

THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY

NEWS

Fundraising Leadership at the Biggest Groups Still Has a 'Shocking' Lack of Diversity Despite Racial Reckoning

By *Drew Lindsay*

JULY 27, 2022



COURTESY OF THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

"It was important to me to understand that I could show up as my authentic self," says Priya Bery, who became senior vice president for partnerships at the Pew Charitable Trusts in December. Bery is a first-generation American whose parents

immigrated from India.

In the two years since the the racial reckoning that followed the police murder of George Floyd, America's nonprofits frequently have promised to make their staffs look like America itself. Yet, diversity remains elusive in the ranks of top fundraisers at the biggest organizations, despite significant turnover.

Only 11 of the chief fundraising officers at the nation's 100 largest nonprofits are people of color, according to a *Chronicle* analysis. These include three Black executives, six Hispanic officers, and two Asian Americans.

These numbers reflect in part the extraordinary lack of diversity at the 47 hospitals and colleges among the 100 largest groups. Only two individuals from those institutions are people of color, both of whom are Hispanic: Melany Duval at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Sergio Gonzalez at Brown University.

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The numbers aren't surprising given the decades-old dominance of white leaders in fundraising executive positions, according to experts, advocates, recruiters, and advancement leaders. But they sting more because of the racial-equity focus following Floyd's death.

The numbers "are utterly lacking in diversity — still," says Yolanda F. Johnson, a fundraiser, consultant, and founder of the [Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy network](#). "I don't know if there was an organization that didn't put out a DEI [diversity, equity, and inclusion] statement around the summer of 2020."

The lack of diversity is particularly noteworthy given that these 100 organizations have outsized influence in the nonprofit field and touch the lives of tens of millions of Americans. Part of the *Chronicle's* [2021 America's Favorite Charities](#) ranking, they raised the most in cash or stock contributions in fiscal year 2020 — collectively, \$1 out of every \$11 donated to charity.



BROWN UNIVERSITY

“There’s a lot of room to grow, a lot of room to improve,” says Brown’s Sergio Gonzalez, a Cuban American and the only person of color among the 40 college and university CDOs in our survey. “But I’m optimistic about this.”

These groups, while sometimes slow to change because of their size and complexity, should be leading the nonprofit world on diversity and equity issues, says Elizabeth Dale, an associate professor of nonprofit leadership at Seattle University. “These are the organizations that probably have the most resources to start experimenting with change.”

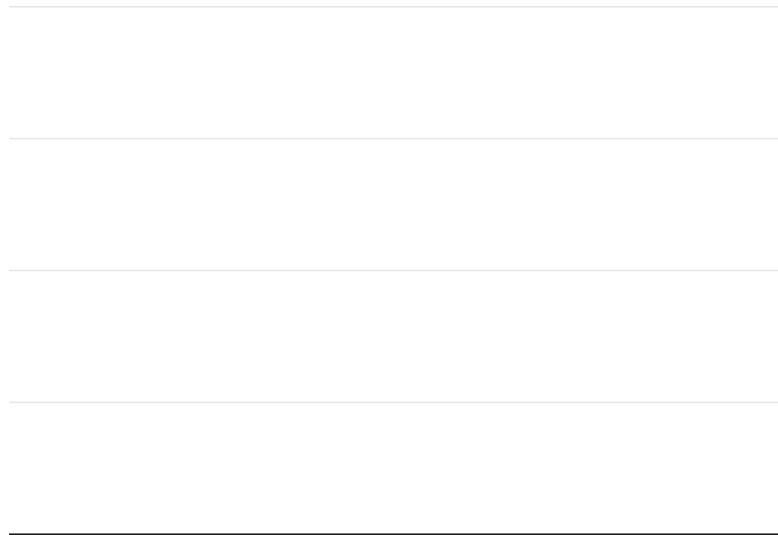
Opinions vary as to whether institutions are pursuing change with the necessary commitment. “I think there’s a tremendous amount of interest in diversifying our profession — not only interest but a lot of work, particularly over the last decade,” says Gonzalez of [Brown](#), the only person of color leading fundraising among the 40 colleges in the *Chronicle* analysis.


A Cuban American who’s the chair-elect of the [Council for Advancement and Support of Education](#), Gonzalez says the organization has a number of programs that aim to raise awareness about fundraising among people of color and improve the pipeline of leadership talent. He also says individual institutions are working to change their cultures to improve the sense of inclusion and belonging.

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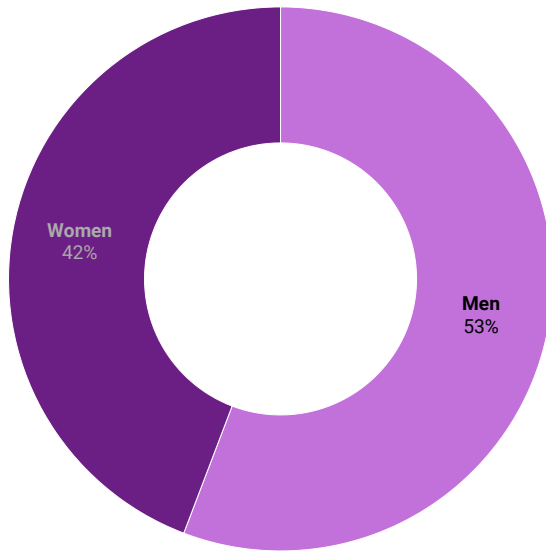
Top Fundraisers: Demographic Snapshot

Diversity among chief development officers at the 100 organizations that raised the most in private support in 2020



 **Mapbox**
Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Men
Women



Note: One organization has two CDOs; six organizations are not included because they do not have a CDO or they have an open position.

