



Getting started & making an impact as Program Staff
Season2, Episode 1

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Transcript

Speaker 1:

Welcome to Asking for Good a podcast for people who want to make a difference. Hear stories from season nonprofit professionals and volunteers on how to begin or further a career in making the world a better place.

Speaker 2:

Welcome to season two of Asking for Good. This is Katie Puer, a career fundraiser dedicated to making the nonprofit sector better.

Speaker 3:

And I'm Tania Winston. New to the nonprofit sector. I'm here to learn along with you,

Speaker 2:

We'll be your hosts. And we're kicking off with this series all about stakeholders and their roles in the nonprofit organization. As someone looking to start your career in the nonprofit sector, you'll have a leg up when you understand how these key players help advance the mission of the nonprofit and how they interact with each other. Check out our website for visuals and articles along the way. There are six primary roles in the ecosystem of a nonprofit. We'll dedicate an episode to each. And on the seventh episode, we're gonna review the many adjacent ancillary players that help get nonprofit work done.

Speaker 3:

So today we'll be talking about program staff. Program staff are employees of a nonprofit organization charged with realizing the mission. This is likely the first type of nonprofit employee we think of when we think of the sector. These are the volunteer coordinators, counselors, conveners, who bring multiple parties together to problem solve our most pressing social issues. Our program staff colleagues produce direct impact on the wicked problems. Today you'll hear from two programmatic staff members who work from local to national organization in roles that are strongly embedded in nonprofit organizations and one that are new to many organizations.

Speaker 2:

Our first programmatic person that we're gonna talk to today is Tania herself. Tania, you are in a programmatic role at a nonprofit and your title is one that a lot of nonprofits would have. Tell me about your title and what it means at your specific nonprofit.

Speaker 3:

Yeah, so I am a project manager at an education nonprofit and so there are two project managers on my team and we both actually, it means we own a certain set of the work that we do. So for me, I own our network meetings. We are a collective impact nonprofit and so I own the logistics behind setting up a meeting with cross-sector partners. So there are a lot of like logistical details that you have to take care of because it's not an internal meeting that everyone is required to participate in. And so you have to ensure that you have space for everyone. We always order food for everyone cuz we're asking folks to come in and give up some of their time to be a part of this work and help drive it forward. And so on the back end, it's making sure that also this meeting not only is beneficial for us to move the work forward in the question that we're asking, but also to make sure that folks walk away with something. And so at my role it means really iterating and putting time into planning with my team. What are we asking folks to do? How are we gonna facilitate this? Is this the right question? And constantly editing to make sure that this is a really great couple of hours for people because you don't want just numbers in a room. You want to retain and grow and so you wanna keep the folks interested in the work and have them keep participating.

Speaker 2:

And when you were applying to this role, were you looking in your job search for this title or were you looking more for the, the issue related to what your passion was? How did you decide on, you know, this title or this role or this job description?

Speaker 3:

Yeah, no, that's a great question. So a combination. So I had narrowed down my focus on what I wanted to work on, which was either in the youth development space or the education space. And so I then landed in education. I came across this role and I was also looking for, because I had been a classroom teacher, so that's where the youth development and education piece came in through me, the area that I wanted to serve. And then my role in corporate was a rotational management program in like a distribution and logistics role. And so that required me to do a lot of project management, a lot of people management and people management was optional for me. I was happy to manage a team, but also it wasn't necessary. But I knew like my skills in project management and being able to deliver on that, I was like, you know what? I want to keep growing those. I also know that that would be an asset to teams. Because there's a mixture in non-profits of folks that are coming straight from like the area of concern, which would be a lot of folks who are experts in education. And my teammates are brilliant. And so I wanted to be able to make sure I can add something. And where I think I add the most value, you know, on my team is saying like, Hey, yes, like I've done projects, I understand logistics.

Speaker 2:

And I also think, you know, when you're deciding on which roles to apply to, you kind of mentioned this, the idea that you could see a place for growth within the role or within the organization.

