



CENTRAL NEW YORK
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

President & Chief Executive Officer
Central New York Community Foundation

Syracuse, NY

“We pledge to be a bold, courageous and enduring partner in philanthropy”

- A central tenet of CNYCF's ongoing commitment to its community

Executive Summary

In 1927, thirty-one civic leaders in and around Syracuse, New York, came together to create a new community foundation, no doubt energized by the early successes of such efforts elsewhere.¹

The commitment to community that inspired leaders nearly 100 years ago continues to inform what is now known as Central New York Community Foundation, the largest charitable foundation in the region. Consistent with its pledge to be “an enduring and compassionate partner in philanthropy,” CNYCF has deployed over \$250 million in support of community-enhancing programs and initiatives in greater Syracuse and its five contiguous counties.²

Earlier this year, CEO Peter Dunn announced he would be stepping down to pursue one more professional challenge before retiring. During his 15-year tenure, the Community Foundation’s assets nearly quadrupled to \$399 million, annual grantmaking more than tripled to just over \$18 million, and the staff grew by half, to its current complement of 25.³

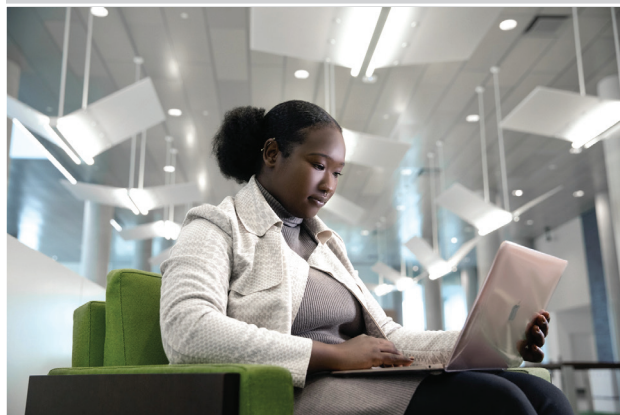
Along the way, CNYCF strengthened its reputation as a trusted entity known for investing flexible capital to advance new and impactful ideas and strategies, building a staff highly knowledgeable about community needs, exhibiting civic sector leadership, and generally having an in-depth understanding of the issues being faced by the region’s communities.⁴

¹ The nation’s first community foundation had been established just a dozen years earlier, in 1915.

² Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, and Oswego counties.

³ Figures are from audited statements for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2022, available [here](#).

⁴ These descriptors are among the responses from a May 2023 survey of over 90 community leaders conducted by BoardWalk Consulting in preparation for the current executive search.



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As the Community Foundation approaches the centennial of its founding, the board and staff are finalizing a five-year strategic plan reflecting continued commitment to the excellence in programming and donor service for which CNYCF is well known. Key priorities of the new plan include supporting bolder steps in community leadership, especially on high-impact issues and projects central to community transformation, and being more *present* in community by engaging more fully with those impacted by specific issues and with donors of varying economic and demographic backgrounds.⁵

These efforts would be important at any stage of a foundation’s evolution, but they are especially critical at the time of CNYCF’s first CEO transition in fifteen years. The mandate is bold and yet still evolving. The board is ambitious for the community, proud of progress to date and excited about what lies ahead. The staff is eager for the stability and support a new CEO portends for their future and that of a mission and region they all hold dear.

In October 2022, Micron Technology, a world leader in memory and storage systems, announced plans to build the largest semiconductor fabrication facility in the history of the United States. The “megafab” is to be built in Clay, NY, Syracuse’s most populous suburb. The [initial announcement](#) calls for Micron to invest up to \$100 billion over the next 20+ years, with \$20 billion of that scheduled over the next decade. Among the attractions for Micron were Central New York’s “leading higher education institutions, access to talent traditionally underrepresented in technology jobs and a significant military population aligned with Micron’s commitment to veteran hiring.”

The opportunity to lead a \$400-million community foundation poised for greater impact would be highly attractive even if there were no new external

⁵ As summarized in “Community Feedback Results,” released in February 2023 and available [here](#).

factors. The magnitude of Micron’s intended investment, with ramifications yet to be fully understood, let alone realized, makes the opportunity to lead this foundation at this juncture uniquely compelling—and uniquely challenging.

