
ROLLINS COLLEGE NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP AND PHILANTHROPY CENTER: THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORKING

Mary Conway Dato-on and Margaret Linnane wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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INTRODUCTION

Margaret Linnane was distraught and dumbfounded. In addition, she was fuming. She had just arrived home from the funders' meeting where she had been asked questions that came close to challenging the very purpose of her nonprofit organization. She had been unprepared for the very tough questions the funders had asked and she knew she would need to be much better prepared for the next specially scheduled meeting in one month. She needed answers to the funders' questions and she wondered how to achieve these answers in four short weeks.

Linnane and the Rollins College Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center (PNLC, or the Center) staff put other efforts on hold while they worked intensely to prepare for the upcoming meeting. They gathered all the documents on the PNLC's mission, vision and strategic plan. Brainstorming started. What information did they need to compile to convince the funders that the PNLC's services, such as networking among established chief executive officers (CEOs) and foundation directors and introducing newcomers to the nonprofit community, contributed to the professionalization of nonprofit leaders and organizations while addressing critical community issues and fulfilling the PNLC's mission — even if such services had not yet generated any revenue? What outcome measures were appropriate for assessing the success of non-income-generating activities such as networking? To start the search for answers to such questions (and others), Linnane decided to review the PNLC's performance from the last two years and to build a strategy for 2011/12. Time was of the essence because without the support of funders, Linnane and the PNLC would be hard-pressed to continue offering the now well-accepted networking activities.

BACKGROUND: PNLC

The Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center (PNLC) was established in 1999 as a program of Rollins College Crummer Graduate School of Business (Rollins). Founded in 1885, on the beautiful

lakeside campus in Winter Park, Florida, Rollins had earned a national reputation for academic excellence both at the graduate and undergraduate levels. The PNLC's certificate programs for nonprofit managers, staff and volunteers and its courses in board development and nonprofit governance had been offered throughout the years on Rollins's picturesque campus. In the 2009/10 academic year, the Center had offered 117 workshops and events to 3,129 attendees. Linnane proudly announced an increase in both the number of programs (up seven per cent) and attendees (up 5.5 per cent) in the 2010/11 program year (see Exhibit 1). As of May 31, 2011, (i.e. at the close of fiscal year), the PNLC had 334 nonprofit members (up 11 per cent from 2010). All programs were designed to support the mission, vision and values of PNLC and Rollins:

Mission: To strengthen the impact, effectiveness and leadership of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations through education and management assistance.

Vision: We envision a vibrant nonprofit sector that is valued by the community for its innovation, leadership and integral role in determining quality of life.

The PNLC team developed the following goals and values to focus their work and enhance mission accomplishment.

Goals

1. Engage the Community in philanthropy
2. Improve the nonprofit sector by strengthening board governance
3. Enhance the business practices of nonprofit organizations
4. Expand the influence of the nonprofit sector
5. Secure the long-term sustainability of the Philanthropy Center

In addition to the guiding principles of Rollins College — excellence, innovation and community — the PNLC subscribed to the following values, which were also reflected in its programs and services:

Values

1. **Generosity:** We value the spirit of giving that is the heart of philanthropy and nonprofit work.
2. **Integrity:** We value strong ethics and commit ourselves to maintaining principled and professional standards for performance, resource utilization and accountability in our work.
3. **Service:** We endeavor to ascertain and respond to our stakeholders' needs with utmost respect and personal attention.
4. **Inclusiveness:** We welcome individuals from diverse walks of life with varying competencies and experiences who strive to educate themselves and their organizations.
5. **Learning:** We strive to remain informed about current issues, trends, and best practices in the nonprofit sector and to model and encourage discovery, creativity, and reflection.
6. **Engagement:** We work collaboratively to fulfill our role in developing our community's strengths and improving the well-being of all citizens.¹

¹ Philanthropy & Nonprofit Leadership Center, "About Us," PNLC website www.rollins.edu/pnlc/aboutus/index.html, accessed June 6, 2011.

THE CENTER'S LEADERSHIP AND ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

Linnane had been the executive director of a nonprofit organization for 18 years before accepting, in 2004, the job as executive director of the PNLC, to work with all of the nonprofits in Central Florida (see Exhibit 2 for an annotated biography of Linnane). She remembered well what it had been like to be thrust into an executive director position with little knowledge of the sector, a complex mission to learn and fulfill, bright-eyed staff members looking to her for direction, enthusiastic volunteers showing up every day, the need to fundraise — and no one to teach her how to do it all.

