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The Future of Work is...

But when the “in person” door closed, a window opened wider than we could have ever imagined.



Letter to the Community.

Dear Partners, Participants, Facilitators, Supporters and Friends:

When COVID arrived in March of 2020, we thought that our work might be done. After all, Reflection Point (at that moment, Books@Work) was about bringing people together – face to face in a room – to explore ideas and make new connections. As workplaces all over the globe emptied, we turned to virtual.

If you had asked us in February whether story-based discussions could be as powerful on Zoom, we would have said no. In March 2020, we had no choice but to try.

But when the “in person” door closed, a window opened wider than we could have ever imagined.

The pandemic leveled the playing field for teams. Suddenly most were remote. For the first time, we led regular Reflection Point sessions with colleagues that have never been in the same place. These were global teams or already-remote teams that realized that the new virtual work tools could also be culture-building tools.

But changing our work to virtual also invited us to reflect on ourselves. Remote work wasn’t an internal stumbling block because we’ve been a remote team for a decade. But providing our programs remotely for the first time encouraged us to think about facilitators, readings and the overall learning experience differently.

No longer tethered by geography, we were free to revisit many aspects of our work. We diversified the experience for our facilitators by bringing them to teams anywhere in the world. And we enriched the teams’ experiences by expanding (and shortening) the nature of the reading. We took a giant step toward short stories, completing a shift that had begun before COVID. We began to wonder whether our name was still serving us.

Reflection Point used to be called Books@Work. But on the occasion of our tenth anniversary, we changed our name.

Years of gathering feedback and insights from our clients have helped us to shape the way we think about ourselves. It was never about the book – as it is still not about the story. Rather, the story and the conversation are a starting point. The magic happens when groups reflect together – on a story, each others’ contributions, the workplace and the world.

Facilitated story-based discussions bring colleagues together and create a context to deepen respect, trust and friendship. These are spaces of honesty and sharing, spaces to “speak your truth” and learn about each other’s realities.

We settled on Reflection Point because it better captures the effects of our work rather than the process. The name reflects a core tenet of our mission – to give colleagues at every level of an organization an intentional pause to reflect and consider other viewpoints. This is both rare and crucial to an organization’s well-being.

Reflection Point provides the space – the “reflection point” – to explore new ideas and connect more deeply to colleagues, whether we barely know them or have known them for years!

2020 was a year of being wrong: but fruitfully wrong. We opened our minds to virtual programming and we adopted a new, more apt name.

We embrace the future of work with optimism, despite, *and because of*, the ambiguity we all face. If uncertainty pushes us to innovate and grow, then we’re all in.

We are deeply grateful for your support and partnership.

Best wishes,



Ann Kowal Smith
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Felix M. Brueck
BOARD CHAIR

What is Reflection Point?

At Reflection Point we believe that inclusive organizations require open and honest conversation.

- It’s about getting to know each other by sharing diverse perspectives
- It’s about building trust and respect
- It takes practice

We make it easier by starting with a story.

We guide groups through facilitated discussions of carefully chosen short stories, designed to foster relationship skills and practices: asking good questions, listening openly, reflecting on diverse perspectives and building empathy.

Why stories? Stories offer a low risk platform to practice honest conversations. A good story invites a group to reflect about the ways they relate to each other and how to co-create a more inclusive future. It opens avenues for sharing more of ourselves and deepening the relationships that support inclusion, collaboration and innovation.

“

The dialogue helped me reflect on my own points of view, and helped connect seemingly ‘non business’ interactions to workplace interactions and business/management practices.”

—REFLECTION POINT PARTICIPANT

The Future of Work is...

At Reflection Point we believe that the most collaborative organizations invest in the depth and quality of relationships among their colleagues. As the future brings new ways of working together, the return on this investment will be profound.

The only thing we know for sure:
the future of work is collective.

Reflective

The last two years have given us extra time for individual reflection, to reckon with our commitments and to reevaluate what's important.

But we've really been at a loss for time and space to reflect with others.

But reflection remains more critical than ever. When we reflect, we draw from past experience to illuminate present circumstances as we make decisions about the future. By learning from our experience, we avoid the mistakes of "fast thinking," a knee jerk response to the problems at hand.

The most effective teams and organizations are those that can reflect together. There's an old saying: "I am so busy cutting down trees that I do not have the time to sharpen my ax."

