

2016 Election: Your Reactions

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By Aimée Simpierre

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Many of us spent the day after Election Day dealing with shock and sleep deprivation. For me, the shock centered around how our nation seems to have missed each and every sign alerting us to the discontent and desperation that propelled President-elect Trump to the most powerful position in the free world. Despite the fact that among them were some who by their own biases would likely never have supported a typical establishment candidate - let alone a woman - we can't be true supporters of equality without recognizing that these individuals obviously felt neglected. We can point



fingers at the pollsters, the campaigns that stoked xenophobic, misogynist, racist and various "anti-other" sentiments while too often ignoring the real issues, and even President Obama's policies for their lack of attention to a forgotten segment of the population. But now that the votes have been counted, the revolution is upon us – it just isn't the revolution many of us hoped for. The system was indeed rigged – it was rigged to ignore the voices of the "silent majority" which have now very forcefully made themselves heard.

But that was yesterday. Now, it's time to organize our thoughts, take stock of where we are and figure out how to create a path forward. In particular, how do we do that for New York's nonprofit sector which works to empower and encourage those who have been left behind by public policies, failed by society and damaged by life's circumstances.

How will the change in administration affect the funding streams many nonprofits rely upon? How will the sudden shift in the prevailing ideology affect the laws many rely on as a safety net? How will the principles and morals of our new leader reverberate through our society and affect the lives of the most vulnerable? It all remains to be seen. Perhaps the first lesson to be learned is how critical it is that we create safe places where every voice can contribute to the process of moving forward. Here's our small contribution to that effort.

We've collected thoughts from you about how this election's results may affect your organizations, the causes you support and the people you serve. Your responses are below. We will continue to update this piece. To contribute, please email us at editor@nynmedia.com using the subject line "NY Nonprofits-Election 2016."

To our future,

Aimée Simpierre

Editor-at-large NYN Media

Crys McCuin, executive director, [The Arc of Dutchess](#)

...As I consider this question, it's difficult to set aside the image of Donald Trump mocking journalist Serge Kovalski in November 2015 early on in his campaign at a South Carolina rally. Once confronted, he attempted to deflect criticism suggesting he didn't know Kovalski.

Those who live a life with a disability and those of us who work in the field of disabilities know disrespect when we see it, and that day we saw it, blatantly. Sadly, it is what many of those we support confront daily, but typically not from a grown man running for president.

Well, now this man has been elected president. What does that mean for people with disabilities? In truth, it's a bit early to predict, but there are concerns aside from this story. If you look at the [President-Elect's website](#), you will not find anything substantive specific to projected policy initiatives regarding services for those with IDD and other disabilities. However, under Healthcare Initiatives I see two elements of concern:

1. Maximize flexibility for states in administering Medicaid, to enable States to experiment with innovative methods to deliver healthcare to our low-income citizens.

This is code for block grants, which are bundles of money allocated to state and local governments to spend on broad initiatives. Paul Ryan likes block grants; he touts flexibility for states to control how and what federal dollars are used for, advancing innovation. Make no mistake, block grants are also used to cut government spending, and a Medicaid block grant, which has been pitched by Republicans in the past, has the potential to drastically cut funding. As need increases and shifts in the economy occur, entitlements can be adjusted, but block grants may not. Block grant dollars can also be diverted away from the initiatives they were intended to support, meaning there would be no guarantee that the current Medicaid dollars received for our services might not be allocated to others. In New York, our services are largely funded by Medicaid. A block grant would have the potential to severely jeopardize the services and support provided to individuals with developmental disabilities. This is a significant concern and we must ensure Medicaid does not become a block grant.

2. Protect innocent human life from conception to natural death, including the most defenseless and those Americans with disabilities.

This is the only specific reference you will find associated with supporting individuals with disabilities on the website. It appears to be an afterthought positioned right after "the most defenseless." It seems that Donald Trump's position has moved from disrespect to "pity," one extreme to the other. The people we support and their families do not ask for pity. They merely request the same rights as every other individual in this country; they want what we all want - respect, employment, access and quality of life. We cannot be an afterthought.

This phrase suggests an acute lack of awareness, knowledge or understanding about what is needed to support this segment of America.

We need to make sure President-Elect Trump knows who and how strong we are.

So, back to the original question about the impact on our organization and cause ... that remains unclear. What seems clear is that we must reinforce our advocacy efforts on a national scale to ensure we are heard, understood and allocated sufficient resources to ensure those we support are not ignored, disrespected or forgotten.

Adriana Pezzulli, Director of Development of the [Lower Eastside Girls Club](#), reflected on the surge of volunteer applications she received immediately following President-elect Trump's victory. The nonprofit, which typically gets two or three applications for volunteers every week, received 30 applications by the Thursday after election day.

The Girls Club is a place that it feels good to be here. So, the day after the election, our staff, we just all wanted to be here. ... People want a place where there's sisterhood and community and people doing work that is helping the next generation, helping the environment, helping fellow man and woman. I think all of that was part of why we got so many volunteer applications is because people want to help raise the next generation of female leadership and they also want to be somewhere where they feel supported and in community.

