In his first career, Bill Graustein worked for 25 years in the Department of Geology and Geophysics at Yale University: originally as a graduate student, and later as a research scientist after earning his Ph.D. in 1981.

His early training as a scientist instilled two habits continuing to inform Bill's work, today, in the New Haven community. First is a habit of trying always to bring relevant but seemingly disparate information together into a coherent picture. Second is a practice of framing
issues for learning—deliberately creating the space and sense of safety necessary for old assumptions to be challenged, and new ones to be imagined and tested.

In 1993, an abrupt increase in the assets of a small foundation established by his father inspired Bill to profoundly redefine the foundation's mission, structure, and strategies and for Bill to re-imagine what his role would be.

During this process, Bill interviewed 40 different people working in all aspects of education. Bill fully expected to hear professional judgments and insights; but he also heard personal stories of life-changing power. Among these many stories, Bill found both particular and universal resonances—each person’s story is unique, while at the same time communicating themes that crossed every boundary of background and experience.

In particular, Bill recognized the yearning of local non-profit leaders for help with working collaboratively for support in perfecting the relationship between their values as an organization and their roles as leaders, and for a space in which candid and constructive dialogues across class and race could take place. Hearing this need, Bill helped develop and lead the year-long Community Leadership Program workshop series as well as other activities for community leaders. The program is in its 21st year.

The Community Leadership Program focuses on Individuals. Bill came to recognize that there was also a need for organizations and systems to imagine, support and operationalize more inclusive, just, and collaborative ways of working. In 2010 Bill and Niyonu Spann started Co-Creating Effective and Inclusive Organizations and Organizers, or CEIO, which is now in its 14th year.