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<https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2020/6/12/how-a-new-organization-will-empower-women-of-color-in-fundraising-and-philanthropy>

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## How a New Organization Will Empower Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy

by Holly Hall



FUNDRAISING CONSULTANT YOLANDA F. JOHNSON IS FOUNDING A NATIONAL GROUP FOR WOMEN OF COLOR IN DEVELOPMENT AND PHILANTHROPY. "THERE NEEDED TO BE A PLACE WHERE THESE WOMEN ARE CELEBRATED, SUPPORTED AND CHAMPIONED ACCORDING TO THEIR UNIQUE EXPERIENCES."

Yolanda F. Johnson of New York-based fundraising advisory firm YFJ Consulting is launching [Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy](#) (WOC), a new national membership organization that seeks to support and elevate the voices of these women through professional development and community building.

Johnson, the first African American president of [Women In Development](#), a 40-year-old organization for female fundraisers in the New York metropolitan area, says WOC (pronounced “woke”) grew out of her efforts to “help move diversity initiatives into the future.”

“Regardless of what happens when I am no longer at the helm of Women In Development,” Johnson writes in a welcome letter to new WOC members, “it is in my heart to ensure that the work of creating a ‘hub’—a truly dedicated space for women of color and their allies in the fields of fundraising and philanthropy—never loses its momentum.”

With an official launch event scheduled for June 30, WOC has already recruited more than 100 women of color in development and other philanthropy roles. Between now and June 30, new members can join for \$40; starting next month, the price will increase to \$50 annually for the next year, a 50% reduction in the regular membership rate due to the pandemic.

The organization is launching at a time when racial justice and equity are at the forefront of the national conversation, but diversity in the nonprofit sector has long been an issue. Last year, a report from nonprofit consulting firm Cause Effective found that 77% of development professionals of color surveyed said they have faced obstacles in their careers due to their race or ethnicity. Meanwhile, philanthropy has been [under fire](#) for years as overly white, especially among its leadership. In addition to issues of equity and opportunity, the Cause Effective report points out that people holding development positions shape the narratives of their organizations and hold the power to steer resources and enable programming. In other words, these are critical positions that help define the nonprofit world, and WOC seeks to provide resources to back up women of color working in them.

The new organization “is a platform elevating the voices of women of color,” says Brenda Asare, head of the Alford Group, a Chicago fundraising consultancy. “There really isn’t any other organization collectively bringing our voices together as women of color.” Until now, there has been only a “fragmented approach” to supporting these women. The group is important and timely as more women of color enter the fundraising profession, a demanding field with people under increasing pressure to deliver, says Asare, one of 13 female philanthropy experts serving on an advisory group to WOC.

WOC will celebrate its June 30 launch with a virtual [panel discussion](#) featuring three to five expert women of color. They will speak about

“workplace sisterhood,” offering tools and ideas for women of color to support one another professionally. In addition to an annual meeting, discounts and other benefits, WOC will offer a robust schedule of webinars such as a presentation next month about financial literacy and wealth-building.

One inspiration for creating the organization, Johnson says, was her work on a Women In Development task force that spent two years examining how to increase diversity and inclusion in the nonprofit world. Another factor was the enthusiastic response among women of color to career workshops Johnson led for them in April.

“There needed to be a place where these women are celebrated, supported and championed according to their unique experiences,” Johnson says. WOC is, she adds, “just empowering women of color to be successful in their lives and careers.”

Johnson’s new organization is already striking a chord among the women who’ve recently joined. “As a woman of color in this profession, I finally have a place where I feel I belong,” writes one. “I cannot wait to see where WOC goes,” another writes. “It has been a long time coming. Thank you for bringing it to life.”