

# BROOKLYN ORG

## **The Foundation Of Our Future:** How Brooklyn Org Is Creating A New Philanthropic Model In The Heart Of NYC's Cultural Capital

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# Executive Summary

Brooklyn Org (BKO) is redefining community philanthropy with a democratic, resident-led model that aligns resources, skills, and power with neighborhood priorities. With an organizational transformation and rebranding launched in 2023, BKO is answering a funding gap that has persisted even as Brooklyn's economy, wealth, population, and cultural influence have surged. Through year-round engagement programs, including neighborhood listening events, community forums with elected officials, participatory grantmaking, and nonprofit capacity building, BKO translates community voice into community investment. BKO is the connective tissue of Brooklyn's nonprofit ecosystem, supporting community changemakers through block-by-block funding programs and through high-profile, boroughwide vehicles like the annual Brooklyn Org Spark Prize. With the federal pullback from funding essential services, Brooklyn Org's transformative model of mobilizing neighbors, businesses and donors to forge local solutions for local problems demonstrates how a reinvigorated community foundation model can meet the challenges of the next century.

# Acknowledgments

Brooklyn Org is grateful to the many people and partners who made this white paper possible—and who continue to advance a stronger, more equitable Brooklyn.

We begin by thanking the Brooklyn Org Board of Directors for their leadership, stewardship, and unwavering commitment to our mission. We are deeply grateful to the board members and staff, past and present, whose vision for a community foundation for New York City’s largest borough focused on justice and long-term community-led change has been our constant north star.

We are also deeply appreciative of Mother New York, whose pro bono work brought our new brand and visual identity to life with clarity, creativity, and care. Our thanks as well to Bennett Midland, the consultants who supported the development of our strategic plan and helped sharpen the direction that guides this work.

We extend heartfelt appreciation to all of Brooklyn Org partners — Donor Advised Fund holders, donors, nonprofits, institutions, businesses, government agencies, elected officials, and dedicated community members, whose leadership, generosity, and expertise inform and inspire our efforts every day, especially the partners highlighted in our case studies: The B.R.O. Experience, Good Call, Beyond Memorial, and Katrena Perou.

Any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of Brooklyn Org.

# 1. Introduction: From The Ground Up

Brooklyn, home to nearly three million people, has grown over recent decades to become a launch pad for ideas, culture, and enterprises that shape the globe. New York City's largest borough is defined by creativity, and pride of place that inspires the best and brightest from around the world to follow its lead. And Brooklyn Org (BKO) is its champion: an inclusive partner and platform for local philanthropy that gives everyone a role in creating change from the ground up.

Founded in 2009 as Brooklyn Community Foundation with assets stemming from the borough's oldest savings bank, Brooklyn Org is the first — and remains the only — public foundation solely dedicated to this storied community. With close to \$150 million in grantmaking to date, BKO is the borough's main mobilizer of local giving, with an eye toward long-term change.

Brooklyn Org's founders set out to correct a stark and persistent imbalance: while Brooklyn is home to nearly one-third of the city's population and one-third of its nonprofits, organizations based in the borough receive a surprisingly small share of New York City's charitable dollars — accounting for just 7.6% of charitable funding in 2019<sup>1</sup>. This philanthropic disparity mirrors a wider lack of attention paid to the borough from political and corporate leadership that focuses primarily on the city's traditional center in Manhattan.

Because of this ongoing underinvestment, Brooklyn has been ripe for new philanthropic leadership to leverage the borough's rapid growth in population, wealth, and economic activity. Despite Brooklyn's renaissance as a cultural and business powerhouse, neighborhoods across the borough continue to experience striking disparities in employment, health, and educational outcomes.

The evolution of Brooklyn Org reflects the ambition and influential power of the borough itself. Casting off the limitations of the traditional foundation, Brooklyn Org has embraced a new model for a community-led organization. The idea is simple: an organization that strives to touch the lives of everyone within the community, that seeks to serve the needs

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<sup>1</sup> Review of *New York City Nonprofit Data*. 2021. [marxe.baruch.cuny.edu](https://marxe.baruch.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2021/05/CNSM_Data_NYC-Nonprofit-Data-UpdateMay2021_Undercount.pdf). The Center for Nonprofit Strategy and Management (CNSM) in the Marxe School of Public and International Affairs at Baruch College. May 2021.

of the entire community. Brooklyn Org's success at expanding its programs, the reach of its fundraising, and connections with nonprofits shows that this ambitious task is not only achievable but can and should be replicated in communities across the United States.

Rather than a traditional top-down funding model, Brooklyn Org is a hub for investment that is a natural extension of the vitality of Brooklyn's communities. Brooklyn Org is offering every resident a path to become a changemaker in their own neighborhood — from volunteering and joining community conversations with local elected officials, to membership, small business partnerships, and Donor Advised Funds. This is work that BKO has been engaged with since its founding in 2009. The relaunch as Brooklyn Org in 2023 was designed to expand the scope of BKO's impact and broaden its base of potential supporters. Since 2019, the most recent year not impacted by the pandemic, Brooklyn Org has nearly doubled its assets under management to more than \$146 million in 2024 from \$74 million. Likewise, Brooklyn Org's annual grantmaking to nonprofits reached \$19.5 million in 2024, up from \$7.4 million in 2019.