What will we forgo if we do not take the time to reflect together before we act?

Virtual

The pandemic forced us to our screens, keeping people connected but physically distant. As the "new normal" includes hybrid or remote teams, our now-honed virtual meeting skills are here to stay.

It's not the format that destroys the meeting, it's the substance and the quality. Virtual meetings may not be perfect, but they require a set of intentional mindsets and behaviors to make them most successful.

A good virtual conversation requires your eyes as well as your ears. Just as you would not go into a conference room with a paper bag over your head, turning off your camera signals your disengagement. When we bring ourselves fully in, the intimacy increases (this heightened vulnerability may be the real reason people complain of zoom fatigue). It invites a focused attention on everyone, not just the person talking, or the most "powerful" person in the room.

How much might we extend our collaboration if we commit to being all in?

Shared

Storytelling is having a moment. From marketing to communications, telling a good yarn is the new charisma - it's powerful, engaging and persuasive.

Storytelling is a simple formula - there's the one telling and the one(s) listening. One to one, or one to many. It's compelling, for sure, but it's intentional and often manipulative.

But storysharing is organic. Yes, you may start in one story (in our case a classic or contemporary short story) but that story invites other stories in response. Story sharing is generous and generative, messy and authentic - it's many to many, without a specific agenda.

Storysharing builds connection, deepens the skills of relationship and expands your circle of empathy and mutual care. Storysharing focuses on the listener, and not only on the teller. It opens you to a different set of realities, to the stories you don't yet know.

Have you shared your stories with your colleagues and stopped to listen to theirs?

Inclusive

In 2020, the murder of George Floyd triggered the collective conscience of the world. Organizations everywhere doubled down their efforts to bring issues of diversity, inclusion and belonging to the foreground.

Understanding and reckoning with historical marginalization and discrimination requires intentional learning. But the skills of inclusion are the skills of relationship: curiosity, humility, suspending your "known truths" to experience the perspectives of others. By deepening relationships with our colleagues, we widen the circle of empathy, trust and respect.

If we ground inclusion in relationships, can we move it from being a corporate initiative to a way of being, an integral part of our collective culture?

Uncertain

COVID threw us into a tailspin, making us unsure of what the next day would bring.

The future of work is, above all, uncertain. And uncertainty invites the darker side of our natures: holding on to old paradigms and competing for attention. Organizations search for ways to help their colleagues be resilient, to withstand the ambiguity of new business models and new working styles.

But a sense of belonging to a tightly knit group is the best antidote to uncertain times. We need meaningful work coupled with meaningful relationships. The science tells us that relationships add emotional carrying capacity to weather challenging times.

Can we soften the uncertainty by leaning on each other instead of going it alone?

Financials

LESSONS LEARNED

To limit 2020 to three lessons learned is a feat! But this past year's lessons were powerful.