When Linnane first arrived at the Center, she wanted it to be the “resource of all resources” for the surrounding nonprofit community. She wanted excellent training and consultation to be available to all of the current executive directors. She hoped also to provide mentoring and coaching. Linnane stated aloud to all who would listen that her goal was “to make the nonprofit sector in her region the strongest in the country!”

Although Rollins did not fund the Center as such, it provided training space, office space and all of the equipment and support needed to operate it, such as the utilities, phones and computers. However, Linnane was responsible for funding the operation, including the \$800,000 operating budget that encompassed the salaries and benefits for eight full-time-equivalent employees, program instruction and materials and conference expenses. In addition to the operational support from the college, the Center was fortunate to have received support from several local private foundations and corporate-giving programs. In addition, the Center generated revenue from program fees, membership fees and consulting contracts (see Exhibit 3 for income and expenses for the 2010/11 program year). Both the internal and external revenue streams were critical to the ongoing accomplishment of the PNLC's mission. As such, Linnane needed to meet constituent needs for programs while also appeasing external funders

Constituents

Most of the Center's constituents came from a seven-county area of Central Florida, which extended across more than 8,200 square miles and included approximately 12,000 nonprofits. These included large and small organizations; and, true to the snapshot of the nonprofit sector at the national level, PNLC records showed approximately 2,100 (17.5 per cent) had income greater than US\$100,000. Of course, PNLC's constituents included hospitals, private colleges and foundations, but, for the most part, they were small nonprofits providing services to niche groups. For example, PNLC membership in 2011 consisted of 334 organizations. In reviewing the member list, Linnane recalled having assisted in the past year, in one way or another, organizations across many sub-sectors of the nonprofit spectrum, including education, health services, culture and arts, and social services.

This review reminded Linnane that the staff and volunteers of the nonprofits the Center served varied considerably in their experience, expertise and training. This review of existing and potential clients occurred regularly among the PNLC staff and helped formulate the membership services offered. Exhibit 4 shows membership benefits and fees. Linnane stated that changes to membership benefits were brewing in the 2011/12 plans:

We are about to add affinity groups as a new member benefit, specifically Marketing, Technology, Human Resources, and The Seasoned CEO. The New Executive Director (ED) Roundtable and New Development Director (DD) Roundtable will continue to be open to non-members because they are strong marketing tools for us.

Services

Because of the variety in the missions and work experiences of the constituents (not to mention the incredible staff turnover experienced by many organizations during the 2007/09 financial crisis), Linnane set out to provide training that could meet everyone's needs (see Exhibit 1). For example, the Center offered 17 workshops on fundraising. "We offer A—Z in fundraising," she explained, "anything you want from setting up a development office through grant writing and major gift fundraising to planned giving — you can get it at the Center." The Center also provided extensive training in board governance, volunteer management, financial management and planning. In all, the Center offered an average of nearly 120 workshops per year. With few exceptions, the workshops were well received by an average of 26 attendees per workshop, who rated the sessions at an average rating of 4.78 out of 5 (see Exhibit 5).

When Linnane reviewed the activities related to the "management assistance" part of the mission, she noted the Center offered consultation (some of which generated income), mentoring for new executives and coaching for those who requested it. Linnane mused:

Mentoring and coaching, it's really what I love to do. But I'm not the oracle; other nonprofit leaders could and should be mentoring their peers. This is the thought that led me to develop more networking opportunities for my constituents at various stages of their career and organizational life cycle. Actually, I recall the specific situation that started the ball rolling. As it turned out these thoughts were moved into action by a regional disaster.

THE NEED FOR NETWORKING: HURRICANE CHARLEY

In 2004, a major hurricane blew through the central part of Florida, leaving behind serious damage. Thousands of homes and businesses had been destroyed, and services of all types were suspended. Being aware of a crisis in the community, the Center requested information from the nonprofits, asking its members "What do you have that you could offer others?" and "What do you need?" Unlikely partnerships and business relationships were formed. Those with building damage found new locations from which to provide their services. Those that lost transportation identified partners to provide it. Some organizations shared staff for a period so that their employees were not out of work due to the effects of the hurricane.