Brooklyn Org is guided by a simple belief: **philanthropy should be democratic**. This is a renewal and recommitment to the core vision and mission that inspired BKO's founding 16 years ago. BKO's approach to engaging communities, highlighted by a participatory grantmaking model where funding decisions are driven by resident advisors, gives Brooklynites have a real seat at the table, ensuring that solutions are not imposed by distant institutions, but are developed and implemented by the people who know their communities best.

This white paper reflects Brooklyn Org's growth as a funder and track record of accomplishment as an incubator for innovative community programs and visionary leaders. This paper also lays out the vision for BKO's next chapter as an organization that continually adapts to meet the needs of the Brooklyn community.

And in this time of increasing political polarization, economic instability, and government funding cuts, Brooklyn Org launched the Brooklyn Backs Brooklyn campaign to build a movement of neighbors helping neighbors. When national solutions dissipate, local action becomes the most powerful tool for change. Brooklyn Backs Brooklyn is a rallying cry for inclusive, community-led philanthropy designed to meet the challenges of a booming, complex, and hopeful borough during a moment of national crisis and philanthropic retreat.

## Brooklyn Org's Deep Roots

Brooklyn Org's parent institution, the Independence Community Foundation, was born during the revival of Brooklyn as a cultural, artistic, and economic powerhouse that started in the 1990's. When Independence Community Bank, founded in Brooklyn in 1850, went public in 1998, it set aside 8% of the value of stock sold<sup>2</sup> to create a charitable arm serving Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. When the bank was purchased in 2006, the foundation's board, under the leadership of its Chairman Alan Fishman, adopted the community foundation model focused on supporting the growing momentum of a changing Brooklyn.

Brooklyn Community Foundation (BCF) officially launched in 2009, using the bank foundation's assets as base for grantmaking while appealing to old and new Brooklynites to increase public giving to and from the borough. BCF developed community foundation tools – a Donor Advised Fund program, strategic funding opportunities, and community engagement initiatives – to attract supporters; however, its base struggled to match the growth happening across the borough. The standard model that BCF was following did not reflect the opportunity, the need, or the ambition that defines Brooklyn today.

Following the seismic shift of the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial justice protests in response to the murder of George Floyd, BCF's leaders embarked on a necessary evolution to yield the kind of institution that the borough has so desperately needed. A new strategic plan and a new eye-catching brand designed by the Brooklyn-based global design firm Mother New York announced the foundation's transformation in the fall of 2023 into Brooklyn Org.

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<sup>2</sup> Ravo, Nick. "Depositors Hope for Windfall When Independence Savings Goes Public." *The New York Times*, February 26, 1998. <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/02/26/nyregion/depositors-hope-for-windfall-when-independence-savings-goes-public.html>.

## 2. The Opportunity: A Booming Borough With Global Influence

Brooklyn's surge to the forefront of the global conversation is undeniable. The borough's cultural and economic impact extends worldwide — Brooklyn sets the trend in food, music, art, and technology. The growing cultural cachet has run in parallel with a boom in the borough's population which increased by 9.1% between 2010 and 2020<sup>3</sup>, the highest growth rate of any borough.

New real estate development in Downtown Brooklyn, spurred by the construction of the Barclays Center and completion of Brooklyn Bridge Park, followed, resulting in an 11.4% increase in housing units in the borough from 2010 to 2024. Brooklyn's overall share of New York City's housing units increased from 29.3% in 2010 to 30% in 2024, the highest share of any borough in the city.<sup>4</sup>

Brooklyn has also experienced an impressive influx of business investment, particularly in the tech sector — where it is home to Etsy, Kickstarter, and Huga. From 2008 to 2019, Brooklyn saw an enormous 356% percent increase<sup>5</sup> in the number of tech startups opening for business — the second-highest increase in the country trailing only San Francisco.

### From 2010 to 2020, Brooklyn's:

Population Rose From  
2.465M To 2.736M<sup>6</sup>

Employment Grew  
By 47.5%<sup>7</sup>

Median Household  
Income Rose 67%<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Recent Trends and Impact of COVID-19 in Brooklyn | Office of the New York State Comptroller." May 2022. [www.osc.ny.gov. https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/osdc/recent-trends-and-impact-covid-19-brooklyn](https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/osdc/recent-trends-and-impact-covid-19-brooklyn).

<sup>4</sup> "Housing Production in New York City | Office of the New York State Comptroller." March 2025. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/report-24-2025.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Bowles, Jonathan, Eli Dvorkin, Naomi Sharp, and Charles Shaviro. 2019. "Brooklyn's Growing Innovation Economy | Center for an Urban Future (CUF)." Center for an Urban Future (CUF). June 2019. <https://nycfuture.org/research/brooklyns-growing-innovation-economy>.

