

Annysa Polanco AKRI Candidate Statement

I often found it difficult to feel like I belonged in the AKRI community, or ‘qualified’ for the consultant training program, or had enough money for the sponsored conferences. I even questioned whether I “belonged” on a slate of AKRI candidates. AKRI as an organization felt contradictory to its main “product” or Group Relations Conferences, if you will. Life and chaos and people are not rational or intellectual, we cannot reason them away with better words or interpretations, more degrees, and higher registration fees. And yet, I have been forever changed by Group Relations Conferences. I am a better partner, a better practitioner, a better mother, a better friend, a better citizen because of what I grappled with and discovered in the **application** of my learnings from GRCs. If I think about this core experience and what I would like AKRI to be, my vision feels rather selfish: I want that same outcome for every individual, group, and system that comes into contact with AKRI. I firmly believe in AKRI’s unique ability to offer transformative frameworks to the very systems that make up its ‘work’.

Moreover, if AKRI “offers experiential learning designed to make sense of the social chaos and irrationality that surrounds us”, it needs people shaped by different life experiences that inform how authority is taken up in service of surviving this chaos. As a first-generation Dominican woman, raised by a single mother in a low-socioeconomic household, the systems I have had to navigate since the age of 8 have shaped how I see the ‘chaos’ we seek to make sense of. My hope for running in an AKRI election is to help further legitimize that people who represent what my identities may surface have equal **value**. Their lived experiences of authority, role, boundary and task are just as valid as those who study it.

The truth is, I don’t think my experiences are particular special, but I do think I am clear enough on how my purpose and abilities can help and contribute to AKRI. Despite my aversion to equating educational attainment with competency, I will share that I have my Bachelors in Human Services, my Masters in Macro Social Work from Boston College, and an Advanced Professional Practitioner Certificate in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion from Cornell University. I worked in non-profits and higher education prior to my current role as the Director of DEI at Penguin Random House. In spite of this, I think my greatest contribution to AKRI are the skills that are not valued in degrees.

I have a high tolerance for ambiguity and operating in liminal spaces as a Latinx woman. Every professional role I have had has been new—there was never a road map. Being able to navigate uncertainty and discomfort in spaces that are not well defined is a skill that I believe would benefit where AKRI finds itself right now.

The interrogation of self and organization in service of an authentic expression, especially in decision-making, is my second contribution. I believe that the more honest we are with ourselves in the process of this work and offer that honesty, regardless of how humiliating and how contrary to our western definition of leadership that may be, the more ‘progress’ and transformation we are able to attain. It is the same constant, intentional interrogation we should ask of our systems and institutions.

In practice, it means saying that I try not to take myself too seriously, that I trust God has a bigger plan for me, that I am only a small speck in the brilliance of collective community. I do my best to recognize when my pride gets in the way, when I am less humble and modest than I perceive myself to be, when my ambition takes a front seat, when my rawness deserves a seat at

the table, when my perfectionism gets in the way, when imposter syndrome is shouting a little louder in my head, when my naivety might be getting the better of me, and when my fear is outweighing my power. I admit when I don't know, when I missed something or someone, and own up to the discomfort and messiness of it all. I remind myself that I am a constant work in progress and that there is so much I have yet to learn.

As I work through my own journey towards wholeness, putting back all the pieces of myself that feel sectioned off and own them (the good, the bad, the projections, and the projected), I can't help but think of AKRI being in a similar position and I feel equipped to aid in the process towards its own accountable wholeness.