UTRGV Nonprofit Resource Center

In partnership with onestar

2026 RGV NONPROFIT SUMMIT

November 4, 2026
8:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Brownsville, Texas

Navigating with Purpose: Charting the Future of Nonprofits



SPEAKER LINEUP

The UTRGV Nonprofit Resource Center is excited to partner with OneStar to host the 2026 RGV Nonprofit Summit, bringing together nonprofit leaders from across the region for a day of learning, connection, and inspiration.

2026 RGV NONPROFIT SUMMIT

Navigating with Purpose: Charting the Future of Nonprofits



MORNING KEYNOTE

Suzanne Smith | Social Impact Architects

SESSION TITLE:

Nonprofit 2.0: Navigating the Waters Ahead

The map has changed. The nonprofit sector is navigating uncharted waters. Artificial intelligence. Workforce shortages. Shifting donor expectations. Economic uncertainty. Rising community needs. The currents shaping our world are also reshaping the future of social impact. In this engaging keynote, nationally recognized nonprofit strategist and author Suzanne Smith explores the evolution of the nonprofit sector and what it means for leaders today. Drawing on national research, emerging trends and more than 30 years of experience, she'll share practical insights to help nonprofit leaders anticipate change, strengthen resilience, embrace innovation and chart a confident course for the future.
The future won't wait. It's time to navigate it with purpose.

Raised in rural Texas, Suzanne Smith believes everyone is a changemaker and that the strongest organizations empower ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things together. She is the founder and CEO of Social Impact Architects, a Texas-based social change agency that helps nonprofits, foundations, businesses and governments solve complex community challenges. During the past three decades, she has worked alongside thousands of nonprofit leaders - from rural communities to the state's largest metropolitan areas - helping organizations strengthen strategy, leadership and long-term sustainability. Suzanne is the author of The Nonprofit Flywheel: A Playbook for Sustainable Growth, Smarter Strategy, and Lasting Impact, a university instructor, keynote speaker and author of the long-running Social TrendSpotter blog. She has also advised federal agencies on social entrepreneurship and systems change. A third-generation Texan, Suzanne remains deeply committed to her home state. Based in Dallas, she has served in numerous civic leadership roles and was recognized with the Dallas Regional Chamber's Young ATHENA Leadership Award.

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LUNCH KEYNOTE

Millicent Boykin | OneStar

SESSION TITLE:

Partners in Purpose: Building Relationships That Matter

What if our greatest untapped resource isn't another grant, program, or initiative but the relationships we build with one another? The nonprofit sector is America's most trusted sector. Our work is community-focused and people-centered. We exist to serve and support the community. The community's well-being is at the heart of EVERYTHING we do. So, if we are striving for the same goal, why is it so hard for us to work together? We have forgotten that our work is aligned and that we should not view each other as competitors but as collaborators and partners.

Communities thrive when leaders choose collaboration over competition, and the key to collaboration is relationships. During lunch, connect with nonprofit leaders, board members, community advocates, and funders through intentional networking and peer conversations. Learn to strengthen partnerships and build relationships by coming together as partners in purpose.

Millicent is a connector, convener, and capacity builder dedicated to working with and for the community. She serves as Vice President of Strategic Partnerships at OneStar Foundation, the State Service Commission for Texas, where she leads statewide networks, programs, and partnership initiatives focused on nonprofit capacity-building, advocacy, community engagement, and volunteerism. An active community volunteer, Millicent serves on several committees and boards, including the Read Up Advisory Council and the Congressional Award Texas Advisory Committee. She is an alum of Leadership Dallas, Leadership ISD, Leadership Texas, and Leadership America. Past board service includes Reading Partners North Texas, the American Red Cross Diversity Leadership Council, and the Woodrow Wilson High School Community Foundation. She has been honored as HOBY Alum of the Year by the Texas North chapter, received a special citation for Volunteer Excellence from the American Red Cross North Texas Region, and was featured as a "Hometown Hero" on Fox 4. Millicent holds a degree in psychology from Northwestern University and is a Certified Group Facilitator. One of her favorite quotes reflects her passion for service: "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do."