...The most important thing is to continue to build on the work we're already doing and to get as many young women as possible to consider careers in public service. So, building up the ladders of leadership, so that 15, 20 years from now, we have young women, who are currently 10 years old, running for local office, running for city and state office, being part of our federal government and building up that next generation. We're doing that work now for the future.

Elsie McCabe Thompson, President of the [New York City Mission Society](#):

... In the days, weeks, and years ahead, we must work with our new administration to fight inequality in our schools and in our communities, to improve the economic vitality of our families, and to create a better world for generations to come.

Our organization has worked tirelessly for two centuries to combat poverty and help people put food on the table, put a roof over their heads, and put skills in their hands and minds.

Yet, today's America still suffers from a deep opportunity chasm that prevents many people from accessing a good education and a good job. Our vision for a stronger America requires us to look beyond partisan politics to see a more unified front aimed at remedying poverty in many of our cities.

As advocates for an America that embraces our differences, we must redouble our efforts to turn pitfalls into promise. We must commit ourselves to creating one future for our children - one of boundless promise.

Human Services Council Executive Director Allison Sesso [writes to her members](#):

"... During this election cycle, it seemed to me that personal responsibility as the key driver of success or failure was pitted against oppressive dynamics as if it's wholly one or the other that determine one's fate. The framing of the work we do and beliefs about what causes communities and people we serve to struggle matters because they drive public policy choices and resources.

As a mission driven sector focused on maximizing human potential, we know the answer is more complex. We are intimately aware of the intersecting systemic biases at play driving opportunities and success. Much of our work seeks to harness individual determination and resilience, to help people succeed despite the odds; yet the oppressive dynamics facing those we serve are undeniable. We need solutions that appreciate both of these truths and right now it does not seem like we are likely to achieve the policy changes or investments needed to realize the progress we are desperate for any time soon. This is, at best, frustrating.

But I am trying to harness my feelings of anxiety, frustration, fear, and disappointment by thinking about how we as a sector can find our voice and proactively counter the "personal responsibility" narrative which fails to appreciate systemic biases and perpetuates inequity. We engage with people and communities every day; we are well positioned to contribute to a counter narrative that better appreciates the systemic reasons people are struggling and highlights how nonprofits work to counteract the systematic failures that bring so many people to our doors.

At HSC, we will continue to do our part and work to develop the voice of the sector in these areas and create space for collective reflection and thinking on workable solutions. It is critical that together, we also engage in the very difficult work of self-examination to better appreciate how our own actions or inactions contribute to the oppressive systems at play and contribute to the "personal responsibility" narrative. Our failure to take on these challenges will only serve to undermine our collective success.

Ann Toback, Executive Director of [The Workmen's Circle](#):

Tuesday's election result was an historic setback for all whose vision of the United States was a welcoming and nurturing home to everyone. This unprecedented outcome flies in the face of the rights and privileges which are the foundation of the United States democracy, and the progressive Jewish values which have served as a lodestar to the Workmen's Circle community.

I grew up with the famous Joe Hill quote: "Don't mourn, organize!" But it wasn't until now that I truly understand and feel the depth of his words. No matter how discouraged we may feel, we must use this moment to organize a new progressive movement to carry us forward. We must take on the mantle of our Workmen's Circle founders, who over a century ago came here to the United States looking for a better world. Founders who fought against prejudice much like we are seeing around us today. We are now charged to rebuild that world, and we can and must empower a movement to do it.

So what's next? What do we tell our children? What do we say to our community?

We tell them that there is hope for the future. We teach them the path to shaping a better tomorrow. And we all set the example of acting on our progressive values. We certainly can't downplay how bad these election results are for us all, but we must be careful not to give in to defeatism. Because, as of this moment, the new status quo is unthinkable. ...

Today our progressive activist traditions couldn't be more critical to building a future we can all proudly support. So our message to our children and to each other must be multipronged:

First: They are going to be safe. America is still a democracy, and our community will stand strong to make sure our democracy continues to function.

Second: We have the unique opportunity to shape a better future. In our community, no one is alone, we will collectively act to change the world.

Third: We will strategically work to forward and share our progressive values with each other and those outside of our activist community.

Today we must recommit to the hard work of building a progressive movement that will be the architect of a better world for us all.

Dr. Jeffrey L. Reynolds, Ph.D, CEAP, SAP, President & Chief Executive Officer of [Family and Children's Association](#):

It's a new day in America and there's a lot at stake as we head into 2017. As organizations that work for, and with the impoverished, the disenfranchised, and the oppressed, it is incumbent on us to speak out in a way that is louder and more urgent than ever before. As our nation debates key policies, budgets and federal decisions, we will be forced to hone our arguments, organize in new ways, implement new strategies and we'll ultimately become stronger as a sector.

Bringing a divided America back together won't happen in Washington DC, but instead will occur locally in neighborhoods, schools, houses of worship and within our own agencies as we continue to work for safer, healthier and more inclusive communities. It won't be easy, but then again it's never been easy. That's, in part, why we do what we do.