The Organization

Founded in 1927, Central New York Community Foundation (CNYCF) is a leader among community foundations its size nationally. The foundation is headquartered in Syracuse, NY, and serves donors and communities in Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, and Oswego counties.

CNYCF’s staff of 25 oversees an unusually broad array of programs and initiatives. Among points of pride for both board and staff are several programs and initiatives that have gained real momentum in recent years; for example:

- [LeadSafeCNY](#), a five-year, \$2-million commitment to eradicate childhood lead poisoning in Syracuse
- [Black Equity & Excellence Fund](#), a million-dollar-plus commitment to increase the capacity of Black-led organizations supporting historically underserved communities
- [Say Yes Syracuse](#), an endowed fund of \$30 million to ensure scholarship support for Syracuse high school students continuing their education
- [CNY Vitals](#), the foundation’s interactive community resource that tracks 70 data points across CNYCF’s five counties, covering such topics as the economy, housing, health, demographics, poverty, racial equity and education
- [CNY Philanthropy Center](#), established in 2010 as the foundation’s home and a hub for charitable collaboration, “a beacon for the



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nonprofit community, serving as a place to think, plan, meet and innovate.”

An overarching influence in the Community Foundation’s work is its [Commitment to Racial Equity](#). Consistent with the area’s history as “[the great central depot](#)” of the Underground Railroad in New York State and its heritage of welcoming thousands of refugees from dozens of countries, CNYCF has made an explicit commitment to racial equity and backed that commitment with accountability, investments, measurements and regular engagement of board and staff members in focused learnings designed to expand and deepen that commitment.

While there is much yet to be done, significant progress has been made in the development of relationships and funding support to benefit the Black community of Central New York. The organization is developing plans to make similar inroads with those who have been impacted by systemic racism or other bias, including members of the Latino, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Native American and LGBTQIA+ communities, as well as community members with disabilities.

The staff is organized along fairly traditional community foundation lines, with five VPs overseeing the various departments and reporting to the CEO.⁶ The staff of 25 is well regarded by funders and grantees alike, even though the community would welcome more engagement with staff, and many are respected as subject matter experts.

Having operated remotely under New York’s strict guidelines during the pandemic, the staff is still adjusting to return-to-office routines. Collective pride in the foundation’s work is genuine, and the regard team members have for one another is palpable. As one staffer noted in our anonymous

⁶ The VP of Development became the Interim CEO on July 1 and will serve in that capacity until the new CEO takes office.

survey, "I come to work feeling like I make a difference every day."⁷

CNYCF is governed by a 20-person volunteer board; collectively, these leaders, drawn from across the foundation's service area, represent a deep array of community, professional and life experiences relevant to the foundation's mission. The CEO search is being led by a committee of eleven current and former board members.

Of the foundation's assets of \$400 million, approximately \$150 million resides in 375 donor-advised funds, and some \$70 million is earmarked by the board for long-term investments. CNYCF also holds \$23 million in endowments for about 100 nonprofit organizations.

For additional information on the Central New York Community Foundation, please consult the foundation's extensive [website](#). Of special interest might be the latest annual report, [Champions of Change](#); [Point of View](#), Peter Dunn's farewell message; the foundation's [Commitment to Racial Equity](#) and the accompanying [Reflections](#), a monthly blog charting "personal and professional efforts toward racial equity."

The Opportunity

CNYCF is already a valued partner to donors and nonprofits alike, but, as noted previously, there is a real appetite within the board, the staff and the community at large for the foundation to be more bold in its vision, more fluid in its engagement and more impactful in its execution—in short, taking smart risks and leveraging its reputation to capitalize on the opportunity to make lasting change within a region that is at one of the most critical inflection points in its history.

⁷ All 25 staff members completed our May 2023 survey. Their responses were notable for their nuance and their candor.