Some of the partnerships that had developed during the crisis continued long after the organizations had recovered from the disaster. The nonprofits that provided other organizations with operational space during the crisis were pleased to retain these tenants. Those that continued to share services were saving money and were happy about their new arrangement. These types of collaborations truly changed the mindset of many organizations and nonprofit leaders. At the same time, the Center staff learned more and more about the value of connectivity. As people met each other and learned about the missions, resources and needs of each other's organizations, services were expanded and led to greater creativity. Linnane contemplated how to continue this high-level of collaboration during non-crisis times.

NETWORKING: THE FOCUS OF THINGS TO COME

One day, an experienced executive director asked Linnane to help him to make connections with some of his peers in the nonprofit community. He told her, "I don't know very many people who also run nonprofits. Some of us would certainly have a lot in common and could learn from each other. I don't

have any easy way to meet them.” Linnane considered what he said and saw an opportunity for the Center to play another role as the hub of networking, a place where best practices were not only taught but also shared among peers. In addition to offering an important service to nonprofit leaders, Linnane also believed attendance in classes would increase once leaders were on campus and, in general, became more familiar with the Center’s offerings and quality of service.

The Center began promoting networking slowly. First, at each workshop, attendance lists were distributed so that attendees could follow up with each other post-event. During the workshops, instructors encouraged the attendees to introduce themselves to one another and to discuss their respective organizations during breaks.

Linnane and her staff then developed some events, almost solely for the purpose of networking. Linnane explained, “Yes, a meal was offered, and yes, there was a brief presentation to further encourage attendance, but the primary goal was for local members of the sector to get to know one another.” These sessions became known as “Leaders Series” events and were held every other month. Much to Linnane’s delight, the room was filled each time, with an average attendance of approximately 50 people (see Exhibit 5). Although these series were well attended, the Center staff noticed that attendees would typically enter the room, identify a seat and pluck themselves down as if the meal was what they were there for! After some brainstorming about the reason for so little interaction among attendees, Center staff concluded that people did not really understand how to meet others in a professional setting.

On the basis of this revelation, the Center offered a workshop titled, “The Art of Networking.” Beginning with the 2005 class, each time the workshop was offered, it was sold out. According to observations during the sessions and feedback after the sessions, people were not comfortable in settings dedicated to networking, and they wanted to learn how to network effectively. Workshop attendees were reminded that training was an opportunity to network and that not only the presenter but also their peers had knowledge and creative suggestions to offer. Constituents learned to be comfortable and strategic in networking settings.

As a result of the increased networking among the nonprofit community, collaborations were built. For example, a program for children with disabilities collaborated with a performing arts organization to offer children with disabilities the opportunity to act in staged performances. Another organization needing help picking up supplies for its programs worked with the local food bank because its trucks were not being used to their full capacity. The Adult Literacy League started offering English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes to parents whose kids were active in the Boys & Girls Club. All of these collaborators credited the Center with bringing them together. Linnane noted:

This is just a small set of examples. I could go on for hours, maybe even days, telling how programs and services developed or improved because nonprofit leaders were in the same place at the same time talking to each other and sharing missions, visions, and challenges.

Building on the success of the Leaders Series and the Art of Networking workshop, the Center began to offer “speed networking” sessions. Linnane recalled the initial speed networking events:

We offered this twice — in 2008 and 2009, focused on arts organizations and others who wanted to attend. The participants wanted to meet one another with the hope being that they would find ways to work together. A timer is set. Organizations start talking one to one. They have two minutes. At the end of two minutes, everyone moves and spends two

minutes with another organization. This continues until the end of the event. You can be sure that business cards and organizational literature are exchanged.

All of these initial actions were well received. Linnane was encouraged and began to brainstorm how the concept of networking could be taken to the next level.

