



Transcript  
December 9, 2019  
Episode 2

Philanthropy – Part 1 of 375: Teach Them Young  
Co-Hosts: Brittny Wilson (B) and Nia Wassink (N)

B: I'm Brittny Wilson.

N: And I'm Nia Wassink.

Both: And this is, The Nonprofit Reframe

N: Brittny Wilson over here is a bad ass fundraising extraordinaire. She has done everything from tiny little nonprofits to multi-million dollar budget. She's the fundraising maven.

B: Dang. I don't know if I can top that but Nia can, being the owner and principal of Mission Launch, a nonprofit consulting firm here in Colorado. She's been Executive Director. She's been Development Director. She's done all the roles and she has all the knowledge. So welcome, Nia.

N: Alright welcome back to another episode of The Nonprofit Reframe. This is Nia

B: and this is Brittny.

N: What are we talking about today, Britt?

B: Today, we are ...This episode has been inspired by a community member who sent me an email last week. You know at the end of the year and it's a time when a lot of people and families especially our thinking about giving back and how they can make a difference in this world. I wish that we had this same sentiment all year long, but at least we have this time and it's an opportunity to capitalize on that and bring in new volunteers in new donors. But when I got this email and it made me think about some of the misconceptions that people have.

N: So, Brittny, what was in this email you got?

B: So the email was from a supporter in the community who want to teach their children more about giving which I think is amazing.

N: Sounds awesome

B: It's something that I have really wanted to start doing with my kids. I have two daughters two young daughters we talk a lot at home about what I do for work but we're always trying to look at ways to plug them into the work itself. So they can see it and it can actually be an experience for them. But it's hard. Not a lot of nonprofits have opportunities for kids to volunteer. Have you seen that with your work?

N: Yeah well it is so often ... I mean, you know this... You end up creating activities for young folks so they can see the work and it's actually not meaningful help.

B: Well no. It just creates more work for staff.

N: Exactly yeah

B: So I mean I get asked this just my friends all the time. "You know, my family wants to do a service project. You know of anything?" So, this person wants to do the same thing. They looked on our website and they couldn't find volunteer opportunities. Something to note. But what they did... I mean they're there, but anyway. But what they wanted to do - what they did see is a way to donate. Which, actually, as a fundraiser makes me feel really good. I know!

N: Claps for that!

B: I know. They found the donate button. So that was great. But their concern is that they don't want to teach their children to quote unquote "throw money at a problem." And their other concern is that they don't feel like they have enough money to make a difference. So they're willing to give their time and their voice.

N: I literally have that exact conversation with my father last night.

B: Interesting.

N: So, my dad and I chat weekly. He lives out of state. And he asked me how Giving Tuesday went. And I said...

B: Giving What?

N: Basically. But asked, "So, who did you give to?" And he was like, "Oh, I couldn't this week yada-yada." And I said, "you know you don't have to give a large gift, right? Any size gift is actually pretty meaningful right now." And then I went into a bunch more detail about that and I think it was the first time that he really understood that we're not just talking about major donors these days. We need a lot of different kinds of donors and for whatever reason that message is not getting out.

B: I know I broke my heart, by reading this email. I mean yes, okay. I recognize that you want to teach your children to get out and do the work and volunteer and give their time and I think that's commendable. But I also think that there is death of giving happening right now among the majority of the population.

N: Well and not to go too wonky on you, but this is something that I'm pretty fired up about right now. We know - we have data - about the shrinking number of small and midsize donors. And you know we get these reports like GivingUSA and those type of things that show that philanthropy is pretty steady. Well that's because our big donors are actually making up for lost in small donors. And many of you might say, "well that's fine, right?"

B: Sure I want that \$100,000 gift

N: Right. Well, what that means, though, is that philanthropy is in the hands of an increasingly small number of people. And those people, the people with the wealth, giving these major philanthropic gifts, tend to give to the same kinds of places. And let me tell you, those are not your local shelters, the other local groups doing the important work in your community. They are the colleges, the universities, the hospitals. Not to mention the DAFs. In the last five years the money that - the amount of assets in these DAFs has gone up 73% in this country.

B: That's incredible

N: So when you've got one type of person - I mean obviously, I'm making a generalization and there are plenty of other people who have wealth, but we know the majority of them are a certain type of person and they're given to certain types of charities. I, quite frankly, I don't want the Jeff Bezoses of the world telling my community what's important.

B: yeah

N: I want my neighbor down the street who is given to the same nonprofit I'm giving to because we both care and think it's an important part of our community.

B: Well, did you just see that episode on The Patriot Act?

