



Transcript  
February 3, 2020  
Episode 3

Corporate Partnerships  
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

B: Together, Nia and I have over thirty years of nonprofit experience. We've worked the program side, the business side, and everything in between.

N: We are reframing the nonprofit experience by challenging the status quo because we know that nonprofits and their staff are undervalued, under-resource and unrelenting.

B: Welcome back to the Nonprofit Reframe. Happy Monday, Nia!

N: And happy Monday to you, Brittny. How are you doing today?

B: I'm doing quite well, quite well. Excited to start the week. How about yourself?

N: You know, I am doing well, mostly because I am loving the awesome feedback we're getting on the podcast!

B: I know! It's so much fun. Thank you, everyone for your texts, your emails, your shout outs on Facebook, Instagram.

N: You all have been absolutely great. Makes it so much more fun knowing that folks are out there enjoying it with us.

B: So please, keep those coming. If you like something that you hear, we want to hear about it. Keeps us motivated.

N: Yes.

B: And feeling like we can actually keep doing this.

N: And we're getting enough stories that I think we will soon have a listener episode where we can share some of those stories with y'all. Keep em' coming.

B: That'll be fun. You know, I was listening or I was reading this post on one of the podcast groups the other day on Facebook that you told me about. And this woman wrote this post about, you know, what she wasn't prepared for when starting a podcast. And that is the

emotional roller coaster that comes with it. So, the fear, anxiety, the sense of imposter syndrome and that still happens every single episode for me.

N: Well, I think it was after our last recording that we were both like, “we are wiped.”

B: I know.

N: I mean, it just takes a lot out of you, talking in a, in a way that you know is being recorded and shared with the world.

B: Well, yeah and then now that we're doing the transcripts for every episode, we have to listen. We re-listen to the episode and write out word-for-word what each person is saying. So, you start to hear all your nuances and your “ums” and...

N: And even just like your mis-conjugated verbs. I know it's “distrusting” and for whatever reason, I said “un-trusting” a few episodes ago.

B: You got to let it go. So what are we talking about today?

N: Today, we are talking about corporate partnerships for nonprofit.

B: Alright. This is a juicy topic.

N: Oh, yeah. This is great... This is one I think we probably both have plenty of stories to pull from.

B: Well, to be honest, it wasn't so... What? Two weeks ago, we did a retreat and we mapped out what our topics were going to be for the next eight weeks or so. And this one was not on it, but we bumped volunteers for this one this week because we have had some recent experiences with it that got us fired up. That's when you know. That's when we know it needs to be a topic; is when we're getting all fired up about something.

N: Totally. And it's a conversation I'm having almost on the daily with clients. So, something that's clearly top of mind for other folks, too.

B: So, let's back up a little bit and let's define corporate partners, for those who might be new to the sector. And, if you're listening and your new to the sector, that's awesome.

N: Welcome. Hang tight.

B: I would love to know why and how you found out about us. But, so, corporate partners are for profit companies that we, as a nonprofit, try to partner with. I mean it's pretty self-explanatory.

N: I think the one important thing to note is when we say “corporate,” we're not just talking about fortune five hundred companies. We really mean every business that's a for profit entity. So, from your mom and pop shop, to the fast food chains, I mean it all of that is kind of wrapped into corporate partnerships.

B: Exactly and ideally, well I should say, and this is an, an idealism...Right. That if we are going to affect real change in our communities, that we need this sort of symbiotic partnership from both the nonprofit and for-profit communities, coming together, sharing resources, which is really what this is all about. In hopes of building a better community, for everyone. So there are different ways that corporate entities engage. I mean, there's a lot of different ways. This will not be an exhaustive list, but some of the big ones are: A lot of corporate companies have grant opportunities for nonprofits.

N: They might just outright give sponsorship dollars or donations themselves.

B: A lot of them have corporate volunteerism. So they'll have a volunteer day or they just I mean, some of it, it's embedded in the culture of the company where they promote volunteerism with their staff.

N: There are some companies that go so far as to say staff at certain levels, especially the finance sector, have to sit on local boards of directors.

B: Yeah, absolutely. And then some of them gives benefits such as corporate matching. So, if someone from the company makes a gift, they will match that gift up to a certain amount. And some of them are really generous.

N: Some will even match volunteer hours in a donation, which I think is just fantastic.

B: Yeah. So, a lot of different ways that companies can get involved. And like I said, we didn't name all of them, by any means, but there's benefits on both sides.

N: There are. But I think...