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Charting the Course: Nonprofit Leadership

Dr. Madahy Romero | Philanthrovera

Consultant

SESSION TITLE:

Indispensable Is a Liability: Leading So Your Nonprofit Outlasts You

Many nonprofit leaders quietly become the organization. They run programs, write the grants, manage staff, and hold every key relationship, until there is no room left to actually lead. It feels like strength, but it is the single greatest risk a small nonprofit carries: when that one person leaves, burns out, or steps away, everything wobbles. This session reframes indispensability as a liability and offers practical ways to distribute the work, knowledge, and relationships now, in everyday operations. Leaders will leave with a clear path to build an organization that runs well today and outlasts any one person tomorrow.

Madahy Romero, Ph.D., is a senior advancement leader and nonprofit strategist who thrives at the intersection of fundraising, strategy, and social impact. She currently serves as Senior Director of Advancement at Saga Education, where she leads a team of fundraisers powering evidence-based, high-impact tutoring programs nationwide during the school day. Her work helps accelerate student learning and opens opportunities for underserved students.

Over her career, Madahy has built and led major gifts programs in both university and nonprofit settings, launching advancement departments, designing comprehensive fundraising strategies, and securing transformative philanthropic support. She is known for combining strategic vision with hands-on execution, translating compelling stories of impact into lasting donor engagement.
Madahy loves partnering with organizational leaders to build strong advancement teams and systems. She helps embed data-driven practices, grow staff capacity, and create structures that allow programs to scale and thrive sustainably.

Above all, Madahy is passionate about advancing educational opportunities and serving the most underserved communities. She is energized by work that creates real change, using her skills in fundraising, storytelling, and strategic leadership to help organizations deliver impact that lasts.

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Charting the Course: Nonprofit Leadership

Alicia Reyna | Alicia Reyna Consulting

Owner/Founder

SESSION TITLE:

Leading from Strength: Building Resilient Nonprofit Teams

Nonprofit leaders face constant change while inspiring teams, engaging boards, and advancing their mission. Sustainable leadership begins with understanding how we naturally lead. This interactive session explores the science of strengths-based development and how investing in what people naturally do best improves communication, strengthens collaboration, reduces burnout, and increases team engagement. Participants will discover how leading from their unique natural gifts and talents builds healthier workplace cultures and stronger organizational impact. Attendees will leave with practical, research-informed strategies they can immediately apply to lead with greater confidence, resilience, and purpose.

Alicia Reyna is an experienced strengths-based talent strategist and people leader with over 20 years of experience creating human-centered organizations that create sustainable and long-lasting change. She founded Alicia Reyna Consulting to help organizations, teams, and leaders unlock their potential through strengths-based development and people centered solutions. With over a decade of experience working in leadership and talent development for a national non-profit and serving her community as an elected school board trustee, she is passionate about creating experiences where adults learn, grow, and thrive together. She is passionate about creating the conditions and systems that support multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual workplaces. She graduated from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science and holds a Master's in Education in Policy, Organization, and Leadership Studies from Stanford University. She is a Gallup Certified Strengths Coach, Senior Certified Professional recognized by the Society of Human Resource Management(SHRM-SCP), and trained in Mediation for Social Justice and Restorative Dialogue.

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Navigating with Purpose: Charting the Future of Nonprofits



Charting the Course: Nonprofit Leadership

Rhanda Luna | ART Consulting

Founder & Principal

SESSION TITLE:

High Accountability Without Burnout: What Effective Nonprofit Leaders Get Right

Many leaders believe they must choose between high accountability and a supportive workplace culture. In reality, the healthiest organizations achieve both. This session challenges common misconceptions about trauma-informed and people-centered leadership by demonstrating how clear expectations, consistent feedback, and psychological safety can strengthen performance while reducing burnout. Through practical examples and discussion, participants will learn how to maintain high standards while building trust, engagement, and long-term organizational capacity.