Speaker 3:

Yeah, absolutely. I've been in a classroom, I've taught in different classrooms. I've taught elementary school, but for education space, like that's where my knowledge really like lives. And so I have a lot of growth opportunity in this role to learn more about how districts interact, how districts make decisions and like how principles and folks who, you know, work in other education non-profits, how they think about the larger scale ability of like solutions. Cuz when you're in the classroom, you're thinking about

your 30 kids and they're extremely important to you. But I didn't have like the insight of how some of those like trickled down decisions were getting to me as a classroom teacher. And so now being in this position allows me to, you know, grow my knowledge there and to like understand some of the things that when I was in the classroom and my experience, how they were shaped by these decisions.

Speaker 2:

Is there anything else that you think we should be talking about when we are thinking about our listeners and having them understand the programmatic side of the nonprofit?

Speaker 3:

You, you have to plan a lot. Like you're not do, you're not just like doing, you

Speaker 2:

Know, that's a great point. Yeah. So much of nonprofit work is, is the planning. It's like it's researching the issue, it's understanding all the players, it's getting the players together. Like yeah, your role is bring all the players together, bring the community together

Speaker 3:

To yeah.

Speaker 2:

Solve the issue. So yeah, there's so much planning, like it's not Yeah, you're, so it's like the tip of the iceberg is what people see in the news or whatever, and then underneath is all this planning. Yeah, it's a great

Speaker 3:

Point. Yeah. Like you, you need people who go out and do direct service. You need like those for like community facing individuals who are like doing service work and you need volunteers that are doing service work. You have to get comfortable with the idea that you are not going to be making an impact every single day. Like a direct impact, right? You have to be comfortable with the idea that the work you're doing in planning and managing like processes is to best ensure that you captivate your audience and also that you've like thoughtfully considered the actual needs of the communities you want to serve. And so you could be planning a, an initiative for several months and that pans out to be, you know, a one day meeting a couple a, a week long. But I think it's also, it's important to like, as, as like a project management or programmatic side that you are also considering that you want to, you wanna protect people's time and you want to show that you value all of the stakeholders in a scenario, so the beneficiaries and then also like the donors and the like volunteers and the other staff members that you're coming with a very clear ask of them.

Speaker 2:

Thank you Tania, for sharing more about the project management role within a nonprofit. We know that this role is available at all types of nonprofits and has been embedded in the nonprofit system for a long time. Next we're gonna hear from Nick Sailor, who is a diversity equity and inclusion director. And that's a newer role for nonprofits, but we're gonna hear a lot of the same themes that Tania has been talking

about from strategic planning to getting people to come together and be on board with a new idea or a new investigation into how we could fix a problem. Let's welcome Nick.

Speaker 4:

My name is Nick Sailor. I'm a pronouns or he, him his, and I'm fortunate enough to serve as the National Director of Diversity, equity and Inclusion for Boys and Girls Clubs of America. A recent role for me just about a month and prior to that I was the senior director of Diversity Equity Inclusion for Boys and Girls Club of Boston. So staying within the movement, as they say, transitioning a little bit in its capacity, of course, from a one local organization, one city to now having the, the, the fortune enough to support all of our clubs across the country at the national

Speaker 5:

Scale. Excellent. So you found your role at the local organization. You were doing innovative things, you were succeeding there, and then you saw an opportunity at the national organization to spread that knowledge nationwide.

Speaker 4:

What was really great about this opportunity was a lot of what diversity, equity inclusion work more broadly is around, is around capacity building. So how can we take the the innovations, the skill sets, the mindsets, the tools that worked in Boston and how can we say what, how could this work for other organizations? How could we figure out what are some of those, those key best practices that, that can support all organizations, but then also have the, the dexterity and the flexibility and sort of the, the insight to recognize that a one size fits all doesn't fit anybody. So what sort of contextual things can we do to support clubs in different parts of the country? Boys and girls clubs, as you can imagine, has clubs all over the place. So not just major metros, but rural states and indigenous regions, military sites. So it really is trying to take the best practices and the best things from my experience both in Boston and prior to that, and then figure out how can I utilize that to support our organizations that are much more

Speaker 5:

Varied. That's so incredible and a theme in any type of nonprofit. How do you create scale? So tell me about how you got started in the nonprofit sector.

Speaker 4:

It all started back when I was in college and the, the selection of my majors, and I didn't quite know when I did it, but it really sort of led myself up to, to doing well in the nonprofit space. So I was a sociology major and a women and gender studies major with a minor in black studies. And throughout my time in those particular fields, I was learning more about sort of the, the way and the perspective and sort of the framework to think critically about different social issues. And so as I started to get ready to graduate, I started sort of looking at, well, what sort of opportunities would I have to take that skillset and, and push it forward? Of course you have the, the academic route you can continue to become a sociologist or et cetera, but that really wasn't necessarily the route for me.