B: Ideally

N: Yes, yes. There are both sides, I think that often companies are looking for this win-win scenario, where they're getting promoted or they're entering into maybe a new market and hoping that the nonprofit is also getting a benefit. And when the companies are coming in with that mindset, it's often that the nonprofit and really get a lesser benefits than if it was more about the philanthropic partnerships.

B: So let's get clear. The percentage of giving by companies, nationally, is ridiculously low.

N: Yeah, about five percent. If you look at all of philanthropic giving, about five percent of that comes from companies, per GivingUSA the 2018 Report that came out last year. And that number has stayed relatively stable. We've seen a little bit of growth, but typically those dollars are actually going to disaster relief. So, you know, the Verizons who want to do a donation match because of a hurricane. That kind of thing.

B: And I you know why this comes up so frequently is because, just like a lot of the other topics that we've discussed, there is an inherent power dynamic at play.

N: Yes.

B: That I feel is completely unfair.

N: Yeah, well, and it's really interesting because I would love for it to really, it to involve reverence on both sides. Like how great for a company to come in and say like, "Oh my gosh. Our community is better because of you," and for us to say..., "our community is better because of your company." Right like, this joint understanding and appreciation of what both of us bring to the table.

B: I mean we live in...it's no secret, that we live in a part of the country, here in Colorado, where we're attracting a lot of companies.

N: Absolutely yep.

B: And so the belief is that they're coming in, they're boosting the economy, they're providing jobs, but the truth is that they're also raising housing prices.

N: Right. And pushing people out and requiring additional services. A lot of them, of course, are unintended consequences, but they're very real.

B: Very real. Which can affect a lot of the clients that were serving, if we're a Human Services organizations.

N: Right, exactly.

B: So, while it's great that they're coming into our community, I just feel like there needs to be an understanding that they need to give back to the community, as well.

N: Right and not just to look good, but because they are really invested.

B: And that doesn't always seem to be the attitude.

N: No no.

B: So I will tell you the story of one company, though, that I've worked with that was really great.

N: I'm so glad that we have a good story to kick this off.

B: And it's really about their corporate culture and their corporate practices. But it just so happens that our board chair, at the time, worked for the company. And this is a key. This is a huge key to this whole thing: that you have to have a connection to somebody internally in the company for you to build a relationship. That's just the way it works now.

N: Exactly. I...The conversation I'm having every other day with clients right now is that, "we want to walk up and down main street and introduce ourselves to these local businesses." And while I think it's great, from an awareness-raising standpoint, you know, everybody should know about your nonprofit, the reality is that doesn't mean that they're going to be connected or committed. That doesn't mean that they've even heard of the issue that you're addressing. And so it ends up in a ton of work for the nonprofit with very little, you know, real return on all those efforts. And most of the nonprofits are doing it, thinking they're gonna get mad donations, you know...

B: Right

N: "Well, they just need to know about us and then they'll be so committed," and that's just not the reality.

B: Well and I feel like the corporate... what do I want to say...That the way that corporations are deciding or companies are deciding to give, has really changed in the last ten years – 5 – 10 years. And so it used to be set up, you would have the structure like a United Way and then the United Way would build a relationship with the company. And then the United Way would bring in area nonprofits as, what were they called? Members? Affiliates? Affiliates or members or something. And so basically the United Way had done all the work in the relationship building. They said, "here are our fifty companies that have agreed to do all their corporate giving through us. To be listed as an eligible nonprofit or recipient, then you become a member with us," and now that's changed completely.

N: Yeah well and especially locally, well and this is happening across the nation. United Ways are really going out of vogue. And so some are closing and consolidating and they're just playing a, I would say, lower role, in corporate giving overall. And are even like just not even on the consciousness of a lot of companies.

B: And I get it. I mean, I understand companies saying, you know, "what we want this to be a benefit of the company, embedded in the culture of the company, and so we want to give to the places that our employees support."

N: Yes, love that.

B: I do too. And so they say, okay, you know, if you have a company, in on it each company has a different way, or process in which they do this. But essentially, like, if you volunteer for an organization, you serve on the board or you have an affiliation with an organization, bring it to the table and then we'll consider that as one of our recipients.

N: Right, yeah.

B: So, we had one of those. It was our board chair. So, he was really involved in the organization and the company they work for is a huge, huge company. And they offered all the ways that we talked about earlier of engaging. They did them all.

N: nice

B: Yeah and so we were eligible for all of it. So, we got sponsorship for our events. We applied for an annual grant that was a substantial amount of money. We/they did a volunteer day every year. Oh, this is big too. Not only did they volunteer, but they paid for the volunteer project.

