



DECONSTRUCTING DEVELOPMENT

Major Gift Fundraising in the New Normal

Deconstructing Development, WID's online interview series, returned on September 24th after a summer hiatus. Co-hosts Yolanda F. Johnson (President, YFJ Consulting, LLC and President, WID NY) and Jill Slattery (Director of Principal Gifts for the Americas, London School of Economics Foundation) shared a conversation about Major Gift Fundraising in the New Normal: Challenges and Opportunities with guest Tricia Hill, Director, Major and Principal Gifts, NY Region, University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

Like many of our colleagues, Tricia and her team have had to rethink cultivation and stewardship since the pandemic began. "We can't bring major donors and prospects to campus... so that's been tough," she said. Meeting in-person with alumni for coffee or a meal is not possible right now. However, Tricia has found new ways to engage alumni while also using many of the same tools she always has, albeit in slightly different ways, to actively solicit gifts.

Small online events, such as fireside chats with the dean and faculty, have been very effective. These intimate gatherings with approximately 10 alumni have more of a conversational feel to them. Plus, alumni who may have not had the time to go to a longer in-person event in the past can now Zoom in. "All they are committing to is an hour in front of their computer," Tricia said. "We've had a lot of success engaging people who typically travel all the time." Another successful strategy has been asking alumni to host these chats, which engages the alum host and draws others to attend.

In the past, if you weren't able to meet with a prospect when you were in their area, you may not see them for another year. Now you can request a meeting online, which opens up opportunities to meet with people anywhere. Tricia connects scholarship donors with their student recipients virtually whereas in the past, she would have had to wait for the donor to come to Chicago, which many donors were unable to do. She also recommends engaging



prospects by sending them interesting news articles and inviting them to virtual events – finding creative touch points so that prospects think your email is worth opening.

Summing up, Tricia pointed out that the pandemic has provided an opportunity for fundraisers to reassess in every area. Many things implemented due to necessity may actually work better for your constituents. This is a common theme in many of the **Deconstructing Development** conversations – the necessity to embrace the changes as we transition through this challenging time, and continue to innovate as we cultivate and steward our organization’s supporters.