Speaker 4:

And so I found myself with an opportunity to take that skillset and become a teacher through Teach for America. And then during those two years I learned a lot about myself, a lot about my skillsets, but then also learn about sort of those adjacent organizations that have impacts on the communities that I care

about. And so then from there finding sort of my d e I drive and, and path through that work in the classroom, I had an opportunity to do some diversity equity inclusion work back in higher education. And then from there, again, understanding the beauties of higher education, the challenges of higher education how that plays out in the world of D E I and then still continuing to seek out what are those spaces where I can take my skillset and really maximize what I feel like my purpose is.

Speaker 4:

For me, I've always felt like my purpose is to, to serve young people. And so having that opportunity to then go from higher ed, which is young people, right? They're 18 to 24, whatever the age is, but then to kind of take that back down in age and, and work at a Boys and Girls Club in Boston while still being able to do what I feel like I've been very skilled at with diversity, equity, inclusion work. So it really all sort of married itself together with my skill sets, but then also the audience that really drives me in the, and the purpose. So being able to serve young people and, and in particularly young black and brown people, that's always been important to me. So that's kind of how I, I, I got into the nonprofit space was really more so thinking about my passions and skillsets and how can those align and the space that it aligned really well happened to be in the nonprofit center.

Speaker 5:

That's a theme we hear from, we've had about 15 guests so far, and that aligning your passion and your skills is critical. And I have to do a quick plug for Teach for America and Peace Corps and any other type of short-term internship that's gonna allow you to be enveloped in an issue or a problem, and you get the chance to kind of have a, a truncated time where you're really focused and working on that. I think that allows a lot of people to, to dive into the nonprofit sector. You're an alum and Tania is too. I'm also thinking that the passion piece, we, we got to talk about that with how you discovered your passion. Can we talk more about the skills that you employ, the skills that you see other successful programmatic people using

Speaker 4:

Those who are successful in nonprofit spaces, really understand both big picture and in your specific role, the mission of the organization, right? And so being able to really decipher and understand what that mission is and then how do you fit into that? And so some of the, some of the skills that I find particularly around d e i is that it's very education based, right? In order for us to make change and for us to address systemic inequity through programmatic efforts of d e I, you really have to be a good educator. And so I think, you know, my, my passion even prior to teaching my, my lived experience, my father being a teacher for 30 years, and, you know, education and history being so important to me, then, you know, really influenced the fact that I needed to hone in on the ability to teach.

Speaker 4:

But not just, again, this, this, this blanketed one size fits all teaching, but really that differentiated approach. And so that skillset around differentiated learning really came in handy and really was something that was built upon for my time as a teacher. So not only was I a teacher, but I was a special ed teacher, and all we do is focused on is individualized learning. How can I make sure my young people that have these needs get what they need and another student who may have a different need also gets what they need, right? And so for me that that differentiated learning was so critical to, to the success there. And then I think a lot of strategic thinking and strategic planning, how can you sort of outline the

direction for where you want to go as an organization? What are the things that you're gonna need in order to do that?

Speaker 4:

And I think, again, the, the background as a teacher, and I always, you know, I, I've talked about this a lot in my own personal life that I think teachers are great folk that can start stepping into the d e I programmatic space because they have that recognition that in order for their students, or in order for people to be successful, you have to creatively think of a roadmap to get from point A to point B. And that's with anybody in a nonprofit space, you're always trying to find how can we get to this outcome? And you have to be able to pull certain levers to do it and figure out what resources you need. So there are some times where I'm the right person to, whether that's deliver a workshop or to go through the strategic planning with someone, or maybe it's how can we partner with a local organization, how can we partner with experts, consultants, how can we leverage standing cultural celebrations as a way to talk about certain issues or a way to bring spotlight or focus on communities that maybe we don't often focus on or that we need to focus on for us to successfully live out our mission.