Source: Chronicle of Philanthropy survey • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Priya Bery, named senior vice president for partnerships at the [Pew Charitable Trusts](#) in November, is a first-generation American whose parents immigrated from India and settled in Michigan. Before taking the job to lead the organization’s fundraising efforts, Bery explored Pew’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion and her personal fit. “It was important to me to understand that I could show up as my authentic self” — a conversation that might not have happened a few years ago, Bery says. “The world has opened up, and the public discourse has opened up in the past couple years.”

Others are concerned that diversity efforts are shallow. “White people are still vastly overrepresented to a degree that is just shocking,” says Gloria Blackwell, CEO of the [American Association of University Women](#), which advocates for diversity in higher education and nonprofits more broadly. “The institutions — whether they realize it or acknowledge it — continue to give a kind of lip service and general ‘check the box’-type initiatives to things that really require a more substantive engagement in order to have real progress.”

Nonprofits are missing a rare chance provided by “Great Resignation” turnover to remake their fundraising operations with a focus on equity and diversity, says Chelsey Megli, a talent-management expert and advancement executive at the [University of Oregon](#). “We have this huge window in our industry to meaningfully change representation, to meaningfully change how we hire, who we hire, what the pipeline looks like, who we’ll give a chance to even if they don’t have a résumé with all the bells and whistles. And I don’t see people taking advantage of that opportunity in a way that I would have hoped.”

Turnover, but Little Change

Turnover in the CDO role at the top 100 groups since the start of 2020 has been robust, with nearly a third of positions changing hands. Twenty-six groups have hired new top fundraising executives, and three have open positions they are looking to fill.

Three of the 26 new hires are people of color: Pew's Bery, who has experience leading a family foundation and nonprofits as well as working with philanthropist Richard Branson of Virgin Atlantic; V. Renée Cutting, a Black executive at the [U.S. Fund for Unicef](#) and former chief development officer at the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund; and Kim Goldsmith-N'Diaye, a Black executive with [Doctors Without Borders](#) who formerly was executive director of consumer segments and product marketing at the aid group World Vision.



COURTESY OF RENEE CUTTING

V. Renée Cutting, Unicef's chief philanthropy officer, came to Unicef last year from the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, where she was chief development officer.

Fundraising itself is a profession that has lacked racial diversity for decades, even as the country's population has shifted. The [most recent studies](#) suggest that about 13 percent of fundraisers are people of color. "You simply don't have a large number of people of color in senior-level positions to step into those [leadership] roles," says Don Hasseltine, vice president and senior consultant at the [Aspen Leadership Group](#), an executive recruitment firm, and a former college fundraising executive.

Equity advocates agree that the pipeline of fundraising leadership talent lacks diversity and that it will take concerted effort over time to correct. Nonprofits need to examine hiring practices, salary structures, promotions, professional development, and more, they say.

“Change takes time and intentionality and strategy and people who don’t succumb to fatigue,” consultant Johnson says. “I see this as being a decade-long process, from 2020 to 2030.”

Regardless, Johnson and others argue that too many nonprofits don’t see how they contribute to the problem. In some instances, people of color aren’t showing up in candidate pools because the organizations aren’t equitable places to work.

“The thing that really stokes my ire is when people say, ‘I can’t find candidates of color,’” says Johnson. “Even if you’re one of the largest nonprofits, are you attractive to a candidate of color?”

An organization’s lack of diversity in its board or leadership can be off-putting for both applicants and employees, Johnson says. “You create a solid pipeline by building a structure and work environment that is inclusive and that makes people feel welcome, that their skills and talent are welcome, and that they’re on an even playing field. Or they won’t want to stay,” she says.

The lack of diversity also stems from what some describe as a narrow view of who can do the CDO job. Large organizations, insiders say, tend to trust their fundraising operations to those they know or to those who have proven themselves in similar roles.

In the *Chronicle* analysis, half of the 26 chief development officers hired since 2020 were internal hires, while another five made lateral moves from another organization. In one instance, the new CDO at a top 100 organization came directly from another top 100 group; Jennifer Arnett, named chief development officer at the Mayo Clinic in September, had been the top advancement officer at the University of California at San Francisco.



CHERYL RICHARDS

Dana-Farber Cancer Institute's Melany Duval is one of six Hispanic chief development officers at the 100 organizations in the *Chronicle* survey.

Organizations need to look beyond conventional credentials and identify people outside fundraising who have the management and leadership skills to oversee a large development operation. Gonzalez of Brown, who's been a lead development executive for more than 20 years, had no formal fundraising experience when he was hired as advancement chief at the University of Miami in 2001. [People were shocked](#) at the choice, but then-president Donna Shalala liked his deep roots in the community and extensive experience

leading organizations. Gonzalez had been chief of staff to the county's top executive and director of a Super Bowl organizing committee.

