

Committed to New York's Future

An Interview with Kathryn S. Wylde, President and Chief Executive Officer, Partnership for New York City

EDITORS' NOTE Prior to assuming her current post in 2000, Kathryn Wylde served as the founding President and Chief Executive Officer of two Partnership affiliates, the Housing Partnership and the Partnership Fund for New York City. She is a board member of the New York City Economic Development Corporation, the Manhattan Institute, NYC & Company, the Governor's NYC Regional Economic Development Council and the Fund for Public Education.



Kathryn S. Wylde

Will you highlight the history and heritage of the Partnership for New York City?

The Partnership for New York City is rooted in more than 250 years of civic engagement by business leaders, going back to the mid-eighteenth century. Throughout its history, the Partnership and its predecessor organization, the New York Chamber of Commerce & Industry, have been the primary force behind strategic partnerships between business and government, with financing projects like the first subways and the transatlantic cable.

In 1979, David Rockefeller launched the Partnership to help the city recover from the urban crisis that left America's cities in near ruins. Under his vision, the new Partnership would encourage business leaders to work more directly with government, labor and civic groups to address broader social and economic problems in a "hands on" way.

In 1996, the \$170 million Partnership Fund was established to support entrepreneurial ventures that generate jobs and diversify the economy with a focus on projects that help disadvantaged communities. The Fund seeded the early development of Silicon Alley, and subsequently the city's cleantech, fintech, health IT, life sciences and advanced manufacturing sectors.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Focused on maintaining the city's position as the center of global commerce and innovation, the Partnership for New York City (pfnyc.org) is comprised of top CEOs from the city's corporate, investment and entrepreneurial sectors. It works in partnership with government to advance the interests of the city. The organization's priorities include maintaining the city's competitive position in the attraction and growth of its business sector, improving public education, and fostering public/private partnerships to address the challenges facing the city. The Partnership Fund is its economic development arm that invests in projects that contribute to strategic industry growth, support for distressed communities, and job creation.

Programs and partnerships have included building affordable housing, encouraging civic participation in reporting violent felonies through Crime Stoppers, supporting MWBE's to participate in developing affordable housing, leveraging private sector expertise to modernize the region's transportation network, and aiding small businesses amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

How do you define the mission of the Partnership and has this purpose remained consistent since its beginning?

The Partnership serves as an honest broker between business, government, and the civic sector to achieve a more inclusive and vibrant economy. While its programs and partnerships have evolved throughout its history – adapting to the needs of the time – its mission and initiatives have always aimed to support the growth and prosperity of the city and expand economic opportunities for all New Yorkers.

How did the Partnership adapt its work to address the challenges caused by the pandemic?

Throughout the pandemic, the Partnership has been the primary source of communication and cooperation between business and the government agencies managing the city and state's response to COVID-19. It has played a key role in advising government on policies and regulations for closing and reopening the economy as well as providing resources to support equipment, testing and vaccination administration needs.

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In July 2020, with the support of its member global consulting firms, the Partnership published “A Call for Action and Collaboration,” the first comprehensive report examining the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on the New York metropolitan area. The report outlines a series of actions and cross-sector partnerships to support an equitable recovery.

The Partnership and the coalitions it forged during the pandemic are acting on these recommendations to accelerate recovery. For example, the Partnership Fund led the formation of the Small Business Resource Network to provide small business owners with easy access to public and private sources of funding and technical assistance. This includes a new program, “Open + Online,” which is building websites, including e-commerce sites, for small businesses to help them compete in the burgeoning digital economy.

Our formal relationship with public transportation agencies, through the Transit Tech Lab, enabled us to aid the response to challenges presented by COVID-19 to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and other agencies. The Lab tapped its portfolio companies to help the MTA reroute bus service to accommodate essential workers during the overnight termination of subway services. It also facilitated the adoption of tools to sanitize trains and to communicate changing transit schedules and other essential information to riders during the pandemic and going forward.

What do you see as the keys to New York’s recovery and rebuilding coming out of the pandemic?

The pandemic exposed and exacerbated inequities across socio-economic lines, particularly within our public health system. We saw COVID-19 disproportionately affect low-income neighborhoods and communities of color. In our report “Toward a Resilient System of Health,” we took a close look at the changes in New York’s healthcare planning, financing and delivery system that are necessary to achieve a healthier and more equitable city. These include leveraging private sector expertise to address challenges surrounding social determinants of health and expand preventative health hubs across the city.

Closing the skills gap is also paramount in creating a more equitable city and resilient workforce. The city’s unemployment rate remains nearly twice the national average. However, there were over 370,000 private sector job postings as of July. We see a great opportunity to better sync private sector skill requirements, workforce development programs, and our public education system to upskill New Yorkers for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

How critical is a strong public/private partnership for New York City’s future success?

Throughout the pandemic, the public sector leaned on the private sector to fill gaps and expand capacity to create PPE, enforce mask and social

distancing requirements, and accelerate the development and distribution of vaccines. Recovery will require the same level of collaboration. The city lost over 400,000 private sector jobs and tens of thousands of businesses during the pandemic. We moved rapidly toward a fully digitized economy which leaves many less skilled workers and government agencies at a great disadvantage. Business will need to provide training and technology to ensure that individual workers, entrepreneurs and government are equipped to function effectively in the post-COVID-19 digital economy.

How proud are you to see the way your members showed resilience and supported those in need during this unprecedented time?

We are very proud of how quickly our members responded to and aided our government and the healthcare system throughout the pandemic. New York’s own Pfizer, followed by Johnson & Johnson, led the way for vaccine development; JetBlue donated 100,000 round trip tickets for medical personnel and nurses; and Google added extra server capacity to accommodate the surge in unemployment claims the New York State Department of Labor was not equipped to handle. Our members also collaborated with volunteer organization New York Cares to support their parks cleanup program as more and more New Yorkers were taking advantage of green space. Amid great uncertainty about the future of the city as an attractive hub for talent, our members have remained committed to supporting its rebound. ●

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