

Technical Assistance

The Un Conference Session Notes – June 30, 2021

DEI Conversations – facilitated by Guillermo Lopez and Jared Mast

- It is important to lay ground rules when having conversations so that everyone's voice is heard and to help disrupt domination in conversations, a white supremacist practice
- DEI conversations need to start by acknowledging that there will be/may be discomfort
- Using "why" questions to better understand perspectives that are different
- DEI conversations sometimes exclude some members of the team
- Coworkers and partners are often a different journey than others or the organization as a whole; and everyone can help move hearts and minds (even when power dynamics make that tough)
- Balancing needs of people served vs. desires of funders
- Start with the character/perspective of the person; ease your way into the conversation
- White leaders can use their voice/power to challenge perspectives and further anti-racism work
- Trust your thinking and try to remove doubt
- People who have worked with law enforcement found that building from 1 on 1 relationships is an effective strategy to initiate larger conversations
- Balancing one's own authenticity alongside recognition of different personal experiences; empathy and recognizing shared humanity
- Difficult conversations don't threaten your life, they threaten current dominance/power
- Choose courage over comfort but remain curious
 - "Peacemaking does equal passivity... it's about a revolution of love that lets the oppressor and the oppressed free" quote
- Leadership requires taking risks, and there are inevitable missteps failures, and we need to re-look at treatment of leaders (lifting them up vs. tearing them down) otherwise we can be left with a system of numb/unreceptive/apathetic leaders
- Practice the art of appreciation

DEI Experiences – Florian Spece and Candace Moody

Experiences/Highlights:

- Being the only POC in an organization can be traumatizing when working in spaces that highlight White Supremacist Cultural values. The bulk of the DEI work typically falls in the hands of POC.
- Difficulty with work/life balance due to low wages in most cities – having to choose between eating and paying bills
- Working from home met needs for many individuals with mental disabilities – How do we transition to going back into the office?
 - Many people feel like they need to constantly prove a disability when it is not visible
 - Companies and organizations having blanket expectations is not an accessible practice – not taking into consideration what everyone is going through
 - Difficulty in communicating triggers to employers without being seen as less capable

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Solutions:

- Getting a Therapist or family doctor to write a letter of accommodations for returning to work or starting a new position – this letter is protected by law
- Requiring Personal Development for individuals in leadership positions in the areas of mental health and trauma informativity
- Initiating Mental Health days/plans in employee contracts as PTO
- Having a contracted therapist to come into the office for extra support in the HR department
- Adding accessibility supports to the office
 - Creating Mindfulness Rooms in the office
 - Bringing the outside, inside – plants and sunlight
 - Emotional support animals in the workplace
 - Accommodating medical marijuana in the workplace
- Creating more policies in PA that protect those with both physical and mental disorders
- Utilizing team building activities like cooking together (this can also be done virtually)

Resources Shared:

[The Ortiz Ark Foundation - Nonprofit - Allentown, Pennsylvania](#)

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Youth Entrepreneur Program

Fundraising – Kate Cohen and Maria Esposito

Top of Mind Concerns

- In-person event planning with the surge of the delta virus
- How do we plan towards our annual galas for in-person events, while staying flexible with the uncertainty of what will happen next
- Seems like funding sources are shrinking/ending (i.e. Century Fund, foundations sunsetting, etc. more competition with bank mergers/less funders)
- Cost of completing construction projects, programming is difficult to ask donors for since rates are increasing with cost of materials, more need, but can't pass on this increase to participants/those we are supporting
- For organizations that aren't able to access government funds, it's been extremely difficult, and for smaller organizations fundraising was always difficult, but now is even more challenging; the pandemic has heightened previous fundraising issues
- Year over year donations being based on last-year's virtual budget, which lessens overall fundraising dollars, is problematic—how do you get a program off the ground when we're rebuilding but levels of support are based on non-programming pandemic world
- Gala fundraising and “appeal” isn't the same when you can't get folks together
- Difficulty with funders changing direction of dollars to COVID-programs, which causes challenges for funding “regular programming”; budgeting for 2021 is more difficult given this reality

Changes in Fundraising

- Spent the last year blowing up everything we were doing before, and realigning to what makes the most sense now, especially in the arts community
- Individual donors have increased giving and blown away by the response, so much extra giving
- Feels very much like a marathon, grabbing every funding opportunity possible, and many webinars on specific funding sources (government) which takes lots of time
- Relationships in development are so important, and the past year has highlighted that—some of the red-tape and formality has melted away, which has been nice for us to just meet each other where we're at—as humans figuring it all out and wanting to do good in our community
- Grant collaboration with larger organizations helps with partnerships and supporting smaller shops