<sup>6</sup> "2020 Census Results for New York City Key Population & Housing Characteristics." 2021. *NYC.gov*. NYC Department of City Planning. [https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/planning-level/nyc-population/census2020/dcp\\_2020-census-briefing-booklet-1.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/planning-level/nyc-population/census2020/dcp_2020-census-briefing-booklet-1.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> "DiNapoli: Brooklyn Leads NYC's Economic Recovery | Office of the New York State Comptroller." 2022. *www.osc.ny.gov*. NY Office of the State Comptroller. May 23, 2022. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/press/releases/2022/05/dinapoli-brooklyn-leads-nycs-economic-recovery>.

<sup>8</sup> "Table Data - Estimate of Median Household Income for Kings County, NY | FRED | St. Louis Fed." 2023. Federal Reserve Economic Data. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. 2023. <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/data/MHINY36047A052NCEN>.

At the same time, born out of renewed energy in the borough and a determination to see progress made on long-term challenges, Brooklyn’s nonprofit landscape has expanded rapidly, with the number of nonprofits increasing by 38% and nonprofit spending increasing by 55% from 2011 to 2021.<sup>9</sup> Thousands of organizations — large and small — work daily to strengthen neighborhoods and respond to urgent needs. From immigrant rights groups to food pantries, from youth mentorship programs to cultural councils, Brooklyn’s nonprofit community is as dynamic as the borough itself.

This explosion of civic energy has created extraordinary opportunities for investment. Brooklyn has the people, the ideas, and the infrastructure to become a model for urban equity and resilience. But opportunity alone is not enough — without strategic philanthropy to match, the borough risks leaving too many of its residents behind.

### **3. The Challenge: A Mismatch Between Growth And Community Investment**

Even as vast new investments have flowed into development and private enterprises, many Brooklyn communities face entrenched inequalities. While Brooklyn’s median household income is about even with the citywide income level at more than \$79,000 per year, residents in many parts of the borough are struggling. The poverty rate in many Brooklyn neighborhoods exceeds the citywide average (18.2%<sup>10</sup>) — and it is much higher in neighborhoods like Brownsville (32.4%), Borough Park (26.6%), and Coney Island (26.3%).

Meanwhile, the median income in once working-class neighborhoods has increased dramatically in tandem with an extended burst of real estate development. Since 2000, median income has spiked by 102% in Fort Greene, where it is now \$156,870; in Park Slope, median income has increased by 66% to \$165,910<sup>11</sup>. Rapid growth has contributed to an affordability crisis where families are priced out of neighborhoods that they have called home for generations. The housing affordability burden both highlights and compounds other urgent challenges that persist in many neighborhoods.

Despite strong job and economic growth, Brooklyn’s overall unemployment rate stood at 6.8% in 2022, higher than the citywide rate of 5.7%, and the second highest among the five

<sup>9</sup> “NCCS ‘Core’ Data Catalog.” 2015. Urban.org. 2015. <https://nccs.urban.org/nccs/catalogs/catalog-core.html>.

<sup>10</sup> “Brooklyn Neighborhood Profile,” furmancenter.org (NYU Furman Center, May 8, 2025), <https://furmancenter.org/neighborhoods/view/brooklyn>.

<sup>11</sup> “Brooklyn Neighborhood Profile,” furmancenter.org

boroughs behind The Bronx<sup>12</sup>. In certain neighborhoods, the rate is even higher, like Brownsville and East New York, where it has been more than 10% and 9.7% respectively. The rent burden and gaps in employment rates and overall wealth contribute to wider stresses on people living in some Brooklyn neighborhoods. According to city health statistics, adults with low household income (under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level) experience serious psychological distress at a rate of about 18%, compared to 5% for those with higher household income. Adults who were unable to pay rent or mortgage had a 20% prevalence of serious psychological distress, compared to roughly 10% among those who could meet their monthly rent<sup>13</sup>. As recently as 2024<sup>14</sup>, The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene identified special high-need neighborhoods in Central Brooklyn where child and adolescent mental health services are especially under-resourced.

These challenges are affecting who calls Brooklyn home. The 2020 Census showed that Brooklyn's Black population had declined by 69,370, an 8.7% drop, compared to 2010. In 2000, Black people accounted for 34.4% of the borough's population; as of 2023, that figure had dropped to just 26.2%.

These same pressures affect local nonprofit organizations that are struggling to retain space and staff. Lacking the kind of strategic resources to withstand these economic changes, many frontline organizations — the very groups best positioned to create lasting change — face the threat of displacement. Many Brooklyn residents, meanwhile, are unaware of how central these nonprofits are to the health and stability of their neighborhoods. As a result, Brooklyn has lacked the philanthropic infrastructure to ensure that the borough's surge in prosperity translates into progress for all Brooklynites.

## 4. The Solution: A Big Idea For Brooklyn

Brooklyn Org's model of philanthropy begins with a simple conviction: every Brooklynite deserves a seat at the table. This is the guiding force behind Brooklyn Org's comprehensive strategic plan launched in 2023 that charts a bold course for the coming years, anchored by two overarching goals:

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<sup>12</sup> US Census Bureau. "American Community Survey (ACS)." The United States Census Bureau, 2018-2022. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs.html>.