N: I loved that episode on the patriot act

B: If you don't follow that show definitely check it out especially the last episode. It's on Netflix in fact about big philanthropy, which speaks exactly to this point. And one of the examples that they gave and I was so which I thought was so poignant was around Bill and Melinda Gates in Washington really pushing for charter schools. And how over and over and over again - and this isn't to say anything necessarily wrong with Bill and Melinda Gates... Look we know that they have given so much money and have made big strides in a lot of areas across the world. But this is an example of how they have used their money and their influence to change the offerings and education system in a particular state. And so here they had, you know, the voters, time and time again, had voted down charter schools. And they just pumped more and more money into advertisements and lobbying for it until it eventually passed.

N: Exactly I tell my clients regularly: I would much rather have ten \$100 donors who are really committed to our mission than a \$1,000 one-off donation. I know those ten families are going to take more work. Right? Because it's 10 versus 1.

B: Sure

N: We're gonna have to keep them involved and engaged, but now we have ten people who support the work we're doing. So if we have something come in front of City Council and that ten people who could potentially back us instead of one. I've got 10 people who can tell their network about what we're doing instead of 1. I've got 10 who could be potential volunteers that you know I mean... It goes on and on and on. But our small and mid-size donors are absolutely critical for nonprofits right now.

B: And again to go back to the email, that is the part that broke my heart, is that they said, "We can't afford to give enough to quote unquote 'make an impact'" and that's just wrong. That's just wrong. And honestly, as a fundraiser I'm gonna tell you right now, when you're working for an organization that has a deficit, every dollar counts.

N: Absolutely.

B: We want your \$10 and yes we also would love to have your time and your volunteerism. And all that's great too, but the fact of the matter is, that we need to be able to be hitting our budget in order to keep these programs going. And if we don't get money in the door, that's not gonna happen. And so we need people to really be generous with their money; even if that's only \$5, \$10, \$15, \$20.

N: Yeah. I will say, I love the part about teaching philanthropy young.

B: I love it

N: Actually, you'll know this because I've done this to your daughters. If a kid wants money from me for a fundraiser, I make them call me on the phone and ask.

B: I Know! I love it.

N: Because we need to teach them like if there's something your passion about kiddo, great! Call Aunt Nia up and you know, she would love to give, but you're gonna have to actually call and ask her.

B: And that's my PSA right now. If you have kids and they have a fun run or they're selling something, you know for money, and they're calling their families or they're supposed to get money from their families and their friends, make them do it.

N: yeah

B: Have them do it. So I know, my daughter's school she... I thought this was fantastic...They... Well, first of all, they had a platform that is very easy for everybody to give. And then they encouraged every student to ask ten people that they were gonna do a fun run. And you need to ask ten people. And so I told my daughter, "okay let's lay out who you're going to talk to and then you need to call and ask them." She was so good! You have a job for life, kid!

N: You have taught her well!

B: Keep this up. If you don't have a problem talking about money or asking for money, go for it.

N: Well and you know, I'm working with so many clients every day, trying to get them less scared of fundraising. I am trying to break this habit that they have been taught since they were children that they shouldn't ask for money. That it's scary to ask for money. But if we can teach them both the power of philanthropy and also the power of asking for missions they care about absolute when they're kids, then they'll never develop that.

B: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. Well I know I always joke that I am kind of the worst friend, your worst person to be around. Because I'm a fundraiser, so I talk about money all time. I have a master's degree in comparative religion, so I'll talk theology all day to anybody. And I'm not religious I just really love talking about different traditions. And I'm, you know, pretty passionate about politics.

N: And you're an Ohio State Fan

B: And I'm a buckeye. You know people from Ohio love to talk about things from Ohio.

N: God, don't I know that. Geeze.

B: so you know all those fauxpas subjects that you're not supposed to bring up parties: I'm the first one talking about them. And that's what's this about. Let's talk about it because it's the truth. If we want to continue to have these amazing organizations hold up the most vulnerable in our community, because it's not happening through other social systems, then we need to support them.

N: Snaps for that. Speaking of being the worst person at a dinner party, I was that person earlier this week.

B: Oh no. What happened?

N: So I was with some other folks who I know are civilly involved. They're in nonprofits, or volunteers, or board members. So, I felt like it was a safe space. But I had just watched that episode of The Patriot Act. I've already read the book Winner Takes All.

B: Yeah

N: Which is so powerful

B: Yup, amazing go get it.

N: It's a subject that I could wonk-out on anyway, but it's obviously something I'm very passionate about. And so, somebody brought up something even tangentially related. I think it was just like about year-end giving and I went in deep. Just like, "This is why things are wrong with philanthropy and DAFs..." And by the end, you know, people are like grabbing their wine glasses and slowly wondering away.