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- Importance in reaching out by phone to major donors/donors in general just to see how they were doing, to check-in, and express concern in relationship
- Expanded social media presence to keep work top-of-focus
- Virtual tours and returning to “old school” tools like phone, snail mail seem even more effective in today’s environment
- Authentically sharing mission and getting rid of “bells and whistles” has made huge impact with donors
- Idea of “reverse auction”: invite donors to participate in something tangible (i.e. talk to program participant, sponsor specific program need or individual-client based need, etc.); silent auctions incredibly difficult in 2020; tangible asks are much more fruitful right now if donors can assign direct need to dollars
- Some grantors reduced size of the applications, which was very helpful and thoughtful for development needs

All Things Masking – Dr. Rajika Reed, Sharon Alexander, and Marci Martinez-Howey

Overall, our counties are looking really good in terms of the data. Monroe is the only county in moderate transmission, everywhere else is low transmission. Vaccination rates are also going up. The needle is moving a bit.

Challenges & Approaches

- Compliance has been a big issue since the beginning of the pandemic, and leadership can’t be everywhere at once to monitor employees.
 - Asking managers to take more responsibility for ensuring employees are masked – being upfront with your staff so it doesn’t feel like policing
 - We have initiated a progressive discipline policy around the mask wearing. It is a policy and so if people are not wearing masks, they are subject to discipline (verbal/written warnings up to termination). This is not being reinforced uniformly across the company and it is unfortunately causing friction with employees and managers.
- How to handle masking protocol for vaccinated vs. unvaccinated staff?
 - Making masking voluntary, but required if you are front facing or working with clients regardless of vaccination status
 - Currently the vaccines are under Emergency Use Authorization, but that should be removed and have full FDA backing soon, after that you can mandate staff get vaccinated
 - Difficult to require disclosing vaccination status, but you could ask for voluntary disclosure
 - Stress the importance of not dealing with folks differently based on if they are masked or not masked. Don’t exclude people. Consider how you are making fellow employees feel for their choices, regardless of what those choices are. That can definitely be hard to navigate.
 - People who did take their health into consideration and got vaccinated are feeling penalized if they still have to wear masks.
- Will the new variant scare people enough to push them to get vaccinated? News reports show people who are being hospitalized now are the ones who are not vaccinated.
 - Incentivizing the vaccine is an opportunity. If employees did get vaccinated and showed us proof, we offered an extra paid day off. You can also do raffles or other types of prizes, so it isn’t focused on the penalty side, more on the rewarding side of getting the vaccine.
 - Give people the autonomy to decide if they want to get the vaccine because people don’t like to be told what to do. And then reward people for making the decision to get the vaccine.
- The people who are choosing to not wear a mask right now are not really posing a risk for vaccinated individuals. Is that correct?
 - The cases we have seen with vaccinated folks have been getting COVID too, but it is way less severe and no hospitalization is needed.

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- Need to remember immune-compromised people. If there is just one immune-compromised person in your office you need to be considerate of their status.
- Creating policies currently that will go into effect when we are back full in person
 - Working with at-risk populations (pregnant, etc) so we are concerned about policing people and developing a policy that will apply to everyone – clients, employees, etc.
 - Having employees who won't get vaccinated and don't want to wear masks.
 - It's hard to mandate the mask policy now that the CDC says masks not required (even though CDC clearly states that some places can/should still require it)
 - Potentially creating a rule that everyone has to wear the mask until the vaccination rate among staff hits a certain level (example - 70% like the state did). That leans on the peer pressure aspect.
 - Maintain virtual options for meetings that people do not feel comfortable attending in person
- What are folks doing for large gatherings overall?
 - CDC says large gatherings are still discouraged. Smaller, intimate gatherings are better where you know people are vaccinated.
- Our office is larger, so we have two sets of rules. We were requiring masks, but in the past week we changed the rule to have people who are not vaccinated required to wear masks and people who are vaccinated can choose not to.
- Meetings or events with food
 - The vendors we work with are good about making sure things are individually wrapped.
 - We also have each department come in separately to keep the gatherings small. We make sure to disinfect/sanitize between each group.
- How are you factoring PPE into budgets for next year?
 - At the beginning we had to send people home because we couldn't even get the products, we needed to keep everyone safe. We asked employees to help us secure the products we'd need, and we reimbursed people. That worked well.
 - We also upped our cleaning schedule/routines to make sure those common spaces (light fixtures, doorknobs) are being cleaned more often.
- Seeing hesitancy from employees to tell leadership they are vaccinated because they do not want to go back to working in the office
 - Leadership should be more cognizant of work/life balance and letting people work from home, but for a human service organization and face to face is important. So, there is an important balance, but we need to figure it out.
 - When creating a return to office plan, you should incorporate a more robust return to office policy. We are doing a 70/30 split that allows for 30% time working from home. We see this more as a guide rather than a strict ratio to follow. Keeping flexibility and transparency is crucial to having staff be excited about being in the office while maintaining the effectiveness and convenience of working from home.
 - Our staff has been in person the whole time, but we are seeing our clients are concerned. They have been via phone and now they are not sure what it will look like going forward with in person or via phone.
- Frontline workers who are carrying out our mission in the community and are dealing with higher-risk people and can't work from home. It is creating a bigger divide between administration and front-line workers. I don't know what to do about that because it is part of the job. Hard for employees when you are developing these policies because there isn't much we can do.
 - We had folks who were in office through the whole pandemic. We did some bonuses, incentives, and recognition which helped.