<sup>13</sup> "Social Determinants of Mental Health among New York City Adults." NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, November 2023. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/databrief139.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> "2024 Annual Report - Critical Gaps in the Mental Health Care System in New York City." NYC Mayor's Office Of Community Mental Health, February 2024. <https://mentalhealth.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2024-OCMH-Annual-Report.pdf>.

## **BUILD THE CAPACITY AND POWER OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT SERVE BROOKLYN**

For many years, Brooklyn nonprofits — particularly emerging grassroots organizations — faced significant barriers to accessing philanthropic support. Grant cycles were limited, applications were cumbersome, and essential capacity-building resources were often unavailable to the informal community groups that need support the most.

Brooklyn Org has fundamentally changed that landscape by shifting from transactional grantmaking to transformative partnership. BKO has expanded access to funding by streamlining applications and eliminating application deadlines so organizations can apply at any time of the year. Microgrants and collaborative funding streams mean that even volunteer-run community groups can get well-deserved recognition. Funding decisions are now rooted in neighborhood-level data and community insight, ensuring that resources reach where they are most needed. At the same time, BKO strengthened the borough's nonprofit ecosystem through free, year-round capacity-building programs designed to improve organizational resilience, elevate storytelling, and attract new sources of support.

The increase in BKO's reach, and in nonprofits interest in receiving support, has been tremendous. In 2024, BKO received 872 grant applications, up from 228 in 2019, an increase of 282%.

## **ACTIVATE AND MOBILIZE MORE RESOURCES TO EXPAND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

Brooklyn Org aims to become a household name. Grounded in consumer and market research, its rebrand challenges perceptions of philanthropy as elitist and positions BKO as approachable and inclusive. Its website, [Brooklyn.org](https://brooklyn.org), is a hub for Brooklynites to learn about local issues and the nonprofits addressing them. Through stories of neighbors helping neighbors and a calendar of community events, BKO invites all Brooklynites to be part of strengthening their borough.

Partnerships with government and major institutions raise visibility and channel more resources to Brooklyn. A new Emergency Fund enables rapid crisis response. BKO is also leveraging its endowment to advance an investment approach aligned with community values. This dual strategy — mobilizing giving and aligning investments — positions Brooklyn Org as both an advocate and an engine for systemic change. BKO is not only raising money; it is transforming how money moves to and through Brooklyn.

# By The Numbers

Comparing The Last Typical Pre-Covid Year At Brooklyn Community Foundation  
To The Most Recent Full Year Dataset From Brooklyn Org

## Impact

2019 2024

### ASSETS UNDER MANAGEMENT (AUM)



### DAF FEES



### CONTRIBUTED REVENUE



### TOTAL GRANTMAKING (Inclusive Of Donor Advised Funds & Strategic Grants)



0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

## Participation

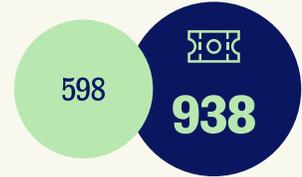
2019 2024



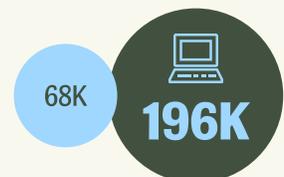
GRANT APPLICATIONS RECEIVED  
+282%



GRANTS MADE WITH  
COMMUNITY ADVISORS  
+592%



MAJOR EVENT ATTENDANCE  
+57%



WEBSITE VISITORS  
+188%



DONOR ADVISED FUNDS  
+104%



## 5. Listening As Strategy: From Community Voice To Community Investment

Listening to the people in Brooklyn's diverse communities sits at the heart of Brooklyn Org's work. In a borough and city filled with incredible civic groups, Brooklyn Org is the only independent organization dedicated to lifting up the voices of all Brooklynites. Bringing residents, elected officials, and community leaders together in conversation is a critical component of Brooklyn Org's evolution.

In 2022, the organization launched an unprecedented cycle of ongoing listening, visiting 27 neighborhoods in three years, hearing hundreds of voices to identify priorities and emerging challenges. The first cycle of listening tours was completed in 2024, and the second cycle began promptly in 2025. BKO's commitment in launching the listening tours is not only to identify top concerns — placing issues like food insecurity, the need for youth development opportunities, and expanding public space, alongside wider concerns like immigration and community safety — but ensure all of a community's voices help to directly shape investments.

The insights gathered inform tangible outcomes such as the **Neighborhood Collective Impact** grants launched in 2024. These multi-partner neighborhood-focused investments are designed to meet needs identified by residents themselves and reflect BKO's commitment to going beyond community consultation. BKO also supports small and early-stage neighborhood organizations through a **Microgrant** program. Designed to help organizations with annual budgets below \$100,000, grants of up to \$10,000 are made twice a year. Combined, these investments embody a **full cycle of accountability to neighborhood solutions** and demonstrate how Brooklyn Org aims to translate community voice into community power.