From the staff's brainstorming another innovation in the networking area was developed: PeerLabs. The first PeerLab was in December 2010. For the event, PNLC staff arranged the room with 8 to 10 circular tables. At each table, a leader from a local nonprofit conducted a discussion on an area in which his or her organization excelled. Topics included, among others, Creative Fundraising, Using Social Media, Generating Earned Income and Finding Volunteers. The entire session lasted half a day. Attendees selected one table to sit at with others who shared an interest in the same topic. Introductions were made and the sharing began. Linnane beamed:

The reaction was overwhelmingly positive. People loved the time with their peers to talk about best practices and they asked us to offer it again. The second PeerLab was in May 2011, with 50 people in attendance. We decided to offer a PeerLab twice a year as long as attendance continued to be high and we continued to receive requests for more opportunities like it.

Affinity Groups

After having observed the success of these general audience networking events, Linnane began thinking about how to apply the concept in a more targeted fashion. With this idea in mind, the Center began to establish affinity groups. Linnane explained the concept: "We'll introduce peers, one to another, and let them take those relationships where they will." The Center began by offering a "New Executive Director Roundtable" in January 2007 for those new to their positions. From there, they developed the "New Development Director Roundtable" in June 2009 and eventually the "Seasoned CEO Roundtable" in January 2010. Annually, the Center offered "For Board Chairs Only," an opportunity for board chairs to discuss the challenges they faced in leading boards. At the same time, Center staff began taking leadership roles in already established affinity organizations, such as the Association of Fundraising Professionals and Grant Professionals Network. In this way, the PNLC staff improved their own network and observed the management strategies of successful affinity groups.

Linnane was aware that many of the introductions that had been made through PNLC networking activities had turned into partnerships and eventual deep collaborations, resulting in friends mentoring and coaching each other. While such developments made her feel proud of the efforts she and the PNLC staff were making, she realized that some of these deep, cooperative relationships were forming into their own groups away from the Center. Sometimes she was invited to informal breakfast meetings or for drinks after work with executives who had established good, sustaining relationships with others. She realized, however, that she was seeing fewer of these executives formally; that is, they were not engaging much with the Center. Linnane wondered whether this situation could "possibly have happened because the nonprofit leaders had developed their own 'affinity' groups and no longer needed the Center?" She was unsure how to bring the leaders back into the fold.

EXPLAINING THE VALUE OF NETWORKING TO FUNDERS

At the annual PNLC meeting in May 2011, Linnane shared with the Center's funders the network organizing the Center was involved in. She expected them to be enthusiastic; after all, "how could anyone not be excited about connecting people to form a more cohesive sector?" She was not prepared for some of the responses. Her funders had asked: "How do you know that offering networking opportunities provides value?" "How many connections have you facilitated that have impacted the community?" "How many of these partnerships you're describing are lasting longer than three months or six months?" "What is the impact of networking on their clients?" "What is it really costing you (and your operation) to do all of this facilitation?" "Would your time be better spent on activities that generate revenue for the Center?"

Linnane had been caught off guard. She couldn't answer any of the questions. She knew instinctively that connecting people on the scale that the Center was doing was resulting in a stronger nonprofit sector overall, which supported the Center's mission and vision. Nevertheless, she had to listen to their questions and determine how to prove that network facilitation strengthened nonprofits and the community and was worth the staff time.

Linnane knew that the Center's reputation was building, that classes were filling and that advice was being sought. Center staff was consistently hearing comments such as "I don't know what I'd do without the Center" and "I couldn't do my job without you." They were starting to hear nonprofit staff members state proudly that they had earned a certificate in nonprofit management or proposal writing through the Center. Much anecdotal evidence supported that the Center's efforts were positively influencing local organizations and their staff. The Center was becoming the "go to" organization for advice, training, information and connections. Linnane needed to convince the funders that networking was important to the Center's mission and to the nonprofit community. Funding support was critical to PNLC's success. She had four weeks to prepare for the next meeting. She needed answers — fast.

