

2023 Hall of Fame
Honoree Profile

Neill Coleman

**I'M A BIG BELIEVER
IN PHILANTHROPY
PLAYING A ROLE
IN INFLUENCING
PUBLIC POLICY**

BY JEANMARIE EVELLY
PHOTOGRAPH BY ADI TELWAR

When Neill Coleman founded his consulting firm, Mission Magnified, he set out not only to assist charitable foundations in using their resources most effectively, but to help them “think about how to engage with public policy in order to achieve impact at scale.”

“I’m a big believer in philanthropy playing a role in influencing public policy,” said Coleman, who has spent much of his career promoting collaboration between nonprofits and government as a means of driving change. “And I really help them think through how to approach that strategically. That includes, obviously, the grant making that they’re doing, but also how to use the foundation’s influence and voice.”



That’s something Coleman has experience in: During his five years as vice president for global communications at The Rockefeller Foundation, he created and managed a \$10 million annual grants portfolio, with a focus on funding journalism and storytelling campaigns that would help draw wider public attention to the foundation’s priority issues.

That included supporting a six-year series at UK-based newsroom The Guardian, called Guardian Cities, about how urban areas across the world are tackling issues like climate resiliency and poverty.

“It was really a chance to showcase cities that were doing creative, smart projects for resilience, equity, for livability,” he explained. “The Guardian reached policymakers and decision makers globally, so someone in a particular city could be reading a story and be inspired by what someone in another city was doing.”

Support for nonprofit and public service journalism was something he continued

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to prioritize during his next role as the executive director at Trinity Church Wall Street Philanthropies, which has helped fund reporting on housing and homelessness in several newsrooms, including City Limits.

“Any increased coverage on the challenges and the solutions that are out there around homelessness and affordable housing is a good thing,” Coleman said. “A story in City Limits that highlights either a particular problem with a government policy, or an opportunity for changing government policy, can be really powerful.”

During his time at Trinity, Coleman spearheaded the Philanthropies department, where he expanded grant-making from \$10 million to \$57 million a year. Under his tenure, the organization supported community groups assisting New Yorkers with emergency rent relief applications during the pandemic, and more recently, nonprofits working on the ground to aid asylum seekers arriving in the city from the southern border.

Coleman, a native of Scotland, has long been drawn to both media and housing policy. His first job, as a college student in Glasgow, was at a homeless shelter. “That was my first deep engagement with the issue of homelessness

and kind of the start of that as a passion for me throughout my career,” he said.

He later worked in nonprofit and government communications, including for the city’s Department of Housing, Preservation and Development (HPD) under the Bloomberg administration, where he fielded press inquiries from reporters, including those at City Limits. He then moved to Washington, D.C., to serve as chief external affairs officer for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) during President Barack Obama’s first term.

Coleman, who has been recognized as an industry leader—making both Crain’s New York Notable in Nonprofits and Philanthropy list and the City & State Pride Power 100—said his focus now is on helping other philanthropic organizations leverage the power of collaboration with other sectors to expand their reach.

“If you want to achieve change on issues like homelessness at scale, you have to engage government and also the private sector,” he said.

We asked all of our honorees: Tell us about a favorite place of yours in New York City, and why it’s special to you.

“On the deck of a NYC ferry,” Coleman said. “When we lived in Long Island City I would take the ferry to work and I loved seeing the diversity of—and changes in—the city manifesting on the skyline.”