Brooklyn Org expands upon its unique position as the only independent organization dedicated to amplifying the voices of Brooklyn's residents. In 2025, Brooklyn Org led the charge in organizing **The People's Pulse**, a citywide survey to identify city residents' most pressing concerns and immediate hopes for the city in a municipal election year.

BKO hosted a pair of town hall discussions led by nonprofit leaders that engaged elected officials with the findings of the People's Pulse survey. The **Brooklyn Org Community Forums** provided community residents with an opportunity during a critical municipal election year to elevate the issues most relevant to their lives with leaders who can deliver change. The survey and forums demonstrate how Brooklyn Org has worked to deliver new

resources and capacity support to help nonprofits identify and meet the needs of Brooklynites. These efforts to elevate the voices of Brooklyn residents reflect the core belief that philanthropy must be shaped not by distant decision-makers but by those who live the issues every day.

“I have been trying to articulate just how good [the Brooklyn Org Community Forum] was. We need more of this. There is a benefit to bringing nonprofits together with elected officials but doing it in front of an audience is more impactful and generative. It brings awareness to issues and organizations people might not be aware of, plus creates some accountability for elected officials who say they will work to address it. It also lets the public in on the barriers to progress that exist, which nonprofits might be less forthcoming about.”

- Brooklyn Org Community Forum Attendee, Fall 2025

## 6. Building A National Movement: Neighbors Back Neighbors

The ultimate goal of Brooklyn Org’s evolution is to inspire a national movement of locally led civic reinvigoration. Just as Brooklyn Org is creating an organic, community-led **civic hub for local philanthropy for Brooklyn, and led by Brooklynites, so too can communities across the country.**

By bringing together residents, donors, nonprofits, and small businesses, Brooklyn Org is building a more inclusive and accessible pathway for community investment that is as strong as the people it is designed to serve:

- **Enhanced Community Presence.** Brooklyn Org significantly increased its visibility through digital marketing, an engaging, Webby-winning website, a first-of-its-kind borough-wide PSA campaign, branded merchandise, and community events. This cultural presence meets Brooklynites where they are, demonstrating that meaningful philanthropic engagement is not just for philanthropists.
- **Community Membership Model.** A membership that welcomes all Brooklyn supporters, not just major donors, to broaden participation and deepen civic engagement.
- **Brooklyn-Based Donor Advised Funds.** Brooklyn Org’s DAF platform combines giving vehicles with advisory services to help donors identify high-impact nonprofit

investments. DAF holders, including companies like Etsy, can be confident that administrative fees directly support local communities while their giving has the potential for global impact.

- **Engaging Institutional Partners To Build Community Power.** From working with beloved small businesses like Brooklyn Roasting Company to helping philanthropic organizations like the Joe and Clara Tsai Foundation’s Social Justice Fund launch and expand new programs, BKO leverages the native resources of Brooklyn to build a better borough.

## **EXPANDING SUPPORT FOR NONPROFITS**

Brooklyn Org provides year-round support beyond grants by building a nonprofit ecosystem that tests new ideas and delivers for Brooklynites. BKO listens to new voices, elevates new leaders and directs resources to promising approaches:

- **Community-Centered Grantmaking.** Rolling applications and community input shape funding priorities and decisions, ensuring dollars reach where they do the most good.
- **Capacity Building.** Tailored services — from skills training and peer convenings to leadership development and strategic funder connections — meet organizations at their stage of growth.
- **Space For Developing Leaders.** BKO hosts leadership salons that bring established and emerging leaders together for candid conversation, debate and shared problem-solving.
- **Impact Support, Not Burden.** Data analysis and storytelling assistance help nonprofits highlight results while keeping reporting light.
- **Microgrants For Emerging Groups.** Informed by community listening tours, microgrants put hyper-local ideas into motion and give donors a direct way to back rising leaders.
- **Systemic Advocacy.** BKO leverages civic influence to surface sector-wide challenges, elevate nonprofit voices and strengthen a unified citywide sector that shapes policy and attracts resources.

“We are deeply grateful for the full range of capacity building trainings and resources Brooklyn Org offers to nonprofits like ours. They are fantastic and so needed.”

- Brooklyn Org Capacity Building Program Attendee

BKO serves as the connective tissue of Brooklyn’s philanthropic ecosystem — creating local giving pathways, building organizational resilience and ensuring that economic growth translates into equitable and lasting community change.

## 7. Meeting The Moment: Building Strength In A Time Of Challenge

The clearest articulation of Brooklyn Org’s community philanthropy model launched in 2025 in response to the upheaval caused by drastic and widespread federal funding cuts. The Brooklyn Backs Brooklyn campaign responds to cuts designed to weaken essential services and diminish the capacity of local nonprofits by empowering local leaders and cultivating investment from within the community. The campaign’s primary goal is to replace some of the lost federal dollars by increasing Brooklyn Org’s grantmaking by 25% over a 12-month period.

But Brooklyn Backs Brooklyn is much more than a short-term fundraising drive. It recognizes the vast opportunity in this moment to advance a vision of community-led philanthropy rooted in the belief that lasting social change happens when communities lead and resources follow.

