when and how additional investments advance.

THE INVITATION

What comes next is built on partnership.

As of September 2026, more than $1.7 million is committed by the founding funder collaborative. Year One produced the governance, systems, partnerships, and baseline evidence that make the next investments possible.

WHAT CONTINUED PARTNERSHIP MAKES POSSIBLE

- Catalytic capital deployed directly to Newark boards.
- Cohort delivery — learning, coaching, and peer community.
- Evaluation and shared learning available to the whole sector.
- Ecosystem programming across the six priority areas Newark named.

WHAT PARTNERS CAN EXPECT

- **Evidence, on schedule.** Baseline-to-close results following the January 2027 convening.
- **Disciplined growth.** New investments advance when funding, capacity, and quality conditions are met.
- **Continuity.** Governance, administration, and partner coordination remain in place as the Fund moves into its next phase.
- **Transparency.** Regular reporting on capital deployed, cohort progress, and what the Fund is learning.

FOUNDING PARTNERS

- Community Foundation of New Jersey · Prudential Foundation · Schumann Fund for New Jersey · The Henry S. & Agnes M. Truzack Foundation · Victoria Foundation

Join us.

To discuss partnership, contact the fund administrator at Willow Bees Group.

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