N: Omg, that's amazing.

B: So, we're going to be vacillating back and forth, but that's one of the issues. Right. Is that these companies call up and they're like, "We want our twenty five employees to come and do a volunteer project at your little nonprofit." Then we're scrambling, trying to find something for them to do.

N: Right

B: And then we have to think bigger than just something that would take a couple of hours and ultimately, whatever project that is, costs money.

N: Right.

B: And now we're spending five hundred dollars, a thousand dollars, just to have this free labor come. Which is great and maybe saves us money, you know, if we were to do it. For example, one time, we built a shed. We had them build a shed. But we had to buy all the materials.

N: Right

B: And yes, it was less expensive because we had people doing it for us for free than paying to have somebody come and build the shed, but we weren't budgeting for that.

N: Right and it wasn't your top priority.

B: No yeah. So all of a sudden, now, we're spending staff time trying to figure out, "Well, what shed do we want and where we can put it?" Now, we have to clear space for that and we... you know, all the logistics involved. So, at least this company recognized that there's a cost involved in these volunteer days and so they offered to pay for that. Then, I am pretty sure that they also came on a week day. That's another thing!

N: Yes! #volunteerduringstafftime

B: Exactly. So, "hey, we would like these twenty five staff members to come and volunteer and it's going to be on a Saturday."

N: Ugh, yeah.

B: And so now, we have to pay for staff to come on Saturday to oversee the project. So, they did it during a weekday and then the hours that they worked, the company took that money and gave us a gift for it.

N: That's lovely.

B: Yes, so, anyway, um, there was all these different ways that we could engage with them. We had a really great partnership, but then, when that staff member left our board of directors, their relationship was over.

N: Poof. All gone. I think that is the big story. When these companies tie their funds to where their employees are giving, it's so great because it does create, I think, a true partnership. Somebody in your company has identified this as a worthy cause they're involved with - we're gonna put our dollars behind it. Well, that employee leaves the company, you know, or shifts around and all of a sudden, that partnership is severed.

B: We've had that happen so many times, particularly with grants where we've received twenty thousand dollars, a year, I mean a substantial amount of money.

N: Yeah

B: And then, all of a sudden, that person decides to move to a different part of the country or they don't work there anymore, and we're not even, you know...It's not even a consideration.

N: Right.

B: We're not even allowed to apply anymore.

N: Yeah, well, I've got a story on the other side. But this one, I mean, it's really, it's a Nia-issue and less the company. So this company approached us. They wanted to do a toy drive during the holidays. Awesome.

B: In-kind drives, very popular.

N: So they go out, they do it, they actually brought back some really great things we were able to utilize. And that was like the entry point for me to develop a great relationship. They had no ties to us. There was no, like, specific volunteer or board member, so kind of a fresh relationship. And so I met with them a number of times. And their CSR person (corporate social responsibility) really wanted us to come in and help educate their staff on the issues of foster care and child welfare, which I really appreciate. Because it's a topic that a lot of people don't want to talk about. A lot of people don't recognize that there are kids in foster care in their communities. So, anytime I could, I can add bust those myths and let them know that this is an issue and there are ways for them to get involved, I would, I would jump on it. So, she kind of concocted this whole plan and her thought was that: we're gonna get the staff group, like forty people, together. I was gonna present and while we were together, they were going to make these superhero capes and then they'll be donated to the kids. Like this really empowering superhero you've...

B: What were they made out of what?

N: I'm getting there. But I mean, you've got kids. Like superhero capes – love em. Right? Super cool. And I love the message of like empowering, like, these kids feeling empowered themselves. But we get there and yeah... here's the punch line... it is made out of the cheapest material - like you sneeze and it busts into a million pieces. I mean just the, the worst material. And then you forget that not everybody is artistic.

B: Right, well that's what I'm thinking about.

N: And she didn't have like a specific template

B: Like some of them are awesome and

N: Some are awful.

B: Like a kid did it.

N: Even worse than a kid. I mean, one of them, there was like some, some symbol on it that was just like really dark and scary. And so we did it. I brought it back to the office and their literally like 2 that we could use. And then she kept wanting to do it because it was so powerful.

B: For her staff

N: For her staff

B: Not for the kids receiving it

N: No, right. And I had been clear like, "you know, we might need to like talk about the materials and maybe give them a template, so that we can use these better. Because there hasn't been a lot of interest in the first batch. At one point, she did it without me and I just get this box of seventy five of these capes.

B: What?!