At its core, the movement recognizes that Brooklyn’s greatest asset is its people. When residents, businesses and donors unite to build community power, the borough moves forward:

- **Residents** champion their neighborhoods and partner with Brooklyn Org to invest locally in what works.
- **Local businesses** serve as community anchors, supporting neighborhood-led initiatives and building authentic relationships with the people they serve.
- **Donors** tap Brooklyn Org’s deep community knowledge for guidance on investments that advance their goals and align with Brooklyn’s vision for racial justice and equity.

- **Nonprofits** gain sustained support beyond grants — capacity-building, storytelling platforms and diverse funding streams.

“I was already familiar with Brooklyn Org’s incredible work in the community, so partnering with them felt like a perfect alignment.”

- Brooklyn Org Local Business Partner

The message is simple: When Brooklyn invests in Brooklyn, everyone benefits. Brooklyn Org provides the infrastructure and trusted community connections, but the movement’s power flows from the borough itself — from block associations to boardrooms, from corner stores to corporate offices. This is not about asking Brooklyn to give more — it is about unlocking resources that already exist to deploy them with intention, equity and hope.

## 8. Conclusion: What’s Next for Community Philanthropy

The path forward is clear: our communities are calling out for a new kind of organization that builds a network of local champions, invests in community-defined solutions, and empowers collective action.

This is more than philanthropy reimaged — it’s democracy in action. When residents have a voice in how resources flow through their neighborhoods, when businesses see their success tied to community wellbeing, when donors see their impact comes from following rather than leading, we create something unprecedented.

As Brooklyn Org takes the next step in its evolution to be an essential community hub, it will embark on a new round of community conversations, beginning in 2026, that will deepen the participatory framework that defines Brooklyn Org’s model — ensuring that those closest to the challenges continue to shape the solutions. The *Brooklyn Backs Brooklyn* campaign puts the principle of listening as a strategy into action and represents a fundamental shift in how we understand community power and shared prosperity. It’s a recognition that in a borough as diverse and dynamic as Brooklyn, our greatest strength lies not in individual wealth or institutional might, but in our capacity to move together.

The stakes couldn’t be higher. With growing inequality threatening to fragment communities and economic and demographic change continuing to reshape our country, the Brooklyn Org model offers a path to democratic renewal where the people who call a community home determine its future.

Brooklyn's story has always been one of resilience, creativity, and collective action. From the activists who fought for affordable housing to the artists who transformed neighborhoods — Brooklyn's greatest achievements came when ordinary people backed extraordinary visions for change.

Now it's our turn. **Brooklyn Backs Brooklyn** isn't just a call to action. It is a promise that when we invest in each other, we prove that another way is possible.

# Brooklyn Org Case Studies: Local Change In Action

Brooklyn Org's model comes alive through its grantee partners:

- A. BKO's Neighborhood Collective Impact Grants Reclaim Space, Reimagine Safety
- B. Elevating A New Model For Mental Wellness And Mentorship For Young Men Of Color
- C. How A Brooklyn Org Donor Advised Fund Helped Katrena Perou Turn Personal Success Into Community Power
- D. Brooklyn Org Spark Prize Winner Providing Legal Support To Close The Access To Justice Gap
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- F. Elevating Voices to Drive Action: BKO's People's Pulse Experience

## CASE STUDY

### A. BKO's Neighborhood Collective Impact Grants Reclaim Space, Reimagine Safety

In Brownsville, where residents experience disproportionately high rates of gun violence, traditional memorials often become static symbols of loss — marking tragedy without fostering healing or change. **Immanuel Oni**, an artist and urban designer, saw an opportunity to reimagine this dynamic entirely.

In 2024, Brooklyn Org awarded a **Neighborhood Collective Impact Grant** to Oni's initiative, *Beyond Memorial*, that engages residents to design creative, healing spaces that honor lives lost. Produced through Oni's organization, Liminal SP, in partnership with the Brownsville Community Justice Center, *Beyond Memorial* takes an innovative approach to public safety centered on art, memory, and community agency.

Rather than accepting memorials as endpoints, the initiative uses community spaces — sidewalks, parks, and vacant lots — to reimagine mourning as a catalyst for civic action and collective healing while promoting safety, resilience, and connection. Brooklyn Org's support is helping to improve the Dr. Green Playground, adding solar lighting to improve visibility and programming to welcome youth in the space and explore the history of the space and neighborhood.

The results speak to the power of community-driven design. Through integrated workshops, storytelling, and design sessions, *Beyond Memorial* ensures that residents themselves are the co-authors of their environment — creating spaces that reflect dignity and hope. The project's installations transform sites of trauma into places of rebirth and creativity.

*Beyond Memorial* exemplifies Brooklyn Org's strategy of supporting grassroots, resident-driven solutions that are authentic and imaginative. *Beyond Memorial* addresses the immediate impact of violence on the community, but also goes beyond to build the cultural and civic infrastructure needed for long-term resilience in Brownsville.