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The Mandate

In the coming weeks, CNYCF will publish its latest strategic plan, a document intended to guide the foundation’s work over the next five years. At this writing, the draft plan delineates strategies and measurements for Communications, Community Investment, Development, Scholarships and Student Supports, and Finance and Administration. Still under development is the overarching strategy that links these components into a cohesive whole.⁸

The opportunity awaiting the next CEO is more than a mandate to implement a predetermined plan. While no one expects wholesale revisions to a plan under development for many months, the board has high expectations of the next CEO along the following lines:

- **Courageous leadership.** As successful as the foundation has been in recent years, there is still an opportunity for courageous leadership. Of course, the foundation must balance the desires of its donors with the needs of the communities it serves, but there is a very real opportunity for the foundation to exert leadership in ways that might take CNYCF out of its traditional comfort zone.

The foundation is justifiably proud of its progress in eliminating children’s exposure to lead in Syracuse homes, its decades-long commitment to [literacy](#), and its capacity-building work through the Black Equity and Excellence Fund. Leveraging these and other such successes, all part of the foundation’s hallmark brand, while anticipating--not just responding to--changing community needs could be a game-changer.

⁸ Once the plan has been approved and published, the present Leadership Profile will be updated with a relevant link.

Perhaps it is time for the foundation to expand its impact via a laser focus on another overarching community interest. What could happen, for example, if CNYCF were to bring a laser focus to a question such as, “How are our children?” Might the region’s children, especially those in high poverty areas, represent an asset as fundamental to the region’s future as the Micron investment?

The point here is not to champion a specific initiative, but rather to champion the proactive leadership that such an initiative requires. To wield such leadership, CNYCF would have to overcome a culture that some observers describe as too cautious.

- **The power of proximity.** Community foundations are a mystery to many and simply unknown to many others. CNYCF’s recent journey of evaluation, incorporating surveys, studies, focus groups and interviews, made it clear that the foundation and its leadership must engage more fully, more consistently and more pervasively with its community.

This is a tall order, for engagement takes time, and no one at the foundation has an excess of time available. In the short run, the decision to do more of *this* means we have to do less of *that*, and there are few easy choices. If CNYCF is to broaden its relevance and thus its appeal to an expanded group of donors, partners, and communities in need, it must be even more present with those donors, those partners, and those communities. And since money generally follows impact, greater proximity promotes greater impact which attracts the greater resources that reinforce the cycle.

- **Board/staff/community alignment.** CNYCF has an exceptional staff and board, both of which are energized and committed to the mission and vision, despite the enormous challenges and stress posed by the pandemic.



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The foundation’s commitment to courageous leadership and to greater connectivity with its main constituencies—donors and the community’s underserved—will require a deft hand as expectations are clarified, priorities are reconfirmed, and new challenges are embraced. The CEO must be inviting and respectful of varying perspectives and unwavering in building the coalitions—internally and externally—necessary to create lasting impact.

Central New York Community Foundation seeks a CEO who respects the special opportunities at hand and the context in which they must be pursued. Working in concert with a committed board and a capable staff, the CEO must provide the sort of inspired leadership—*servant* leadership—that invites and reciprocates effective, impactful collaboration in pursuit of shared goals.

CNYCF has enjoyed significant growth in assets and influence, and yet even its most loyal supporters highlight opportunities for increased investment, collaboration, and impact.

The Relationships

<p>CNYCF’s CEO reports to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board of Directors
<p>And manages a staff of 25, primarily through five Vice Presidents:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VP of Development (and Interim CEO, as of July 1) • VP of Communications • VP of Community Investment • VP & Chief Financial Officer • VP of Scholarships & Student Support
<p>While stewarding other important relationships, such as</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current and potential fundholders and supporters • Grantees and program partners • Leaders from across the foundation’s five-county service area and beyond who share an interest in the foundation’s work, its impact, or the region and constituencies it serves

The Location

The Central New York Community Foundation is housed in the CNY Philanthropy Center in downtown Syracuse, NY.

Halfway between New York City and Toronto, Ontario, Canada, Syracuse is at the northeast corner of the Finger Lakes region. Formerly a manufacturing hub, Syracuse now lists higher education, research, and healthcare as its major employment sectors. Micron Technology's projected 9000 direct jobs and 40,000 supply chain and construction jobs over the next 20 years represent a major potential reset for the region.