Rhanda Luna is the Founder & Principal of ART Consulting, where she helps nonprofit organizations strengthen leadership, organizational culture, fundraising strategy, and long-term sustainability. With more than 15 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, she has led fundraising, capacity-building, and organizational development initiatives for organizations of all sizes. Rhanda is also a PhD candidate in Organizational Leadership, where her research focuses on trauma-informed leadership, employee well-being, and organizational sustainability. Drawing on both research and real-world leadership experience, she helps leaders build workplaces that support accountability, resilience, and mission impact without sacrificing the people doing the work.

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Charting the Course: Nonprofit Leadership

Marcus Cunningham | Giant Squid Group

Devellopment Consultant

SESSION TITLE:

Embracing Non-Hierarchical and Distributed Leadership Models

Nonprofit leadership is as complex as it has ever been. It's often said that it's lonely at the top...but what if it doesn't have to be? In this session, we'll explore multiple forms of distributed leadership models from the perspective of those who practice it. We'll also discuss the benefits of decision-making tools that allow for distributed leadership right now, in your current organizational structure. Finally, we'll address some of the most common myths about non-hierarchal leadership structures, and the real consequences of maintaining the status quo.

(Co-Presenting with Melinda Chow, Austin Youth River Watch)

Marcus Cunningham ('11) is a Community-Centered Fundraiser, an organizer, and an advocate for the nonprofit sector and its workers. He has over a decade of experience in the social sector, working in institutions serving PK-16 education and movement infrastructure organizations in Texas and across the U.S. Marcus' fundraising specialties are institutional giving and operations. He strongly believes that good systems and a focus on relationships are the through-line for gifts of all sizes and streams. He is a member of the Community-Centric Fundraising Emeritus Council, in addition to serving as a Steward for the CCF Texas Chapter. Born, raised, and currently residing in North Texas, Marcus holds a BBA in Management from The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

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Charting the Course: Nonprofit Leadership

Melinda Chow | Austin Youth River Watch

Co-Executive Director

SESSION TITLE:

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(Co-Presenting with Marcus Cunningham, Giant Squid Group)

Melinda has been a Co-Executive Director of Austin Youth River Watch (AYRW, aka River Watch) since 2016. She led the creation of a distributed leadership structure for AYRW and became Co-Executive Director in 2023. Melinda was drawn to River Watch because of her passion for social and environmental justice, community engagement, and empowering young people. Previously, she managed a science outreach series at UT Environmental Science Institute. Her professional experience spans over two decades and three cities, and includes Austin public radio stations KUT & KUTX, Girls Rock Austin, South Memphis Alliance, National MultiCultural Institute, and the National Civic League. In her off time, she enjoys riding bikes, eating every kind of food, saying hello to animals, thinking about her next travel or nature adventure, playing board games, reading science fiction, and listening to NPR's Pop Culture Happy Hour.

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Navigating with Purpose: Charting the Future of Nonprofits



Steadying the Ship:
Board Development & Governance

Sam Hamman | Hamann Law Office, PLLC

Founding Attorney

SESSION TITLE:

Finding the Hidden Risks

Some of the biggest legal risks nonprofits face show up first as non-legal issues. For example, a nonprofit may have employees who don't fit the culture, board members who are not engaged, finances that go unchecked, donors and funders that are left out of the conversation, and administrative tasks that are left undone. This session will explore the top legal risks that most nonprofits aren't paying attention to but that have the greatest risk of damage. It will also discuss how to assess your own risk and consider mitigation tactics to protect the organization.

Sam is an attorney serving nonprofits and churches in Texas. He is passionate about serving the individuals and organizations he works with.

Sam began his career working as a tax and corporate associate at a law firm in Fort Worth, focusing on closely held business transactions, formation, and tax issues. After four years, Sam took a break from practicing law to work at local church while attending Brite Divinity School. After graduating with a Master of Divinity, Sam took a position in Strategic Consulting with The Center for Nonprofit Management in Dallas, Texas. During this time, he discovered a love for the nonprofit sector. Over the course of six years at CNM, Sam worked with over one hundred organizations of all different sizes, missions, and locations. He facilitated the development of more than 30 strategic plans and guided over 60 boards through training and development. In 2024, he was also ordained as a Deacon in the United Methodist Church.