Exhibit 1

**THE PHILANTHROPY AND NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP CENTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS,
JUNE 1, 2009, TO MAY 31, 2010, AND JUNE 1, 2010, TO MAY 31, 2011**

Membership

- May 31, 2010: 300 new and renewing members
- May 31, 2011: 334 new and renewing members

Workshops and Training

- 2010: Conducted 117 workshops with 3,129 attendees
- 2011: Conducted 125 workshops with 3,296 attendees — 11 new programs added

Certificates Awarded

Certificate	2010	2011
Proposal Writing	36	34
Nonprofit Management	8	13
Volunteer Management	47	34
Philanthropic Fundraising and Development	10	10
Leadership Practice	23	26

Community Presentations: Staff provided more than 10 unique presentations annually for both the nonprofit and for-profit communities, including the following:

- Hosted 20 DonorEdge presentations
- United Way of Brevard Nonprofit Summit
- National Board Source Leadership Forum
- University of Central Florida (UCF) Nonprofit Conference
- Florida Philanthropic Network Summit
- Walt Disney World and Darden Restaurants Donors Forum Presentation

Contract Work: Staff provided 21 events in 2010 and 18 in 2011, including the following:

- United Way of Brevard, Melbourne (fundraising)
- Florida Student Association (mission statement)
- Leadership Orlando (board governance)
- Reinhold Foundation, Orange Park (board governance fundraising/ volunteer management)
- Sea World Orlando (board governance)
- Florida Fund for Minority Teachers (board governance)
- Meridian Behavioral Healthcare (board governance)
- St. Luke's Methodist Children's Home (program evaluation)
- Rosen Hotels & Resorts (volunteer management/board governance)

Research: January through June 2011: *The 2011 Nonprofit Compensation & Benefits Survey* and publication of the Report

Marketing: July 2010: Completion of a new marketing plan for the Center

Executive Transition Management Focus:

- Two educational/networking events for new development directors
- Three educational/networking events for new executive directors/CEOs
- Seven educational/networking events for seasoned CEOs
- Placed 14 Rollins Early Advantage MBA students on nonprofit boards of directors

Source: Margaret Linnane, executive director PNLN, received June 10, 2011.

Exhibit 2**ANNOTATED BIO FOR MARGARET S. LINNANE**

Margaret Linnane is executive director of the Rollins College Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center. She has full administrative responsibility for the college's multi-purpose resource center dedicated to providing a broad range of executive education programs, workshops, seminars and services for volunteer and staff leadership of nonprofit organizations. Prior to joining the Philanthropy Center in 2004, Margaret served as executive director of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida in Orlando for 18 years. In her capacity as executive director of the food bank, Margaret had responsibility for resource development, fiscal management, board relations, strategic planning, program management, human resource administration and community relations. She serves on the Board of Trustees at Bishop Moore High School in Orlando, Florida, and the advisory boards for the University of Central Florida College of Health & Public Administration Nonprofit Management Program, and Public Allies. Margaret has an MBA from the Crummer Graduate School of Business at Rollins College. She lives in Orlando and is married with three children

Source: PNLN records, accessed June 10, 2011.

Exhibit 3**THE PHILANTHROPY AND NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP CENTER'S INCOME AND EXPENSES, 2011****INCOME FOR 11 MONTHS ENDING APRIL 30, 2011**

	Dollar Value	Percent of Total
Program Fees	152,372	19.7
Membership	79,350	10.3
Contracts	111,708	14.5
Grants	380,833	49.4
Other	47,304	6.1
TOTAL	771,567	100.0

EXPENSES FOR 11 MONTHS ENDING APRIL 30, 2011

	Dollar Value	Percent of Total
Program Costs	127,989	20.6
Travel & Conferences	16,931	2.7
Office Expenses	31,612	5.1
Salaries & Benefits	444,281	71.6
TOTAL	620,813	100.0

Source: Margaret Linnane, executive director PNLN, received June 10, 2011

Exhibit 4

PHILANTHROPY AND NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP CENTER MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS AND FEES

**Why Become a Member?**

PNLC members, both individual and organizational, participate in our high quality educational, training and networking programs at a significant savings. Membership fees help the Philanthropy Center to provide programs and services that strengthen and support the entire nonprofit community.

Who May Become a Member?

PNLC membership is open to individuals, nonprofit organizations, and departments of local, state or federal government. An organizational or government department membership includes benefits for all staff, volunteers and board members.