→ **Never assume you can't do something.**

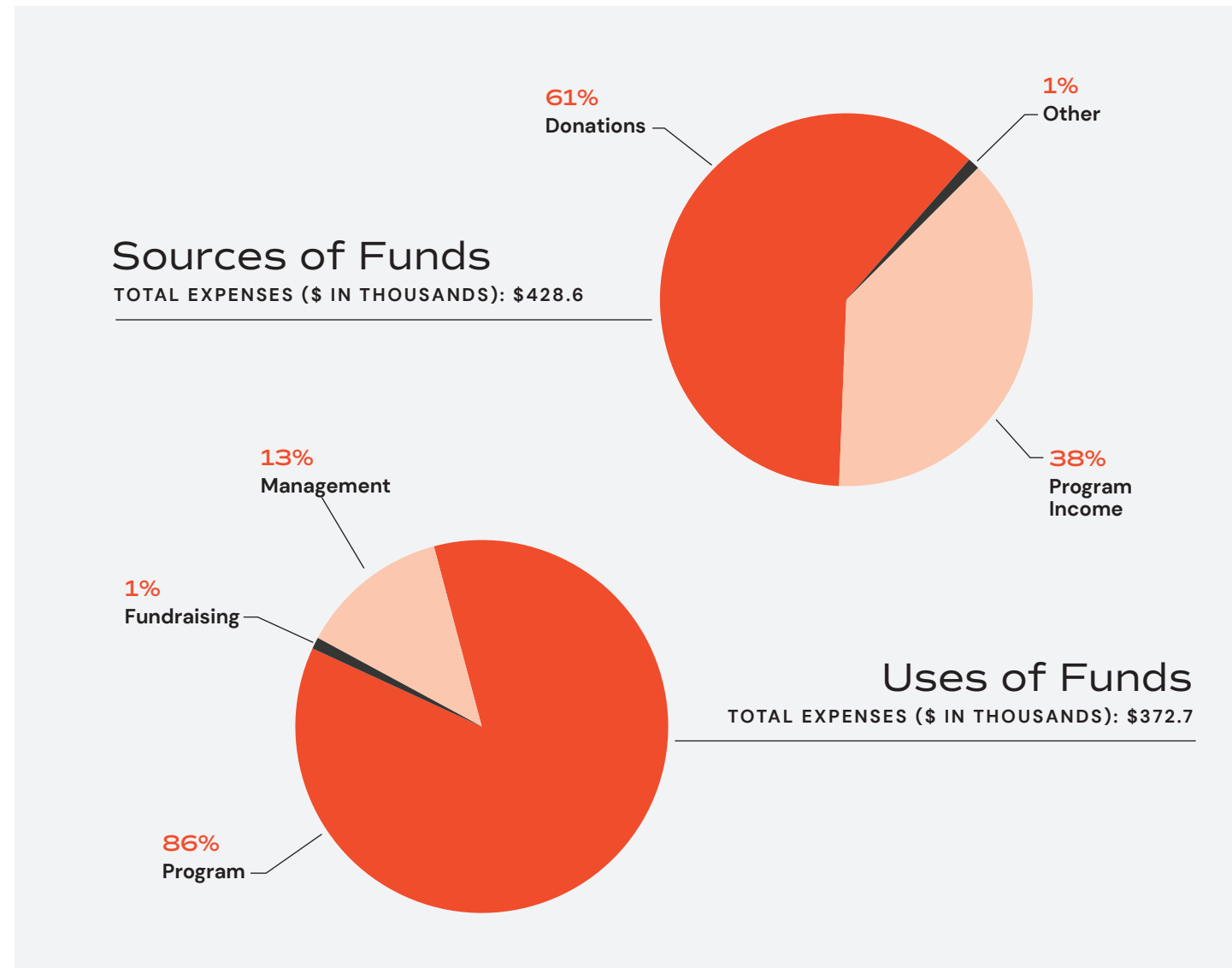
Before the pandemic, we believed that virtual Reflection Point sessions were a non-starter. And we were wrong! Virtual brought us together in new ways and in new configurations, including colleagues on global or remote teams that have never met in person. Virtual lets us deepen interpersonal connection in otherwise private spaces. And virtual let us see a little bit more of each other at a time when we needed it most.

→ **Workplace culture is all about people.**

As the old saying goes, "absence makes the heart grow fonder." But absence also makes you appreciate the things you previously took for granted. Our workplaces are powered by people and the best cultures are those with the strongest relationships. It's about inclusion, collaboration and respect – and these are people skills!

→ **For good workplaces, inclusion isn't an initiative – it's table stakes.**

2020 was a year of reckoning with many companies waking up to the need to address diversity and inclusion head on. Employees are voting with their feet: building a good culture means building an authentically inclusive culture. It starts by investing in relationships. Regularly challenging your colleagues to open themselves to new ideas and to listen to experiences of others is not a "nice to have," it's a must have.



By the Numbers

AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2020 (AND SINCE INCEPTION), WE HAVE SERVED:

11,512
Participants

84
Organizations

8
Languages



We talked about how ordinary people are asked to do extraordinary things. That sticks with me as I think about my own commitment to action to drive equity and inclusion."

—REFLECTION POINT PARTICIPANT

Thank You.

You – our donors, partners, participants and facilitators – give life to Reflection Point. Your dedication to lifelong learning helps individuals, teams and communities. You are making learning inspiring and relevant. Together we are breaking down barriers and building collaborative and inclusive workplaces and communities.

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other perspectives
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—REFLECTION POINT PARTICIPANT

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TWG Plus
University of Massachusetts Medical School
University of Michigan
Valmet Inc.
Veterans Domiciliary at Wade Park
Whirlpool Corporation
Workplace Learning System

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After further thinking about the session, I came to the conclusion that in leadership, everything is not always black and white. Often we have to humble ourselves to make a difference with change.”

—REFLECTION POINT PARTICIPANT



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