In 2026, Sam returned to the practice of law to explore new ways of serving. Today his practice focuses on nonprofits and churches in the areas of governance, employment, outside general counsel services, mergers and collaborations, and succession planning.

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Steadying the Ship:
Board Development & Governance

Jesus Sanchez, MBA | Seven Pillars Finance LLC

Principal & Fractional CFO

SESSION TITLE:

Leading Beyond Compliance: Governance and Audit Readiness

Audit readiness is not reactive: it is a leadership posture that conveys trust and credibility. This session introduces an eight-step framework for leaders and boards to anticipate fiscal year-end, reconcile key accounts, validate grant reimbursements, and prepare organized documentation in an audit binder. Participants will learn how to initiate auditor conversations 90 days before closing and establish a plan for reconciliations and internal controls. Audit preparation becomes a leadership discipline that strengthens transparency, order, and institutional resilience, ensuring nonprofits are positioned to meet challenges with confidence and clarity.

Jesús Alberto Sánchez is the Principal & Fractional CFO of Seven Pillars Finance LLC, with more than 20 years of experience in nonprofit financial leadership and executive management. He has served as Finance Professional, Executive Director, and multi-client CFO, specializing in financial clarity, grant management, audit readiness, and governance. Today, he supports nonprofits across the Rio Grande Valley by strengthening financial systems, building sustainability, and guiding organizations with a calm, mission-centered leadership presence.

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Navigating with Purpose: Charting the Future of Nonprofits



Steadying the Ship:
Board Development & Governance

Carrie Gray | Cielo Strategy Group

Principal / Owner

SESSION TITLE:

Reframing Board Governance

Lead with clarity and strengthen board governance through the Purpose Driven Board Leadership (PDBL) framework. This interactive session equips participants with a practical approach built on three interlocking pillars: govern, strengthen, and sustain. Through real-world scenarios and guided discussion, participants leave with concrete tools to clarify roles, resolve ambiguity, and build nonprofit boards that don't just oversee, but actively drive lasting impact and sustainability.

Carrie Gray brings 36 years of nonprofit experience to this project. Her experience includes working directly with and consulting for small, medium, and large organizations with an emphasis on organizations serving youth, women, and families. Throughout her career, she has focused on best practices in fundraising, strategy, budgeting, board engagement, communications, and team effectiveness.

She led a $25 million, multifaceted campaign to expand transitional housing for YWCA Seattle | King | Snohomish, an organization with an annual operating budget of $35 million. She has designed programs for girls of all ages, served on the leadership team that led the YWCA through a program acquisition, and was the architect and creator of the nonprofit capacity building program for Knapp Community Care Foundation, an initiative designed to strengthen individual nonprofit leaders and organizations for a stronger nonprofit sector in the Rio Grande Valley.

Carrie is a skilled project manager, a charismatic facilitator, and a strategic thinker. She has an innate ability to see the big picture, assess trends, and balance that with the "people" component. She can clearly define and implement the steps needed for transformational change across programs, departments, and entire organizations.

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Steadying the Ship:
Board Development & Governance

Dr. Cristina Grandy | Elevate Consulting Group

Founder & Leadership Strategist

SESSION TITLE:

Building Boards That Deliver

Nonprofit boards are often deeply committed to the mission, yet many organizations struggle with inconsistent engagement, unclear expectations, and uneven fundraising participation. Building Boards That Deliver addresses this challenge by focusing on the infrastructure, systems, and clarity boards need in order to perform at a high level. This interactive workshop explores what effective boards have in place beyond goodwill, including clearly defined roles, governance structures, accountability tools, and a shared culture of generosity. Participants will examine the distinction between governance and management, assess individual and collective board engagement, and identify the practical conditions that enable board members to serve as ambassadors, advocates, and philanthropic partners.

