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## **Conducting Leadership: A novel event aimed at strengthening connections NONPROFIT REGISTER**

By Joanne Davidson Special to Colorado Politics 03/18/2026 | updated 2 hours ago



John Markovich from PNC Bank; William Browning, president/chief executive officer of Clayton Early Learning; and Roweena Naidoo, vice president for policy and community initiatives at Mile High United Way. Photos provided by Clayton Early Learning.

## Denver

**News:** Approximately 40 leaders from Denver’s nonprofit community gathered at Boettcher Concert Hall on March 4 for a novel event whose purpose was to strengthen connections within and across organizations.

It was hosted by PNC Bank and Clayton Early Learning.

Invitations promoted the 4:30 p.m. event as a time to spend in “Deep reflection, powered by beautiful music, where we can explore the principles that drive effective leadership on our own teams — and collaboratively across other community organizations.”

The date for this immersive session led by leadership expert and choral conductor Hal Adler was perfectly timed, given how the nonprofit community is currently facing unprecedented pressures — from funding uncertainty to ever-increasing community needs.



Nicole Dorsey, vice president, client and community relations, PNC Bank; with Sydney Futrell, chief development officer, Clayton Early Learning.

Following a networking reception, participants were ushered to seats on the concert stage with 40 members of the Colorado Symphony Chorus. There, they experienced first-hand how alignment, listening and shared purpose create extraordinary results.

Adler noted how by leading a choir, studying leadership and working in the leadership development field he discovered that the parallel paths of music and leadership “Actually do cross in quite a meaningful way, bringing to life leadership principles such as self-awareness, creating vision and time, and cultivating collaboration and honest two-way communication.”

William Browning, president and CEO of Clayton Early Learning, welcomed the group by saying: “In a time when the world can feel chaotic and uncertain, we wanted to create a moment of connection for the remarkable leaders who carry so much responsibility in our community. Bringing together partners from Clayton, PNC, and so many of Denver’s nonprofit organizations wasn’t just about convening a room, it was about reminding ourselves what’s possible when we work in harmony.”



Raphe Schwartz, VP Strategy, Children’s Hospital of Colorado; Nicole Riehl, CEO EPIC; and Carol Carter, CEO GlobalMinded.

Leadership, Browning added, “Can sometimes feel like standing alone on the podium, but the truth is that real progress happens when the whole ensemble is engaged. Just as a conductor helps talented musicians listen to one another and move with shared purpose, our goal was to inspire leaders to collaborate more effectively and efficiently,

so together we can make something powerful and beautiful for the communities we serve.”

Nonprofit leadership, Browning reminded his audience, “Is incredibly challenging right now, but tonight is a reminder that none of us is doing this work alone. When we come together with hope, courage, and a shared commitment to our communities, we truly can make beautiful music together.”

Daniel Wachter, president and chief executive officer of the Colorado Symphony, shared his discovery that “As a music lover, I found inspiration in what I, as a leader, could learn from watching the conductor lead an orchestra. I found that the power of music activates us emotionally, and I think it opens different channels of learning, channels of observation. It creates a safe place. It makes it easier to become vulnerable, and I think it opens the mind in different ways and makes leadership experiential. Not by reading, not by hearing, but by really being part of it and even feeling the vibration.”



Renelle Darr, chief executive office for Insight Consulting and Christine Benero, chief executive officer at Mile High United Way.

Regional President Kevin Classen attended with several PNC Colorado executives, including Nicole Dorsey and John Markovich.

He said that PNC was proud to support an event whose goal is to create “A more vibrant Denver and a vibrant region. We know the business community thrives when our broader community thrives, and that economic growth and community strength go hand in hand.”

In addition to William Browning, Clayton Early Learning staffleaders Becca Bracy, Paula Smith and Hannah Baer, trustees Bert Williams, Kent Glassman, Daniel Prager, Hennessey Jones and Jennifer Stedron also took part.

Other nonprofit leaders there included Paul Lhevine, CEO of the Colorado Nonprofit Association; Heather Tritten, CEO of the Colorado Children's Campaign; Sean VanBerschot, executive director of the Denver Health Foundation; Elsa Holguin, president/ CEO of the Denver Preschool Program and Warren Village CEO Ethan Hemming.

Also, Colleen Walker, CEO of the Auraria Higher Education Center; Simone Ross, CEO of the Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce; Daphne Brookens, a vice president with Girls, Inc. of Metro Denver; and Dr. Lisa Roy, executive director of the Colorado Department of Early Childhood.



About the organization: Clayton Early Learning is a Denver-based nonprofit that provides comprehensive early childhood education and family support for children from birth to age 5, using a multigenerational, place-based approach.

Website: [claytonearlylearning.org](http://claytonearlylearning.org)

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