One of the ten greenest cities in the US, Syracuse proper has over 1000 acres of parks and playgrounds, and the region is replete with outdoor activities and recreational opportunities.

The foundation's five-county area is also home to numerous institutions of higher education, among them Syracuse University; Colgate University; Le Moyne College; Onondaga Community College; and several branches of SUNY (State University of New York), including SUNY Upstate Medical University and SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

For additional information on Syracuse and the foundation's five-county service area, visit [Wikipedia](#) (a link specific to Syracuse, NY, but listings are also available for the metro area and individual counties). For information on economic development, useful sites include [CenterState CEO](#) and [Upstate Minority Economic Alliance](#).

The largest dedicated news coverage of the region is available at [Syracuse.com](#). [Central New York Tourism](#) and [Central New York Attractions](#) offer a snapshot of the area's attractions and activities. For an overview of community foundations, [CF Leads](#) is an instructive resource.



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The Candidate

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The search committee is open to a variety of career paths. Deep leadership experience gained within progressive community foundations or within the Central New York region will be of particular interest, especially if those experiences were characterized by diverse operating environments serving diverse constituencies.

Competence: Among the traits being sought, CNYCF expects to hire...

- An executive who balances a long view of success with a sense of urgency about the work at hand; one who combines strategic imperative with a commitment to action
- A leader comfortable with calculated risks in pursuit of bold goals set in collaboration with engaged constituencies, an informed board, and an empowered staff
- A CEO who understands not only the opportunity to make a difference but the *obligation* to do so
- A board-savvy manager capable of engaging with people of different generations, economic circumstances and ethnicities as the foundation develops investors, co-funders, and partners beyond its historic focus
- A leader with the demonstrated experience to attract and apply relevant resources in support of solutions to the most challenging community issues

- An executive who has led significant initiatives in a community undergoing significant growth and/or transformation
- A manager and mentor who values people skills as much as subject-matter expertise; someone who respects (and models) the power of proximity in leadership, whether within community or the foundation's own team
- A CEO who leads by influence rather than authority, but also a decisive leader willing to take a stand and make the tough calls when necessary
- A respectful, empowering executive with the confidence to lead a team of smart, independent-minded colleagues accustomed to transparency and candor in their dealings with one another and the community at large
- A broad-based general manager—financially literate, intellectually astute, culturally attuned—with hands-on experience in a significant multifaceted community or grantmaking context
- A compelling communicator who builds enduring relationships
- A superior ambassador for CNYCF's mission, whatever the context
- A student of leadership who continuously 'sharpens the saw' and values and processes feedback for self-improvement and development.

Culture: CNYCF's CEO should embody...

- A genuine commitment to equity, and the experience with practical approaches to ensure real diversity and inclusion
- Trust, value and respect for the knowledge and experience of a committed board and a capable staff



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CNYCF's CEO should embody the courage to be bold, the patience to connect, the humility to learn, the confidence to lead, and the sense of humor to make it all a pleasure.



- High EQ, born of comfort in the community center as well as the boardroom
- An approachable management style and a clear commitment to listening and learning; a compassionate manager who emphasizes team over self and collaboration over hierarchy, even while ensuring the systems and disciplines required to sustain operational excellence
- Genuine respect for donors, grantees, and the constituents they serve
- Thought partnership for grantees and donors alike; a leader who can connect with authenticity at multiple levels and in multiple contexts, navigating easily among the Foundation's various constituencies
- An expansive view of resource development; a fearless fundraiser who is nonetheless nuanced in dealings with donors
- Cultural and social dexterity; an executive comfortable with the special demands of foundation leadership in an evolving community
- Innovative thinking; a leader who can energize support for shared strategic goals and ensure the operational impetus to achieve them
- Passion for the important work that a strong community foundation is uniquely capable of undertaking
- The courage to be bold, the patience to connect, the humility to learn, the confidence to lead, and the sense of humor to make it all a pleasure.

The Compensation

A competitive compensation package of salary and full benefits will be offered to attract an outstanding candidate. The anticipated range for base salary is \$250,000 to \$335,000.

For potential consideration or
to suggest a prospect, please email
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or call

Sam Pettway or **Diane Westmore** at
404-BoardWalk (404-262-7392).