B: But it's so true! I know I have done the exact same thing. I think this podcast isn't helping.

N: No it is not.

B: Because my still box has been following me around everywhere I've been lately and I just jump on top of it and I start preaching.

N: There's a lot to preach about.

B: There's so much to talk about. And getting back to DAFs and how they are kind of this double-edged sword. I mean, it is great that people have this mechanism where they can give money into, but what are they doing with that money?

N: Sitting on it.

B: Nothing!

N: Well, did you see this week in the news, what Schwab Charitable did?

B: No.

N: So they are one of the largest holders of Donor Advised Funds across the country. They, Uh, Any organization like Schwab, like your local community foundation, anybody who holds the DAFs, they have a certain level due diligence. So if you say you want to give to an organization the foundation has to research to make sure that they're an eligible 501(c)3 and yada-yada. Anyway, so Schwab came back and pulled all outgoing contributions from NRA and NRA-related organizations. Now, of course, they came under a lot of fire for this because people assume that it's actually because of the work they do, but it's because they're under investigation by the IRS. But it's an important thing to note to that you know there is a really important role that those DAF fund holders have to ensure that funds are being used well. Some will go further and...There was a group out East that said that they would stop allowing contributions to organizations that were anti-immigrant.

B: Wow!

N: So they can take real social stances and I don't think enough of them are.

B: Yeah,

N: I mean the money gets put in these DAFs and then they can go out to basically any qualified 501(c)3.

B: Right, cuz technically, I mean once the person put the money into the DAFs, while they can direct it, it's no longer their money.

N: It's not their money anymore. Nope

B: So that's really interesting. Well, I don't know how many times we're gonna say this on the podcast, but I feel like it's going to be a lot: The house is on fire right now!

N: Yes! Shout out to Vu Le for that metaphor.

B: Exactly. We love him.

N: But it is true: The house is on fire and if we don't do something right now the entire block is gonna be on fire in minutes.

B: And so all that money, all that wealth, that has been already earmarked for charitable purposes, but is just sitting, really probably making money for the banks in which they're in. We need to be using that money now.

N: Well, here's one of the conflicts, right? So, so many of these charitable entities, one of their markers of success is how large their asset pool is. So, when they can come back and say, "we have a hundred new donor advised funds and now house a \$1mil extra dollars," that looks good for them as a as a foundation or whatever kind of entity they are. So, there's no incentive for them to then get their DAF holders to push funds out.

B: Right.

N: And the IRS has no regulation around it. Private foundations have to distribute 5% annually.

B: But only 5%

N: Yeah, that's the whole issue in and of itself. But for DAFs, there's nothing.

B: yeah

N: I was actually talking to somebody recently who asked me to help them with some philanthropic advising and to start working with their kids, because they expect their Donor Advised Funds to still be full when they pass away. And my immediate response back was, "that's wonderful that you're trying to set your kids up to be philanthropic, but what if you spent the funds in your lifetime? What if you made investments now in nonprofits so you can actually see them utilize the funds and do incredible works with them?"

B: Well, not only that, but then it's going to be showing their children philanthropy in action.  
N Right!

B: So, look at this. We have made this money. Now we're setting it aside for these charitable purposes. Now we're putting it into action, look what we were able to do as a family. So they can do the same thing.

N: Yeah yeah.

B: They don't have to spend your money. They can spend their own because you have shown them how it's done.

N: Yup

B: And you've made it a value of the family.

N: Exactly. Which, then it all comes back to this email, right? Starting them young and teaching them the value of philanthropy, developing how that is an important part of their life and even lifestyle. I will immediately throw my husband under the bus. Because, his parents actually, they are incredibly civically involved and volunteer their time. Somehow that missed him. I don't know how, but he is the least philanthropic person I've ever met. We've been married eleven years and every year I sit down and say, "Who do we want to give to this year? What's of interest to you?" We have three cats. He loves cats, but apparently doesn't want to give to cats. I mean we spend so much time and he has no idea who we give to because I'm just left with the decision making.

B: Well now that you say that, it's making me reflect on my childhood. And you know my family, I would categorize as a very giving family, but we never had those conversations. That was not a practice. I don't know if it's because we were growing up in the Midwest. Mid West (there's my accent coming out, sorry). Or, we were just a middle class family. But that's my point, is that you know, even regardless of your family's income: if you're able to pay your bills and you're able to meet your basic needs and then some. And it doesn't matter how much it is. It's the concept of giving back. Well and it's so funny. I was listening to this podcast earlier today and the reason... I'm curious what you think about it. They were talking about how even just the "giving back" is not even such a great term.