Speaker 4:

And so I think, you know, the two things, especially on the d e I side, the ability to, to educate, the ability to be creative, but a lot of strategic thinking. And then lastly, I would say the ability to influence. And I know sometimes like influencing people might sound kind of, I don't know, it might have an interesting connotation to it, but ultimately when it comes down to d e I work, you know, you have to capture the, the heart and the head. And so in order to do that, you have to be creative and influential in those spaces. So what are you pulling and, and what sort of things are you highlighting in order to influence change? D e i, folk alone aren't gonna be able to make the changes in organizations, but they oftentimes act as the catalysts for other key stakeholders to make those changes.

Speaker 4:

So for me, sitting on a senior leadership team or an executive leadership team, my job is to bring my expertise but also have influence on those key stakeholders, whether it's the c e o, the chief financial officer, the C o o hr, whatever, any sort of stakeholders to think through a certain lens, an inclusive lens, an equity minded lens addressing racial disparities. That's sort of what my job is, is to help others on that journey because I can't do everybody else's job, but if I can help influence how people do their job with the expertise and lens around D E I and I think we'll be in a good place.

Speaker 6:

Yeah. Nick, I think that's really great advice. And so with d e i for a lot of organizations being new to being a formalized role, and you have the luxury, I think, of having that academic point of view and lens that oftentimes organizations are trying to pull people in who don't necessarily have that formalized training. What would you advise folks going into d e i roles or wanting to pivot, you know, maybe what was unexpected even with your expertise?

Speaker 4:

Great question. I think there's a couple things. I think, and I almost wanna break it up into two sort of categories. One is sort of the quote unquote academic or content-based things you need to know, and then what are the mindsets that she needs to know? Because both of those, you can have one and not the other and it's not successful, right? So from a content perspective, really being well versed or just

being confident in the basic principles of DEI, understanding what does it mean when we say diversity? What does it mean? What we say equity, what does it mean when we say inclusion? Being able to share that in a very concise and a very attainable way, right? A lot of times the work of DEI can get lost and can get sort of puzzling because we, we assume that it, it can only be done at, you know, the graduate level, right?

Speaker 4:

And so part of your job as a practitioner is to take a lot of that scholarly work, right? Take some of those concepts around intersectionality, internalize racism, all of these things that are, that do have these huge fields of study, but to like break it down and to be very confident in sort of that, that, that boiler point language. So I think that from a content perspective, I think understanding your context as far as the city or the town having that local history is really important. So if you live in Boston, you have to know about redlining. You have to learn, you have to know about the Boston busing crisis, right? And how that shapes and manifests itself in where you are presently, right? Localized context is so huge in your space, not only because it helps influence not only because it's important context, but it also demonstrates that you, you understand where you are, right?

Speaker 4:

Which goes into sort of that second piece around the mindsets, right? So one recognizing that you, that you are a part of a continuum of change, and that would a lot of times DEI professionals are asked to do are things that have not been done in hundreds of years within organizations. And so while that is, that is challenging to feel like you have the weight of change, systemic change on your shoulders, recognizing that you are asked to do something that is very hard. And so one kudos to you for being in that role. But then secondly, giving yourself the grace and the patience and sort of the foresight to know that the change that you're hoping to drive might not happen during your tenure, but what you're doing is really laying the foundation for, for others to continue that work, just like in the same way that others have laid the foundation for you to even have this position, right?

Speaker 4:

So there's sort of that, that mindset shift. So the second thing around mindset is this, the, the way that you posture yourself in spaces. So recognizing that you are hoping to create a learning organization, an organization that consistently has a growth mindset, one that is consistently recognizing that the, the goal is not one moment in time, but sort of this continuous aspirational space. And that you're gonna need to be a continuous learner. I oftentimes posture myself as learning alongside folk. And I think that's really important because yes, you are the subject matter expert in your space, but all of those people that you are around, the ones that you are influencing, the ones that you are leading, there is knowledge and, and learning to have from them. And if you are able to demonstrate that that's important to you, not only do I think you have a, a, a better likelihood of being a stronger practitioner, but then you also have that little bit of influence as well. You're able to bring folk along if they say, Hey, you know what, I noticed that this person listens and is also learning from me as well. So yeah, just that posture of learning alongside each other, listening to listen, not just listening to share the next thing that's on your mind. I think those are, you know, some, some mindsets that are, that are really important.