## CASE STUDY

# B. Elevating A New Model For Mental Wellness And Mentorship For Young Men Of Color

Across Brooklyn, young men of color are routinely denied space to be vulnerable, heal, and lead. Traditional services rarely meet them where they are — compounding stigma around mental health and leaving schools and families without trusted, culturally fluent partners.

Founded in 2020 by educator Barry “Coach Coop” Cooper, The B.R.O. Experience Foundation — *Brothers Redefining Opportunity*— counters that dynamic by creating identity-affirming, CBT-informed programs that help boys build confidence, learn coping skills and to heal divides.

Brooklyn Org awarded a \$135,000 grant to The B.R.O Experience Foundation in 2024 at a critical time. The funding allowed B.R.O. to hire additional facilitators, strengthen its school-based programs, and provide capacity-building and leadership development for staff. From just five original participants, the nonprofit now operates out of a 4,500-square-foot hub on Marcus Garvey Boulevard with programs embedded in four New York City public school schools.

“Brooklyn Org’s funding not only supported us with building more capacity. We’ve also been able to hire more facilitators to help us do the work while instilling a stronger sense of confidence in my ability to lead,” Cooper says.

In 2025, Cooper won [The David Prize](#), which celebrates New Yorkers “with ideas for extraordinary change,” a very clear signal of B.R.O.’s ambitious next chapter. Cooper plans to scale the organization to reach 2,000+ youth annually; launch a mobile B.R.O. Space to meet families where they are; and to expand the B.R.O. Alliance for Community Empowerment — a network of culturally responsive mental health professionals.

B.R.O. exemplifies a model that elevates leaders dedicated to serving the neighborhoods where they live, to co-designing programs with local families, committed to the long-term work of tracking growth of youth into adulthood and celebrating their educational and employment milestones. With Brooklyn Org’s partnership, B.R.O. is using local insight and trusted mentors to make sure that young men of color are heard and supported and positioned to lead.

## CASE STUDY

### **C. How A Brooklyn Org Donor Advised Fund Helped Katrena Perou Turn Personal Success Into Community Power**

When Katrena Perou sold her Bedford-Stuyvesant home, she faced a choice that would define the next chapter of her life. Rather than channeling the proceeds into traditional investments, she invested instead in the people and places that shaped her, putting the “Brooklyn Backs Brooklyn” principle into practice

Perou opened a Donor Advised Fund (DAF) at Brooklyn Org shortly after founding Inspiring Minds NYC, the nonprofit she leads to provide after-school, leadership, and civic engagement opportunities for Brooklyn youth. That timing created a tension she still names plainly: she was fundraising for her own organization while giving to others.

“A foundation program officer once told me bluntly that, as a Black woman, I would face significant barriers because funders tend to give to those who reflect their own identity,” Perou recalls. “It explained my uphill battle — and fueled my determination to be the kind of funder I needed early on.”

Despite strong results and growth, Inspiring Minds NYC — like many community-rooted, Black-led organizations — struggled to access institutional funding. Perou recognized that the same barriers limiting her nonprofit’s support were holding back a wider ecosystem of leaders across Brooklyn. She wanted her giving to reach people who, like her, built from the ground up without legacy access or insider networks.

The fleeting surge of attention after the pandemic and the racial justice protests of 2020 only reinforced her resolve. As the spotlight faded, so did many financial commitments — leaving grassroots leaders once again asked to do more with less.

The Brooklyn Org DAF offered the structure Perou needed to make her philanthropy strategic, sustained, and proximate. Through her DAF, she designed a long-term giving strategy centered on organizations led by Black, Indigenous and other people of color, aligning her philanthropy with both immediate needs and systemic equity.

Building on that foundation, Perou launched The Table NYC — a community giving model

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and network supported by her DAF to resource Black grassroots leaders and entrepreneurs in Brooklyn. To put that vision into practice, The Table NYC hosts community-led professional development so leaders build skills with and for one another, exchange time, talent, and services without cash, and collaborate on grants so smaller organizations can compete for — and manage — larger awards together.

Perou has also launched a Shark Tank-style pitch event where participants present community-centered ideas for seed funding. Using her DAF to catalyze support for bold ideas, Perou will fund four projects each year selected through the pitch process and offer incubator spaces to give winning projects room to test, iterate, and grow.

Perou's approach demonstrates how individual donors can use a DAF to challenge philanthropic norms — moving resources with communities rather than to them. By supporting peer leaders, sharing resources, and lowering barriers to meaningful funding, she is helping to build capacity in ways that institutional funders often overlook.

As Perou puts it, “There are rich resources and smart, capable people within our communities ready to build solutions to problems — solutions that are already there.”

Perou's journey — from Bedford-Stuyvesant homeowner to strategic community investor — is a practical blueprint for how a DAF can be deployed creatively within the “Brooklyn Backs Brooklyn” movement.

## CASE STUDY

### **D. Brooklyn Org Spark Prize Winner Providing Legal Support To Close The Access To Justice Gap**

For too many New Yorkers, the most critical moment in the criminal legal system — the minutes and hours immediately following an arrest — remains the most precarious. Without immediate legal counsel, individuals face police interrogation and confusing paperwork alone.