N: It was so horrific, Brittny. And then, I didn't know what to do with it. I mean, it was, it was just so awkward. And the worst part is, this whole time, we were talking about a financial contribution to come along with it. Because I had been there multiple times and done multiple presentations and then...

B: Cuz let's be serious. Let's be honest here. I mean, you're ultimately hoping there is going to be money attached.

N: Yeah and we had really up-front conversations about that. Then they got bought out. And we're so close. I mean, she had talked like \$10-20k. They got bought out and any hope of donations: gone.

B: I can't tell you how many times I have worked with a company where they've had a merger or an acquisition and all of a sudden the finances are frozen.

N: Frozen! Yeah!

B: Okay, well, what about this invoice that we sent you seven months ago?

N: yeah

B: I'm sorry all of our finances and all the budgeting is frozen right now. We can't do that. What?

N: It's a pledge. It's a legal thing. You made this.

B: If that was an outstanding invoice to a vendor, to a for profit company vendor, would you still consider? Would they allow you to be eight months behind on paying it?

N: Absolutely not. I will say we also had another positive experience with a company who was really invested and did all of their philanthropy in child welfare and in foster care. So that was great. We already knew we had that values alignment. And they were so good because they gave an upfront contribution but then said, "if there's anything else we can do throughout the year, let us know." I know a lot of companies say that, but they really meant it. And so, we came to them a little while later when we're planning for national adoption day. And I said, "Hey, would you sponsor the bags? We'll put your logo on them so it'll go out, you know, to all these families and volunteers, but we can't afford to buy them otherwise." And they were so thrilled, I mean, you could tell it was a real moment where they felt so connected to us that we would even tap them for that.

B: Yeah

N: And they loved to be able to sponsor that for us. And we loved being able to have these great bags that we could give out and had a very specific purpose for.

B: Yeah, well you brought up something earlier: CSR - corporate social responsibility.

N: Yes

B: And I think that is a big hurdle too in forming these relationships. And again, why you need somebody internal. Because it's so hard to find out where that resides within each company. So is it in marketing? Is it in human resources?

N: Right

B: You know, who is responsible for making those partnerships in the community within each company?

N: Right

B: And it's so different at each place that you've got to get through five gatekeepers before you even find the right person.

N: Right, well, I'll also say, you know, sometimes, when companies move into a community, they do significant investments because they want to be part of the community. But they also want, you know, city council approval. Which we experienced recently here in Longmont. We had our first round of marijuana dispensaries open up and in their initial application, they had to talk about their commitment to community. And so many of them pledged significant gifts to local nonprofits. Now... although, all of them continue to give, it is at such a lower rate than what they had initially promised and done in that first year.

B: right

N: I think that's so disingenuous.

B: Absolutely.

N: You're basically putting it on application, so you get approved by city council, when you don't actually intend to do that year-after-year.

B: Right, well, in so many conversations that I've had recently with potential new partners, where there big... there big stance is, "well we want a genuine partnership. We want engagement throughout the whole year." But what I find out is they just want access to either our clients, our families, our mailing list...

N: yeah, your donors

B: Our donors. And so they want to provide a complimentary service to them. And it's like, well that's not really a partnership. We don't need that. Let's talk about what you need, okay, maybe, you need some marketing help. But then let's talk about what we need. And maybe we need some dollars. And let's see how we can partner that way. And so, what I find and that's where you know I get heated, is that as the nonprofit, we tend to bend to try to meet their needs.

N: Oh my gosh yes. Way, way, way too often.

B: "We'd love to help you with this thing that you have coming up in February, but we can't do it in February. So, can you do it in June?"

N: Yeah, I mean, basically the company's telling us to change our programming and somebody in our nonprofit is saying yeah. "yeah, let's do that, because then their *potential dollars* that they haven't even given us yet, then they'll come in." That's absolutely ridiculous.

B: Exactly. So, I think those expectations need to be made up front and you know my call to action to nonprofits is that: recognize what your boundaries are and stand firm in them. Yes, creating a new relationship, but not so that it's adding more work on to you with potentially no reward.

N: Well and I think part of that is recognize, nonprofits, and be confident in the fact that you have something really incredible that they want.

B: Right

N: That that power dynamic shifts because we always think that we're the ones at the bottom with our hands open. When you shift to say, "actually we're doing a really important community service here and they could potentially be part of that" those power dynamics start to shift. Where we have some power and we can say, "yeah you can be engaged in this and here are the specific ways that you can do that." Instead of them dictating to us.