Speaker 6:

Awesome. Thank you so much, Nick. We are just about at time, but because you are so passionate and I can hear it in your voice in 30 seconds, can you tell us what is the most rewarding part of your role?

Speaker 4:

30 seconds, here we go. The most rewarding part of my role is the, the recognition that I have the ability to influence to really influence the outcomes for the communities I care about. And the way in which you do that is both from your direct work, but then also how you're shaping others' work. And to me, I think there's not many positions that have that sort of opportunity, and so I never take that lightly. I take my job very seriously because I know that done well, this job can be transformational. And that's a, that's a great responsibility. And yeah, just that, that to me is so special.

Speaker 2:

Thank you so much, Nick.

Speaker 4:

You're welcome.

Speaker 2:

Now Tania, I have to put the question back onto you in 30 seconds. What is the most rewarding part of your programmatic work?

Speaker 3:

The most rewarding part about my work is seeing the results because day in and day out, I'm not out there making a direct impact, indirectly serving. And so knowing that the time spent iterating and trying to find efficiencies, which I will say is something the business world does really well, looking for those efficiencies and something I want the nonprofit sector to really realize because we do have that limited amount of resources. And knowing that every second you took to realize that then it came to fruition is always so exciting just to see the needle move, if it's a lot or a little.

Speaker 2:

I appreciate how the rewarding parts of the work are both micro and macro. For Nick, it was seeing the impact on the communities he cares about most. And Tania, you're talking about really moving the needle and changing society, and I think that's an important distinction. What are some other s that you've been thinking about from our conversation with Nick?

Speaker 3:

Well, as we talked about, there's such an importance in being able to work across teams and use influence to increase the impact of your work is, as Nick mentioned, he's not a member or the boss of any of the other departments, but he needs to work with finance and his HR department because they also need to realize, you know, d e i and everyone plays a role in that. And so I thought that was so important that he brought in.

Speaker 2:

I think you kind of had that same concept when it comes to influence too, when you were talking about, you know, bringing conveners together and making sure that they find value. And I liked the idea that Nick was saying, use your influence to influence the head and the heart. And I'm sure that you're experiencing that too in your work.

Speaker 3:

Absolutely. your p other people's problems are interesting, but your problems are pressing. And so when you're bringing together different groups, you need to ensure that you're also addressing something that they find pressing. In my role, it's important to connect with those in that I want to convene across sectors and make the problems that we are talking about pressing for them and being able to connect that to the work they're doing.

Speaker 2:

I really like what you're saying about helping outside players from your nonprofit take on the issue that you're focused on. I think it connects with what Nick was saying in the importance of knowing your content and your context. So knowing the definitions of d e l or knowing the issues of education, but also the local history or the values of the organization that you're trying to persuade to come on board with you. So marrying the content and the context. Yes,

Speaker 3:

It's so important and I think Nick has found, you know, a lot of success moving from the Boys and Girls Club of Boston to the national team of the Boys and Girls Club, and staying within the mission because he recognizes that he can't take the exact same work he was doing in Boston and just apply that across all 50 states. Instead, he can take those principles and frameworks that he found working in Boston and make those relatable. So if he can take those principles and frameworks and then apply them, you know, nationally to different size organizations.

Speaker 2:

Yeah, I love when he said one size fits all, fits none. And I think that's true for your job search too. You know, applying without the appropriate content and context will lead to prospective employers not being that interested in your application because it's not that unique. It's not specific to their organization.

Speaker 3:

I would I would definitely agree with that. And I think my advice for anyone applying to jobs is that a lot of nonprofits are going to ask you for a cover letter and that cover letter. If your friends or family read that without your name on it, they should know that that's about you because it should be so unique. And you shouldn't be trying to fit yourself into what you think that role should be, because you likely won't end up super happy in that role and find success, but be true to yourself and find where your experiences and your interests align with the work that that nonprofit is doing. While you want it to be unique to you, you can never go wrong emphasizing your organizational skills, your strategic planning, or your communication skills when you're applying to those programmatic roles.

Speaker 2:

Stay tuned for our next episode. We'll be talking to the administrative side of the nonprofit. That's where I sit in fundraising. We're gonna talk to two CEOs of nonprofits, one from the Bay Area, one from the Midwest. They're gonna have some great insights for us. Thank you for joining us on asking for Good. Find us wherever you get your podcasts. Please tell a friend, take care.