



WID Forum Workshop Speakers

Digital Fundraising: Trends and Campaigns to Learn From

Melanie Buhrmaster



Melanie Buhrmaster currently serves as the Vice President, Individual Giving at the Food Bank for New York City. Throughout her career, Melanie has raised more than \$75 million for a variety of programs and is passionate about the art and science of building relationships with constituents to that lead to broad-based impact.

Melanie began her career at the Elmwood Franklin School in Buffalo, New York. Since then, she has held leadership roles at the National Kidney Foundation of Western New York, The Salvation Army, CCS Fundraising Consultants, St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute, Ruffalo Noel Levitz, and the State University of New York at Buffalo. Most recently, Melanie served as the Vice President, Development for Smile Train, building the organization's U.S. high-value

fundraising program in support of their global international cleft-care initiatives.

Melanie is involved with a variety of professional organizations, most notably serving on the board of the New York City Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. She is a member of the Chief, a national women's network and alumna of the FBI Citizens Academy. She has received many accolades for her community service and involvement in her hometown of Buffalo, the Buffalo Business First 40 Under Forty Award and the Buffalo Niagara Sales and Marketing Executives Elite Sales and Marketing Award for Fundraising.

Melanie has a Bachelor of Arts in Public Communication from Buffalo State College and a Master of Science in Education from the University at Buffalo.

LinkedIn: How to Build Your Presence and Get Noticed

Xochitl Ledesma



Xochitl Ledesma is a Director at a leading cyber security firm where she leads partnerships and is involved in developing their DEI programs. With over 10+ years of U.S. and international consulting experience, across the Tourism, IT, and Nonprofit sectors, she is focused on harnessing the intersection between human psychology, technology, and innovation.

Xochitl started her career at EY's cybersecurity practice, where she learned the importance of creating your brand at the start of your career. She then shifted to international consultancy and working for a nonprofit, where she learned the power of skill transference. As someone that has shifted careers and excelled in rebuilding her brand after each change, Xochitl brings invaluable insights on how we can leverage our past accomplishments for future ones by enhancing our online presence.

The Art of the Blended Ask: Optimizing Impact for Donors and Organizations

Kathryn Van Sickle



Kathryn Van Sickle is a passionate fundraiser, community builder, and storyteller and has spent the past decade focused on building confidence and expertise in fundraising. Kathryn has had the privilege of working for a small college, large research university, and now an independent day school. She believes that her diversity of experience makes her stronger as a professional.

Kathryn currently works in New York City as the Director of Major Gifts & Strategic Engagement at The Chapin School. Chapin is an independent k-12, day school. She is also the founder and host of The Development Debrief LLC. The Debrief podcast has been featured in The Chronicle of Philanthropy. Kathryn has been an invited guest speaker for the Association of Fundraising Professionals-NYC, Women In Development, New York, CASE programs and more.

Before Chapin, Kathryn worked in major gifts at Columbia University as a regional officer, raising six- and seven-figure gifts. While working there, she earned a masters in Strategic Communications from Columbia. Kathryn launched her career at her undergraduate alma mater, Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut where she worked in the annual fund with the leadership giving society.

Kathryn volunteers at Trinity as a member of its Board of Fellows and as the Engagement Chair for the Women's Leadership Council Executive Committee. Additionally, she is the Vice President on the Associate Board of Directors for the nationally acclaimed Jericho Project which is ending homelessness by enabling homeless individuals to attain housing, employment, and mental and physical health services. Kathryn lives on New York City's Upper West Side and loves running in Central Park.

The Major Gift Ask

Ellen Smith-Israelson, CFRE



Ellen Smith-Israelson, CFRE, is the Vice President of Philanthropic Services & CMO for Jewish Communal Fund (JCF), the donor advised fund of the Jewish community. Now in its 50th year, JCF manages approximately \$2.8 billion in charitable assets for 4,600 funds.

Ellen oversees JCF's Marketing and Development and Donor Relations teams. The development team cultivates current donors who contribute an average of \$550 million annually to their donor advised funds. Additionally, Ellen's team is responsible for building the donor base by acquiring an average of 250 new DAF accounts and \$60 million in assets from these new accounts each year. This growth is a result of her innovations to bolster networks of referral sources, donor stewardship, and build capacity to accept gifts of complex assets. Ellen helps the marketing team develop an omni-channel strategy and oversees all advertising and public relations initiatives. In addition, she oversees JCF's philanthropic services, providing a variety of educational resources including webinars, podcasts, and print material. She collaborated with Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors and Jewish Funders Network on the creation of the Jewish Philanthropy Roadmap.

Ellen has served on the national board of Advisors in Philanthropy (AiP), and is currently a member of NYSSCPA's Family Office Committee, Association of Fundraising Professionals, WID, and PPGGNY. Prior to joining Jewish Communal Fund, Ellen served as the Executive Director of the Long Island Chapter of American Jewish Committee. Before joining AJC, she was a marketing and fundraising consultant, the Director of Corporate and Foundation Giving at Hofstra University, and Associate Director of Development at North Shore University Hospital.