Organizations may be afraid to make such unorthodox choices, Gonzalez says. "Anytime you hire a nontraditional candidate, there's a risk. You don't know if they'll be successful in that job. And when you're talking about senior levels of management in higher education, it's a risk that a lot of institutions don't want to take."

Organizations also may be ignoring talented people of color because they see frontline fundraising experience as a prerequisite. When the University of Washington's [business school](#) hired Tahsin Alam in 2021 as its top advancement officer, it was not a conventional choice. "I had never raised a dime in my life," says Alam, who was born in Bangladesh. But he had considerable experience and training in organizational development as well as six years at Rutgers University directing its talent-management efforts in advancement.

In less than a year at Washington, Alam closed more than \$7.5 million in gifts. He says he's also increasing the advancement team's performance and efficiency. "I congratulate the Michael G. Foster School of Business for taking a chance on me," he says. "Our industry's willingness to look outside the box is very limited. You have to take that leap of faith."

Large organizations also may be undervaluing the success of fundraising leaders at smaller nonprofits. "What makes for a successful executive extends beyond actually raising money," says Vincent Robinson, founder and managing partner of the [360 Group](#), an executive search firm. "If you can do those things in a \$30 million campaign, somebody would need to tell me why they couldn't do that at a \$300 million scale."

Mixed Findings for Women

The *Chronicle* analysis of the top 100 groups found that women continue to be underrepresented in fundraising leadership at large nonprofits, though the data was mixed.

Women make up 45 percent of the chief development officers in these organizations, a figure that some advocates found encouraging. "It's quite promising to see that parity is not too far off," says AAUW's Blackwell. Of the 26 hires since the start of 2020, 14 are women.

Ivory Tower CDOs: Demographics

Racial and gender diversity at the 40 colleges and universities in the survey

White 39

Hispani 1

[Get the data](#) · Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Men 28

Women 12

Source: Chronicle of Philanthropy survey • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Still, [studies](#) indicate that women make up 70 percent or more of fundraisers altogether. Also, at the 40 colleges and universities in the *Chronicle* analysis, only 12 women hold the chief advancement position.

“The fundraising profession has been majority female for decades now, and yet we’re not seeing those rates reflected in leadership,” says Dale of Seattle University, who has [studied the gender gap](#) in fundraising leadership at nonprofits in the United Kingdom. “That was true in 1990, and it’s true today.”

Dale’s research, conducted with Beth Breeze of the University of Kent in the United Kingdom, found that barriers to leadership for women include inflexible work schedules as well as inadequate support for women with leadership aspirations. Gender stereotypes held by some board members and donors also undermine the perception of women as leaders, according to the research, which included surveys and focus groups.



PIOTR KULISIEWICZ

Lisa Gurwitch is the first woman to lead advancement at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

Lisa Gurwitch was named chief development officer at the [American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee](#) in January. She is the first woman in the organization's history to hold the position, but CEO Ariel Zwang says gender had nothing to do with the choice. "It was about the best candidate — period," says Zwang, who in 2020 became the first female top executive in the organization's century-old history.

Gurwitch has fundraising experience, but the group was also attracted to her work as CEO of the nonprofit Delivering Good. The JDC's advancement staff includes 70 individuals scattered globally.

"What we needed in this role wasn't just a great fundraiser; it was also a great manager who could harmonize complex systems all over the world," Zwang says. "That's one reason Lisa's CEO experience is so valuable."

Methodology

The *Chronicle* analysis used a survey of the 100 nonprofits in our [America's Favorite Charities ranking](#), which is based on the support raised by groups from individuals, foundations, and corporations. Each of the groups brought in more than \$181 million in 2020.

Three organizations were not included in survey results because their chief development officer position is open. Three institutions were not included because the group reported it does not have a top fundraising officer. One organization identified two executives as their top development official.

We welcome your thoughts and questions about this article. Please [email the editors](#) or [submit a letter](#) for publication.

FUNDRAISING LEADERSHIP

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Drew Lindsay

Drew is a longtime magazine writer and editor who joined the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* in 2014.

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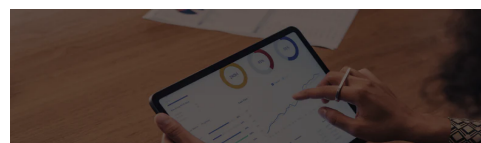
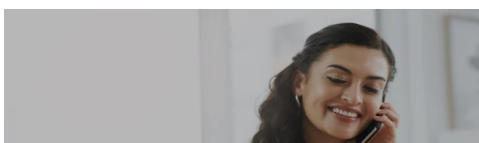
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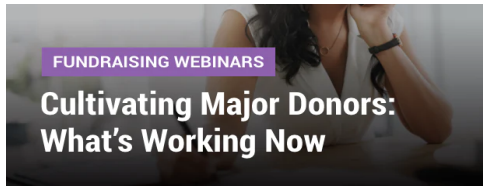
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