Membership Benefits: Upon enrollment in PNLC, all benefits will be available to all employees, volunteers, and board members:

- **Free** 30-day job postings on the Center Job Posting Board
- 10% Discount on all products and services offered through Opportunity Knocks, an online job center and the nation's leading job site for nonprofit jobs
- Discounts on all Center workshops, events, and seminars
- Scholarship eligibility of up to 50% off workshop fees for all 501(c)(3) members
- Scholarship eligibility (50%) to the Crummer Management Program ("Mini-MBA")
- 20% discount off of total registration fees when registering 3 or more people for a single Philanthropy Center workshop at one time
- 20% discount off of total registration fees when 1 person registers for 3 or more Center workshops at one time
- Special discounts offered on Crummer Graduate School of Business Management & Executive Education Center select programs
- Discounted one-year subscription to the Nonprofit Quarterly (\$39 as opposed to \$49)
- Use of our conference room for small meetings (seat 12-14)
- Use of the Philanthropy Center's resource library (includes Foundation Directory Online)
- A link to your organization's website from the Philanthropy Center's website
- Invitations to exclusive events
- Discounted price on the Central Florida Nonprofit Compensation & Benefits Survey Report

Exhibit 4(continued)

Membership Categories and Fees: All listed dues are for one year PNLC membership. Your membership will expire 1 year from the day you join or renew.

Individual Memberships **\$175**

Nonprofit Organizational Memberships

Annual Budget	Annual Membership Fee
Less than \$100,000	\$125
\$100,000 to \$500,000	\$200
\$500,001 to \$1,000,000	\$225
\$1,000,001 to \$2,000,000	\$325
\$2,000,001 to \$3,000,000	\$425
\$3,000,001 to \$4,000,000	\$525
\$4,000,001 to \$5,000,000	\$625
\$5,000,001 to \$10,000,000	\$750
Over \$10,000,000	\$850

Large funding agencies and membership organizations that wish to join on behalf of their affiliated organizations may contact the executive director to discuss a group membership.

Government Department or Agency Memberships

Annual Budget	Annual Membership Fee
Less than \$1,000,000	\$200
\$1,000,000 and Over	\$400

