

PERIOD Independent Review

Phase 1 Report

August 2020

Introduction

A Compelling Call-Out

In August of 2020, PERIOD hired a team of organizational consultants from Dragonfly Partners, led by Aarati Kasturirangan, to conduct an independent review of its structure, policies and practices. The review was commissioned in response to accusations made by a member of PERIOD's community.

In June of 2020, a Black activist who founded a sister organization to PERIOD, wrote an article that appeared in a major online publication. (The activist told PERIOD they do not wish to be named in any reports or public statements and so their name has been removed from this report by Dragonfly Partners). In the article they described their experiences with PERIOD and named harms including extracting and appropriating the ideas of other menstrual activists and monopolizing and mismanaging resources. They also made several accusations directed at PERIOD's founder.

The article outlined a set of demands which included a demand for the founder to step down, a desire for Black leadership at PERIOD, and a call for a process to redistribute power and resources to grassroots organizations working on menstrual justice. After the article was published, there was a fervent community response that took place primarily on Instagram. Other Black menstrual justice activists backed the perspectives shared in the article. Many PERIOD chapters pledged to hold PERIOD accountable in solidarity with these Black activists.

Efforts to Acknowledge and Repair Harm

PERIOD's leadership team has expressed a deep commitment to make amends and transform in any way that is needed to prevent future harm. Relatively quickly, the board of directors severed PERIOD's relationship with the founder. She is not connected to PERIOD in any way.

Separate from PERIOD, the founder has been working to make amends one to one and publicly and she is currently working with a transformative justice group to support her efforts at accountability.

In a concerted effort to respond to the critiques they have heard, PERIOD's leadership and staff have:

- Posted several public apologies through social media.
- Made several unsuccessful attempts to speak directly with the person who wrote the article.
- Had dozens of one-on-one discussions with menstruators around the world.
- Hosted two virtual open chapter calls devoted to listening and responding to chapter members' concerns and questions about the accusations.
- Recruited and formalized a youth advisory committee which is tasked with overseeing new program development including the review and funding of PERIOD's micro-grants. By the end of 2020, two of these committee members will serve on PERIOD's national governing board.
- Initiated a program of micro-grants of up to \$1,000 per grant to fund youth-led groups in menstrual justice.
- Hired the first of up to five regional chapter coordinators to collaborate with and support chapters' efforts in their communities.
- Further refined a new senior position within PERIOD to act as National Programs Director. This search is in process and PERIOD is committed to keeping the position open until it has an applicant pool that includes a significant portion of menstruators of color.
- Initiated a pilot program to fund international chapters beginning with PERIOD's work in Guatemala.

The team at PERIOD recognizes that the organization has caused harm during its rapid growth. They also know that many of their partners depend on PERIOD to get products to people who need them. And they are acutely aware of the profound sense of validation many chapter members have experienced through their involvement with PERIOD. They hope they can transform in ways that meaningfully address harm and allow PERIOD to fulfill its responsibilities to those who have come to depend on them for material aid and social support.

About the Independent Review

In mid-August PERIOD hired Dragonfly to conduct this independent review. The goal of the independent review is to better understand PERIOD's strengths and weaknesses and the roots of the harm they caused. These findings would then form the basis to create a plan for major change at PERIOD. As of August 31, we have completed:

1. A review of PERIOD's history as described by the founder, members of the board of directors and in written documentation.

2. An assessment of some of PERIOD's strengths and contributions to date.
3. A review of all documents, social media posts, recordings, and meeting notes that chronicle the interactions between members of PERIOD and the larger community since the article was published.

Accountability processes involve many people with different relationships to PERIOD. They are dynamic. Real transformation requires thoughtful, often painful self-reflection. It is not formulaic, nor does it follow a straight line. Dragonfly Partners is committed to accompanying and advising PERIOD through this accountability process. In the next phase of the independent review we will conduct focus groups and interviews to better understand PERIOD's strengths and weaknesses and begin to develop a more specific set of recommended actions steps.

Summary of Phase 1 Findings

PERIOD's Strengths

- PERIOD is a relatively small non-profit run by five full-time staff and several interns. PERIOD does quite a lot with its one million dollar budget.
- PERIOD gets lots of period products into the hands of menstruators who need them. In the last six months, they have distributed almost three million products from their warehouse in Portland, OR.
- PERIOD's founder was really good at getting the word out about period poverty and menstrual activism. She took advantage of every opportunity to tell her story in social media, print media, and speaking engagements and inspired many young activists.
- Hundreds of young activists from around the world have reached out to PERIOD because they wanted to get involved. PERIOD has cherished this overwhelming enthusiasm for menstrual activism and has tried to be responsive.
- There is a clear demand for an organization like PERIOD to exist. To date, over 850 PERIOD chapters have formed. Seventy-two chapters dissolved as a result of the article naming harm and subsequent social media commentary. In that same span of time, 110 new chapters formed without prompting from PERIOD staff.
- Because of the number of chapters connected to PERIOD, PERIOD appears to be a much larger, bigger budget organization than it actually is.

PERIOD's Mistakes

- PERIOD's growth has been rapid and somewhat haphazard allowing plenty of opportunities for mistakes to be made.

- Movements today embrace leaderlessness as a core strength. By centering and elevating herself on social media and other public platforms, the founder (and therefore PERIOD) signaled that her leadership was central to the movement.
- PERIOD has not done a good job of telling the story of the many contributions it has made, who is involved, who it serves, or what it does. This has allowed people to make assumptions based on PERIOD's social media profile in the menstrual justice space.
- It is clear that staff have been thrilled to be a part of this growing network and have deep respect and pride for the great work chapters have done. But PERIOD's people did not have the skills needed to build thoughtful coalitions with chapters or partners.
- At times, PERIOD was given access to materials and ideas that originated in chapter and partner groups. Due to carelessness, PERIOD did not do its due diligence in tending to these relationships and acknowledging these partners' distinct contributions.

Suggested Next Steps

This first phase of Dragonfly's review has been limited primarily to a review of written and visual documentation. We are eager to speak directly with members of the PERIOD community so that we can get a more robust picture of PERIOD. Based on this first phase of inquiry we have identified several questions for further exploration:

1. White dominant cultural norms shape many non-profit institutions. How has white dominant culture shaped PERIOD's governance and programs?
2. In what ways has PERIOD demonstrated an ability to be inclusive through its governance and programs?
3. Are there ways that chapters have benefited from their relationship with PERIOD that should be preserved?

In addition, based on our review thus far, we would like to offer some preliminary recommendations to PERIOD's leadership.

1. Respect the wishes of the Black activist whose article sparked this accountability process. Do not use their name.
2. Directly address each of the demands made in the article even if you are not able to meet those demands today.
3. Learn and tell the story of the menstrual movement and be clear about what PERIOD's contribution has and has not been to that movement. Re-enter the movement with humility.
4. Get input from chapters and partners to reexamine PERIOD's best use in the menstrual movement. Shift the work of the organization as needed.
5. Clarify the relationship between PERIOD and its chapters. Prioritize slow growth and deep relationship-building.
6. Intentionally and actively share the mic with menstrual activists from communities that are most impacted by menstrual inequity.