

The Color of Fundraising

BY MICHELLE S. GOLLAPALLI, MBA, CFRE



Tanya L. Downing, director of corporate and business development at the Texas Health Presbyterian Foundation in Dallas, agrees. “I’m always the only black woman at my level,” she admits. “My environment is not that diverse. There are few minorities in fundraising, and I wanted to attend the conference because I wanted to be in an environment where everyone looked like me, to build my network, talk with people and hear recommendations to improve myself and my career.”

Faculty were chosen so that their seasoned expertise in fundraising matched their ability to deliver core messages uniquely tailored to fundraisers of color: Richard McPherson (Internet fundraising), Anisha Robinson Keays (special events), Yve-Car Momperousse and Stephen A. Forbus (annual campaigns), M. Gasby Brown (starting a development program and faith-based fundraising), Fernando Chang-Muy (individual and major gifts) and Elizabeth Ann Terry and André E. Dixon (grant seeking).

In addition to the sessions, an interactive luncheon panel focused on career growth and enhancement issues. Guest speakers—Rodney Jackson, president of the National Center for Black Philanthropy in Washington, D.C.; Robbe A. Healey, MBA, NHA, ACFRE, vice president for philanthropy, Simpson Senior Services, West Chester, Pa., and AFP chair; and Gloria Pugliese, CFRE, director of corporate and foundation relations, La Salle University, Philadelphia, and president of the AFP Greater Philadelphia Chapter—emphasized the importance of fundraisers investing in their professional education and development, not only for their

“One of AFP’s primary missions is to encourage and advance diversity, not only within the fundraising profession, but also in all of philanthropy.”

To that end, explains Heather Gee, CAP, CFRE, vice president of development and donor services at The Philadelphia Foundation, the first Color of Money conference was held on June 24, 2009, at Temple University in Philadelphia. The leadership initiative of AFP’s Greater Philadelphia Chapter, in collaboration with AFP, the AFP Foundation for Philanthropy and the National Center on Black Philanthropy, certainly fulfilled AFP’s diversity mission. “This conference is one of the first of its kind, aimed directly at helping fundraisers and others serving nonprofits from underserved and underrepresented populations,” says Gee, who served as conference co-chair. “Many of the people who came to the conference often are the only ones of color in the development office. Sometimes they feel alone. The conference provided a venue for fundraising professionals of color to come together.”

For more information on AFP’s diversity programs, visit www.afpnet.org and About AFP. Search: diversity

personal growth, but also for the organizations they serve. The closing keynote was delivered by Dr. Ron Archer, founder and chairman of the Dunamis Institute for Leadership Development in Hawaii.

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with many dynamic speakers,” Downing adds. “It’s always comforting being among other fundraising professionals who share some of the same personal and professional life experiences.”

To reach a truly diverse audience, marketing partnerships were formed with organizations including Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (www.aapip.org), Hispanics in Philanthropy (www.hiponline.org) and the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance (www.philaculture.org).

“The conference was a unique educational opportunity that assembled fundraisers of color from a variety of organizations, from small local nonprofits to large nationally recognized foundations,” says Debra DeBose Whiting, assistant director of advancement, Horizons-Upward Bound, Cranbrook Kingswood School in Bloomfield Hills, Mich. “It also was the first to address the concerns of fundraisers of color. Many attendees work for small nonprofits that are not affiliated with large organizations. This was an opportunity for them to interact with others who do what they do, to realize that they are not in a silo. It was nice to have a room full of people of color.”

More than 140 fundraisers attended the conference, coming from as far away as Texas, Michigan, Massachusetts and Maryland. Scholarships were made available to those who were not able to bear the full cost of attending the conference.

Sponsors were approached for their investment in this community-based initiative and The Philadelphia Foun-

ation came on board at the presenting sponsor level, followed by McPherson Associates Inc., the HBE Foundation and Temple University (program sponsors); the National Philanthropic Trust (supporting sponsor); and Beach Communications, which designed and developed all of the marketing

communications materials. In addition, the AFP Greater Philadelphia Chapter also provided seed money to begin work on the conference planning and implementation.

As Whiting explains, Richard K. Martin, CFRE, vice president, advancement, at Lutheran Social Services of Michigan in Detroit and a past president of the AFP Michigan, Greater Detroit Chapter, has spearheaded the drive for greater diversity in the area and is always encouraging others. “He called us up and asked if we wanted to go to the conference. We were able to get scholarships, which covered most of the registration. Six of us rented an SUV, drove nonstop to Philadelphia and found a reasonably priced hotel. On the road we read *A Philanthropic Covenant With Black America* and we really got to know each other well!”

Downing also heard about the conference from Martin, who was on the same People to People trip to China with her in 2008. With the help of a scholarship, she was able to attend.

Due to the size of the conference, it was a more intimate event, with people open to making comments. “People in the room were really willing to share,” Whiting says. “They felt comfortable talking in the group, and we had a chance to get to know one another.”

Gee is happy that attendees took away some basic fundraising knowledge that they did not have before the conference. “I hope they met and got to know other fundraisers and that they left feeling inspired and not alone. I also hope they really took time to take

their careers seriously and to invest in themselves.”

The conference certainly met many expectations. “The six of us from Detroit who went felt really good that we took the time to go to the inaugural conference,” Whiting says. “We were happy to have been a part of it, to represent greater Detroit, Michigan and the Midwest. We would like to take part in other conferences. There are other people out there like me, and so I hope this is not the only one.”

Downing agrees. “To catch on, there have to be back-to-back conferences; one needs to be held again next year, building on the results from this conference. I was amazed to see so many senior-level fundraisers and CFREs, and the next conference can have a track for senior people.”

Because of the generous support of The Philadelphia Foundation and other sponsors, as well as the committee’s using technology to cut expenses, the AFP Greater Philadelphia Chapter now has \$19,000 as a result of the Color of Money conference. It plans to use that money specifically for diversity projects, including scholarships to help diversify the 800-plus membership.

The learning and networking that began at the conference certainly has not stopped. There was a networking reception following the conference, and afterward attendees were invited to join an online network on LinkedIn, an initiative of the Color of Money Committee that also was responsible for the conference planning and implementation. The group provides members with a free, online opt-in for ongoing professional development and networking opportunities. Since the link went live, discussions have been engaging and membership has soared.

“Now I want to know how to start a Dallas Color of Money Network,” Downing explains. “I need to find other fundraisers of color and then start our own networking group to help grow the profession.”

Michelle S. Gollapalli, MBA, CFRE, is associate director, principal and major gifts—East with the national Alzheimer’s Association and served as co-chair of the Color of Money conference.