N: yeah because it is transaction, right?

B: exactly

N: I get something and now I'm gonna give back.

B: Exactly. But, again, it goes back to the fact that if we want these organizations to be able to continue the services that people are relying on, people in your own community are relying on, then we need to help support that as a community.

N: I was actually working with a client recently. They do homelessness services: a wide range, from emergency to longer-term housing. And they started providing an opportunity for people, when they're making rent checks, to include a small donation. And at first, you know, the staff were like, "oh my gosh. Why are you asking our people for donations? Go ask the rich people!" And we're able to pivot and say: actually it's a really empowering thing to say, "even an extra \$2

a month, I believe in the work you're doing and so I want to donate. I want to be part of that philanthropic class.”

B: Yes!

N: Right. It isn't just the wealthy who get to decide what charities are worthy. “Me, going through this program, I recognize the benefit and I want to support that.”

B: Yeah.

N: I think we need to recognize that there's real empowerment in philanthropy, as well.

B: I know. I just want a new rebirth of giving to happen and I'm not sure how that happens.

#rebirthofgiving

B: No, just kidding. But, I really do. I mean, I know that I am biased, I've worked in this sector my entire career. I'm still passionate about it. I've seen the work first hand. I don't know what communities would do without these organizations. And I just feel that it is everybody's duty to do that. And maybe that's wrong and I recognize everybody has different financial situations, but if you're in a place where you can make that gift, no matter what size, I think we should. Because otherwise, these organizations are going to crumble. And we're gonna have a lot bigger social problems on our hands.

N: Can we go back to this email for a minute and talk about the part where they say, “we don't want to throw money at it,” and want to volunteer instead.

B: Thank you for bringing that back up.

N: What do you think about?

B: Ugh. It just kills me. And reaffirms our decision to do this podcast. That's such a misconception. It's not throwing money at a problem. It is fueling a solution.

N: Fueling a solution. Man, we have all our merch figured out right now.

B: #FuelingASolution

N: But it's so true and I think it gets back to the whole like, “money is such a taboo thing .” So, throwing money at the problem feels dirty, right? When actually, that money is absolutely critical and part of the bigger picture. And you can be part of it through your contributions. I want people to stop thinking in those contexts.

B: Me too! Me too. Preach. I know we could probably do a whole nother episode on people's relationship with money and how that impacts...

N: I'll write that down.

B: Yup, write that down. Podcast topic number 352. But, so, in that spirit and in this time of year, I just want to come back and say, you know if you are, you know, able to and have the means to give, whatever those means, please consider: Give where your heart is. I mean think about it: there are so many different, amazing organizations out there. If you have cats and you love cats (Nia's husband, who should be giving to cat charities) you know you have that option. and you can make it such a fabric and a value within the fabric of your family.

N: I also want to say, I think this is a call out to our nonprofit folks. We have focused so much on major donors

B: yep

N: That we forget our low and mid range donors. So as you're thinking about how you're going to acknowledge people giving smaller gifts and think about your stewardship plans for next year, make sure you have a plan to really ensure that these donors are brought into your mission, into programs. I mean, we see massive donor attrition and that is especially true of our lower in mid range donors. So please, please, please work to bring them in and work to find opportunities to give them that special touch. I know it's harder the larger you are and the

more number of donors you have, but bring in your board, bring your program staff into it. Make it an opportunity to really appreciate them.

B: I love it. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. This concludes our episode and we will see you next time.

N: Hahaha

B: I don't know. How do we end it?

N: Uh, this concludes the recording, at the tone

B: Beep

N: I will say it again, please subscribe, follow us on socials. We're on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram @nonprofitreframe. You can email us at [nonprofitreframe@gmail.com](mailto:nonprofitreframe@gmail.com).

B: It doesn't matter what generation you're in, we have the social channel for you. So check out

N: We would like to thank our sponsors. Mission Launch. Colorado-based consulting firm, focusing on fundraising and board governance. You can learn more at [missionlaunchco.com](http://missionlaunchco.com).

And Jake Walker Music who provided our theme music today. You can find him at [jakewalkermusic.org](http://jakewalkermusic.org). Thank you so much.

N: Hey, Nia here. We have our first of many corrections. In this episode, I mistakenly called this incredible book "Winner Takes All" and it's actually "Winners Take All." The subtitle is, "The Elite Charade of Changing the World." It's by Anand Giridharadas. You can find out more in the link in the show notes. I definitely recommend getting it. Thanks.