



By Yolanda F. Johnson

Maximizing the Impact of Good Work: Becoming WOC

Fundraisers are the beacons of light and hope that illuminate the path to the good work needed in the world today. Philanthropists are those journeying along that path, arm-in-arm with fundraisers, battling inequity and the issues facing our society. Women and women of color are powerful forces in both roles: brilliant, strategic, authentic and ready to enact change, both in the world and in our sectors.

There is a great deal of good work to do, and I am grateful that I have been allowed a unique opportunity to bring together women and women of color in fundraising and philanthropy and their allies to champion the cause. It all began with my journey as the first Black president of Women In Development (WID), N.Y., the New York City Metro area's 40-year-old premier professional organization for women in fundraising and philanthropic

work. Two years ago, when I was president-elect, I helped design and lead WID's first-ever Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, which delved deeply into the fabric of our organization. It examined the reasons that WID was not diverse and what we could do to change that.

I have since transitioned that task force into an Inclusion, Equity and Diversity Committee to continue this work for WID, hopefully well into the future. However, in addition to the task force, there were other needs. From the incredible feedback I received from women of color, I knew there was still a demand for a space specifically designed for the unique experience of being a woman of color on both the fundraising and philanthropic sides of the nonprofit sector. So, I created that space: Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy (WOC, pronounced "woke"), to celebrate, champion and support women of color in these sectors and to provide them with personal and professional development resources.

of Giving," by Tyrone McKinley Freeman, Ph.D., which examines the role of Black women's philanthropy during the Jim Crow era. This will be a very special dialogue because, for women of color, in both fundraising and philanthropy, impostor syndrome can run rife. WOC is here to remind us that we stand on the shoulders of giants. Yes, we may sometimes be the "first" or the "only" person, but we, too, have a robust legacy of which we can be proud. Holding our heads high, we look to a future where we occupy far more "seats at the table" of success and leadership. In the spirit of collaboration and trust—which is imperative among women of color—we are delighted to partner with another organization championing women of color fundraisers for the November book event—F3 Atlanta.

Since many of us are already fundraisers or philanthropists in some form, even if it is not our direct profession, WOC programming also finds ways to build community by tackling universal yet deeply personal issues. Indeed, WOC members are health care professionals who fight domestic abuse

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As WOC's community-building work has been underway for a while, it did not take long for our membership to grow to nearly 700 individuals nationwide and internationally. From my experiences and expertise in fundraising strategy and philanthropic counsel, I recognized the importance of bringing everyone together into one community to maximize our impact. As a result, WOC offers a robust programming schedule, including the newly launched WOC Votes 2020 Voter Activation Campaign, in partnership with the League of Women Voters and PowHer the Vote. We are also planning WOC's first-ever daylong virtual Symposium on Nov. 17. WOC is accomplishing this, in addition to providing professional assessments for fundraisers, philanthropists, advisers and so much more.

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with their time and dollars, as much as they are high-level development executives at major institutions and founders of giving circles and philanthropic officers. *This* is the spirit of WOC, along with the mantra of working together, as our members sometimes do on their own. Recently, a WOC member received the opportunity to present her CEO with recommendations on DEI. As part of the process, she developed a workshop with a fellow group of WOC members. Her approach, along with a recent event, reminded me of the reasons I founded WOC. Our recent WOC Connections Week, where we all came together to network and support each other, focused on several different workshops. From planning year-end campaigns to working in higher education, and from establishing development operations to learning how to be a philanthropists, we are doing the necessary good work and building community. The excitement is palpable, because at WOC, there is something for everyone.

Another component of maximizing the impact of good work is understanding the role of allyship in championing women of color in fundraising and philanthropy. Given the current racial equity movement, I received a great deal of

feedback from non-people of color, asking “What can I do to help?” For this reason, I established the Allies in Action Membership Network (AiA). As the opening statement of AiA attests, “It is not a Black person’s responsibility to teach white people about racism.” However, there is currently too much at stake to not consider allyship. As a result, I determined that I am open to those sincere and genuinely ready to give up their privilege to create a more just and equitable society. I am here, and WOC is here, to move that effort forward.

While its work began earlier on, AiA was officially launched with a Global Gathering in July, which featured an expert panel of allies from both fundraising and philanthropy. AiA, which now has

more than 100 members across the nation, is based upon four pillars: education, legislation, inclusion and action. We have since delivered a transformative anti-racism seminar and continue to move our programming forward, with the goal of supporting WOC in its work for women of color. One of the AiA values I am most excited about is the “action” pillar, which includes a year-end giving philanthropic component. *Allies Give 2020* will consist of each ally giving a gift amount that is meaningful to him or her toward causes that champion women and girls of color and racial equity. It is not collective giving in the traditional sense; rather, it is individual giving with a collective spirit. My team will provide philanthropic counsel to this end,

building a portfolio for the allies to use in their giving. With this effort, we are directly going to help move the racial and gender equity movements forward! We will accomplish this while the simultaneous life-changing process of allyship work continues.

WOC and its initiatives remind women of color that there are many of us with similar ideas and ideals, and we need to support one another as best we can, while moving our work forward. For more than a decade now, I have worked to champion women in fundraising and philanthropy. There is a lot of work to do, and we welcome our sisters who are also along for this journey toward equity for women of color in fundraising and philanthropy.

These endeavors reflect a good deal of work. Yet it is so worth it. I am humbled by the opportunity to work with so many talented individuals who are helping my efforts to advance women of color in fundraising and philanthropy. For me, the time is now, and the place is WOC. I am happy to be the captain of this ship as it sails into the horizon of equity for women of color. With each initiative, each effort, each connection, we can see equity coming toward us, one success at a time. 📍

Yolanda F. Johnson is the founder and president of YFJ Consulting LLC, founder of Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy (WOC), founder of the Allies in Action Membership Network and president of Women In Development (WID), NY. A classically trained performing artist, Yolanda is a music educator and composer, performing in musical venues, including opera, concert, oratorio and sacred music. She has used her performance background for fundraising and philanthropic success through her All the World’s A Stage workshops. Yolanda also serves on several boards, including the Hudson River Museum, PowHer NY and the Foundation for Post Conflict Development.



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