Brooklyn-founded nonprofit Good Call aims to close this justice gap with a simple but revolutionary insight: the timing of legal access, not just access itself, determines legal outcomes. In 2025, they received the **Brooklyn Org Spark Prize**, a \$100,000 unrestricted grant recognizing nonprofits that redefine responses to Brooklyn's most urgent challenges.

This investment arrived at a pivotal moment, enabling Good Call to execute on a strategic vision and refine their AI-powered, 24/7 hotline that connects arrested individuals to lawyers instantly, ensuring no one faces interrogation without representation.

The seismic events of 2020 — the George Floyd protests and COVID-19 pandemic — catalyzed Good Call's evolution into a comprehensive justice reform organization. With Brooklyn Org's support, Good Call is now building scalable solutions, including a hybrid model with a for-profit arm that licenses their platform to municipalities nationwide; driving narrative change through youth internships, skills training, and storytelling that underscores the human stakes of legal access; and advancing systemic reform by supporting community-led initiatives and advocating for broader adoption of early counsel access.

Good Call's structure, sustained by municipal partnerships, demonstrates how social justice innovation can be both impactful and financially sustainable. The Brooklyn Org Spark Prize affirmed Good Call's unique position and amplified local innovation with national implications, helping Good Call not just respond to the justice gap but close it permanently.

## CASE STUDY

### **E. An Awareness Campaign Announces A New Approach To Philanthropy**

To propel its strategic plan and grow the base of champions supporting Brooklyn, Brooklyn Org partnered with the same agency that created its new identity — Mother New York — to conceptualize an advertising campaign to introduce BKO to a broad audience.

Mother New York, working pro-bono, developed a bold campaign — [“Show Brooklyn Some Love”](#) — featuring five Brooklyn Org-backed nonprofits: Mixteca; Groundswell; Workers Justice Project; Arab American Family Support Center; and Sure We Can. Headlines and imagery spotlighted the Brooklyn residents served by these change-making organizations and called in audiences turn their love for Brooklyn into action.

As a visible invitation to all Brooklynites to participate, the campaign’s tone focused on Brooklyn’s innate sense of grit, drive, and determination to overcome all obstacles. The campaign premiered on the external display screening at the Barclays Center arena in Downtown Brooklyn during the New York Liberty’s May 2024 home opener, then scaled across the borough via subways, buses, billboards, guerrilla posters, and street-pole banners.

A full subway station takeover at Bedford Avenue in trendy Williamsburg served as the centerpiece. Media strategy and buys were planned and executed by nonprofit agency F.Y. Eye. To deepen community touchpoints, BKO integrated cultural partners and moments including sponsorship of opening night concert of BRIC’s beloved Celebrate Brooklyn music festival in Prospect Park and a family-friendly “Show Brooklyn Some Love Fest” at the City Point mall. High-traffic placements and transit takeovers delivered boroughwide visibility for the new BKO name and mission, while creative industry press amplified the story.

## CASE STUDY

### F. Elevating Voices to Drive Action: BKO's People's Pulse Experience

One of the very important new roles that Brooklyn Org has embraced is to serve as an independent, trusted voice for Brooklyn in civic conversation. In 2025, in the midst of a historic citywide election, BKO wanted to cut through the noise of political spin to understand, in concrete terms, what matters most to the people who call this borough home. Past elections have made clear that far too many New Yorkers feel unheard and disconnected from important conversations about the future of our city.

Brooklyn Org joined with the 5BORO Institute at Citizens Union to create *The People's Pulse*, an opinion survey designed to put the authentic voices of New Yorkers at the center of the political discussion. The results, released in February 2025, were unmistakable: New Yorkers were struggling to maintain their lives here through rising rents, grocery prices, childcare costs, and more. Affordability was the defining issue shaping their lives in New York City, and the challenges they faced to pay the bills were causing many to question their ability to remain in New York.

Beyond evidence of economic strain, *The People's Pulse* uncovered a deeper sense that the systems meant to support New Yorkers during difficult times are no longer working as they should. Eighty-four percent of respondents said the city is facing a serious mental health crisis. Half reported feeling less safe than they did five years ago. Only half believe their vote truly makes a difference in local elections.

The findings of the People's Pulse survey proved prescient. From mayoral debates to City Council campaigns, affordability dominated every election conversation. More importantly, city residents used the survey data to ask candidates how they would address these core issues and make sure nurses, teachers, artists, and service workers could stay in the neighborhoods they've helped sustain.

*The People's Pulse* reveals an important role that foundations can and should be playing to repair frayed civic connections in our communities—a role that extends outside of political election cycles. BKO led a coalition of foundations to fund and shape the survey: The New York Community Trust, The Staten Island Foundation, and the Altman Foundation. *The People's Pulse* aims to not be a one-time project, but the start of an

ongoing dialogue between the community, policymakers, civic leaders, and nonprofits. Philanthropy has a clear role in developing community knowledge—through research, data, and connection—to champion the voices of residents as policy makers develop budgets, programs, and priorities.