B: Right, Exactly. From the company's side of things, I mean some of these are really big companies and I know that they do these matches to try to encourage giving, but I just wish that there was more ways that they could encourage their staff members to give. Because I can't tell you how many corporate volunteer groups we've hosted, or you know the organizations that I've worked for have hosted over the years where not a single person with in... that comes, becomes a donor.

N: Oh yeah

B: They come in a volunteer for the day and we give them our spiel and they learn about our programming. And I get it: I mean, it doesn't mean just because you came to volunteer that you have to give money too. But there doesn't seem to be any push to do that. And it can't come from us?

N: Have you ever been part of one of those combined federated campaign days?

B: They're the worst.

N: And I know the federal government is not a company, but it I think it's a very symbolic, you know. So you go and you got a booth. And the best locations provide some incentive like: there's food. If you get past all the nonprofits you can have a free lunch! The worst, just leave you out in the sun, baking all day, hoping that an employee will come out so you can tell them



about what you're doing. And we would, without fail, always gets sat next to the cat sanctuary who would bring live cats.

B: But that's the best spot. Because everybody comes to see the cats.

N: But they don't want to stop and talk to us.

B: Well, I know, but at least you see people. I mean, I'm telling you, at the other end of the fair, it's just crickets and tumbleweed. You know, it's like they're nobody comes down that far. One time, I worked at that event and I forget which group it was, it doesn't really matter. They brought a tiny horse.

N: Oh my gosh. Done.

B: Done! How do you compete with a tiny horse? You can't!

N: No, you can't.

B: So, the next best thing is to be the booth right next to them, because at least maybe you can get some overflow.

N: And hope you're not downwind. My husband's now a federal employee. So he just got one of those emails, like in December, telling him to sign-up. And I was like, "Oh! Show me what it says." Because I've always wondered like

B: Good point

N: Like on the inside, what does it say? And it is it's a nice letter, saying, you know, "our commitment to communities...so check it out." But it was so basic and insincere. My husband was even like, "I don't, I don't know what this is, I don't know how to do anything about this." And he like hands it to me. And I was like, "honey, don't worry about it." Clearly, we know who takes care of the philanthropy in our house. But I thought it was so funny because you've got all these employees, who are lay people when it comes to philanthropy. And so, if you don't provide them the tools to actually get engaged through your employee giving program, it's gonna feel overwhelming.

B: Well, exactly. If Collin can't figure it out and his wife is a nonprofit consultant, how is anybody else, you know, who has no understanding of the nonprofit world or philanthropy?

N: Right right. It's a struggle.

N: It is a struggle well in those fairs are always so funny because you get searched completely. Your car is searched, you have to get out there looking under your car, in your car. You're like, "I just want to hand out some brochures."

N: I just want some of your employees to give us five dollars a month.

B: Hey I'll take it.

N: I know, I know.

B: So, what are take aways?

N: I think the first one is to recognize, companies, that you walk in to any relationship with a nonprofit with a power dynamic at play. And anything you can do to ease that, to appreciate their work, to thank them for what they do in the community, take that right off the bat, so that then you can have a true partnership.

B: Really quick: no joke. While we were sitting here, I just received a text from the company I was talking about earlier, saying that I'm past due on a bill to them.

N: They didn't like being called out for pulling their funding once he left.

B: That was kind of spooky. It's like they knew I was talking about them. They're like, "well, now you owe us money. That's really funny. Alright, so yes. And then, any other take away?"

N: I think for nonprofits: recognize that if you are entering into new corporate partnerships, start with where you have connections. Don't cold call. Don't send out mass mail. Don't send

volunteers up and down main street, except maybe looking for like a silent auction item. But like true corporate partnerships require that inside person who's even going to tell you where the CSR lives in the company. That's really where you need to start to look through your board, let's look through your volunteers, let's see where you might have some connections.

B: Yeah and I would say also, consider how much time, how much bandwidth you have available to work on that. I'm not saying that these relationships aren't lucrative or can't be lucrative, but we all have such limited time and we're all doing ten different jobs. So, considering how little the percentages really is of corporate giving, you know, take that into consideration when you're planning out your priorities with your development staff.

N: Yeah.

B: I mean, if you have the staff, great. But, I like what you said. So many times, we have volunteers that come and we don't know where they work.

N: Right

B: We've never asked them where they work. So I think if you can start doing some of that data collection internally and then, build on those relationships, that's where you're going to get the most bang for your Buck.

N: And with that I think, we will sign off. I hope you all have a great February. Don't forget to subscribe. We will be back next week with another all new episode. Like us, follow us, on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and you can always email us at [nonprofitreframe@gmail.com](mailto:nonprofitreframe@gmail.com)

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