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- The key was that the people who are those front line workers need constant communication to make sure they are safe, they have everything they need to stay safe, and to be clear how appreciated and needed they are.
- What we are doing going forward is being transparent in the job description on whether a job has flexibility for working from home or needing to be in the office. It helps it be less unfair if it is made clear upfront and from the beginning right when someone applies for the job.
- New York Times had an interesting graph about who was getting COVID. Once lockdowns occurred the people who were frontline workers had their rates skyrocket.

Incorporating COVID Success Lessons – Karen Smith and Laura Savenelli

Positive Changes/Opportunities at Organizations

- Many organizations were able to raise funds to expand their front line opportunities
- Using Teams and other platforms to communicate increased collaboration
 - More integration of technology is here to stay
 - Committee meetings and other meetings are easier done virtually
- Working from home
 - Remote work tools and resources made many people more productive and comfortable
 - Opportunity to pause and reflect on the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of our work
 - Pacing of work is better – not in the ‘chase’
- DEI is at the forefront of many agendas
 - People wanting to do better in terms of equity
- Timing of programs and events is very critical
- Recovery/mental health outlets have been a challenge, and something we will need to continue grappling with
- Many online programs had success, ex: census work

Positive Changes in the Community

- COVID was a big success to end some of the gang violence in the city
 - The gangs began working together to address urgent community needs
 - Need to continue to create opportunities for gangs to invest in the community
- More people had opportunities to serve in their neighborhoods
 - This brought a good deal of organizational growth, but that means more funding and more space
- The air and environment was cleaner from less pollution, the city was quieter
 - There was a calmness that lead to more listening

Struggles

- Challenges with masking and getting people vaccinated
- Rise in trauma with no outlets for healing
 - Need to continue to share in compassion and grace
- Continual transformation of the community requires funding
- Despite a desire for unity, many factions divide the community
 - Have to embrace what we have learned in order to overcome power struggles and rebuild

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Mental Health – Maggie Murphy and Erin Connelly

Questions and Struggles

- How do organizations handle a collective global trauma?
- Lack of services made situations more stressful
- Maintaining a balance between work and home life was difficult when working from home
- Childcare was a big stress during the pandemic and continues to be an issue
- Compared to past traumas (such as 9/11) we couldn't come together and grieve as a community
- Loss of education time for children. Concern about impact on generation. Difficult for children who aren't as comfortable with technology, e.g., more comfortable with books.
 - Kids' emotional needs are often overlooked
- Need for a comprehensive list of mental health resources

Positive Approaches

- Talking with others in open and supportive dialogue
- Additional money from the stimulus packages removed some stress around bills
- Changing scenery was positive
- Importance of engaging again, schools opening important for many kids even on modified basis.
- Peer support and facilitators groups in community as resources. International facilitators group creating training for community members. Opportunity for others to join development of this.
- Concept of languishing-identifying and sharing what individuals are feeling helpful by itself. Storytelling useful for this.
- Importance of acknowledging the change in the work environment and how much people have done during the pandemic
- Ask for help, don't suffer alone.

Organizational Growth and Sustainability – Diane Elliott and Saide Saddiq

- The organization does not stop with the building, but it's the people and programs and those you help outside is important too.
- Continuing the work of helping the community outside the organization helps to sustain the organization because people see the mission/goal is real and will also step up to help
- Being stable financially relies on leadership and board development
- For new nonprofits, the funders won't know why you're doing this work, even if data shows the need – hard to break through the initial funding struggles. Having a large organization support them will help give stability, but they might not always have the same goals/mission
- Funding that builds capacity so organizations don't have to be dependent on unreliable grants

Top 10 factors needed to ensure organizational growth and sustainability:

1. Client satisfaction: Those with context expertise/lived experience
2. Understanding the role and responsibility of roles – good, bad and ugly
3. Commitment and dedication to the mission/constituents
 - a. Transparency/Authenticity
 - b. Passion
 - c. Long-term to build/sustain relationships
4. Diversity of funding
5. Understand legalities of nonprofit – things you can and cannot do
6. Community engagement
7. Relatable experience

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- a. hire people with life experience, not just academic degrees
 - b. equitable and diverse hiring practices
8. Team buy-in and ownership – internal aspect, keep foundation of organization going
9. Building relationships and collaboration with others
10. Knowledge, education and resource sharing