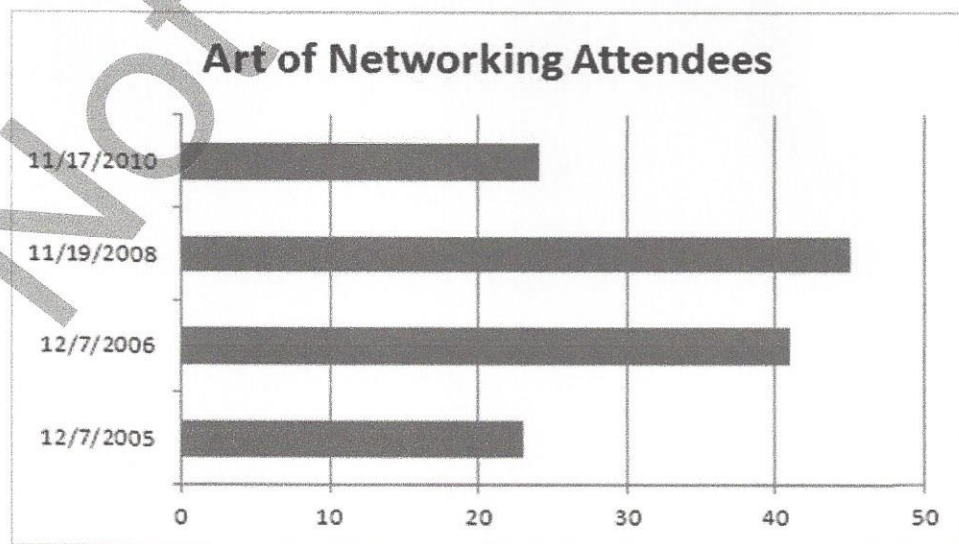
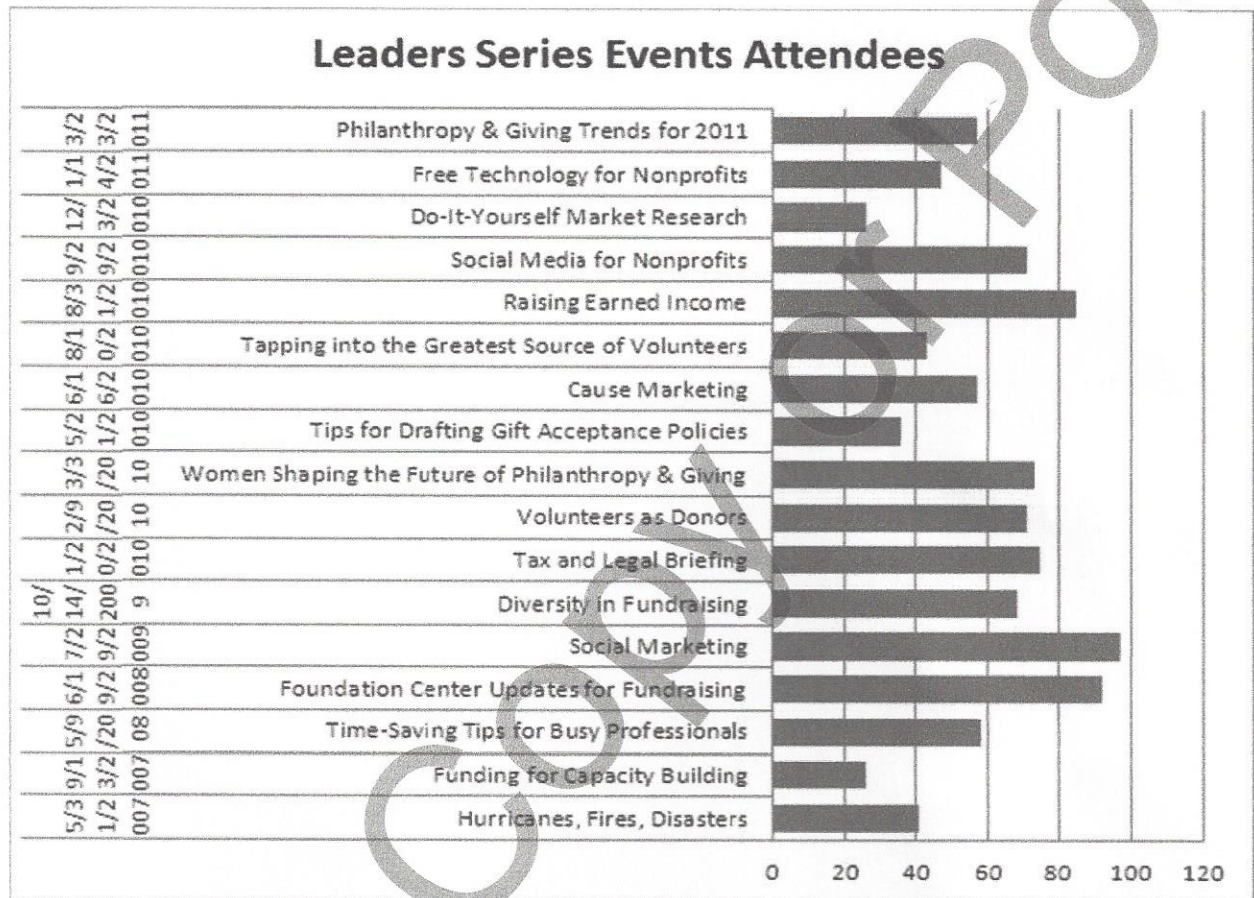
Source: *Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center, "Membership Information,"*
www.rollins.edu/pnlc/membership/index.html, accessed June 6, 2011.

Exhibit 5

WORKSHOP AND EVENT ATTENDANCE

Date	Topic	Attendees
5/31/2007	Hurricanes, Fires, Disasters	41
9/13/2007	Funding for Capacity Building	26
5/9/2008	Time-Saving Tips for Busy Professionals	58
6/19/2008	Foundation Center Updates for Fundraising	92
7/29/2009	Social Marketing	97
10/14/2009	Diversity in Fundraising	68
1/20/2010	Tax and Legal Briefing	75
2/9/2010	Volunteers as Donors	71
3/3/2010	Women Shaping the Future of Philanthropy & Giving	73
5/21/2010	Tips for Drafting Gift Acceptance Policies	36
6/16/2010	Cause Marketing	57
8/10/2010	Tapping into the Greatest Source of Volunteers	43
8/31/2010	Raising Earned Income	85
9/29/2010	Social Media for Nonprofits	71
12/3/2010	Do-It-Yourself Market Research	26
1/14/2011	Free Technology for Nonprofits	47
3/23/2011	Philanthropy & Giving Trends for 2011	57

Exhibit 5 (continued)



Source: Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership Center records, June 2011.