(Co-Presenting with Jeff Grandy, Catapult Fundraising)

A dedicated leader in education and community engagement, Dr. Cristina Salinas-Grandy actively contributes to advancing academic excellence and strategic growth. She serves on the Educational Advisory Committee at St. Patrick School, where her expertise shapes decision-making and fosters long-term sustainability. Dr. Salinas-Grandy brings extensive experience in education and nonprofit leadership, specializing in teacher development, program innovation, and strategic planning. Her professional career includes serving as an assistant professor at National University. Most recently, she has led board development initiatives with the Coastal Bend Bays Foundation, Gulf Coast Humane Society, and Teach For America Rio Grande Valley. She has also provided volunteer leadership to organizations like Child Focus, driving impactful programs that benefit children and families. Dr. Salinas-Grandy's commitment to organizational advancement extends beyond her leadership roles. Her scholarly work on ePortfolios and reflective practices has been showcased at national and international conferences, reflecting her dedication to innovative educational practices. She combines her academic and professional insights to empower organizations with tailored strategies for success, ensuring clarity of purpose and alignment with their mission.

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Steadying the Ship: Resource Development

Jeff Grandy | Catapult Fundraising

Vice President of Client Development

SESSION TITLE:

Planning and Executing a Capital Campaign

This session offers strategies to launch or revitalize capital campaigns, covering goal setting, leadership engagement, and donor cultivation techniques to ensure lasting success and impactful donor relationships. This session is ideal for those seeking to lead campaigns that resonate with donors, engage community stakeholders, and achieve ambitious fundraising outcomes.

Jeff Grandy, M.Ed., is a South Texas fundraising leader, speaker, donor engagement champion. Jeff helps nonprofits strengthen donor relationships, uncover hidden giving potential, and build sustainable fundraising strategies through major gifts, campaigns, mid-level donor engagement, and legacy giving. With more than 16 years of experience, he brings a high-energy, practical, and people-centered approach to helping organizations invite greater generosity. Jeff has supported organizations including Tyler Junior College, Teach For America RGV, Friends for Hope, Palm Valley Animal Society, and Ronald McDonald House Charities South Texas. Whether talking donor strategy or baking cookies, Jeff believes the best results come from relationships, generosity, and a little joy.

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Navigating with Purpose: Charting the Future of Nonprofits



Fueling the Journey: Resource Development

Carrie Gray | Cielo Strategy Group

Principal / Owner

SESSION TITLE:

Beyond the Digital Distractions: Building a Relationhip-first Fundraising Culture

Strong fundraising organizations build bridges long before they need someone to cross. This session moves beyond transactional fundraising to explore what it takes to build a true culture of philanthropy – one where discovery, cultivation, solicitation, and stewardship are shared work across board, staff, and leadership rather than the job of one person. Participants will learn practical strategies for deepening donor relationships, planning an ask that feels personal rather than improvised, and engaging their board as genuine ambassadors. Attendees will leave with tools to strengthen donor retention, measure relationship health alongside financial results, and put a cultivation plan into action for their own donors.

Carrie Gray brings 36 years of nonprofit experience to this project. Her experience includes working directly with and consulting for small, medium, and large organizations with an emphasis on organizations serving youth, women, and families. Throughout her career, she has focused on best practices in fundraising, strategy, budgeting, board engagement, communications, and team effectiveness.

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Fueling the Journey: Resource Development

Dr. Arlene Siller | Ascend Nonprofit & Business Solutions

Founder & CEO

SESSION TITLE:

Stop Chasing Grants: Building Funding Systems That Strengthen Your Nonprofit's Future

This session provides strategies to launch or revitalize capital campaign efforts, covering goal setting, leadership engagement, and donor cultivation techniques to ensure lasting success and impactful donor relationships. This session is ideal for those seeking to lead campaigns that resonate with donors, engage community stakeholders, and achieve ambitious fundraising outcomes.

(Co-Presenting with Daniela Paz, Ascend Nonprofit & Business Solutions)

Dr. Arlene Siller is the Founder and CEO of Ascend Nonprofit & Business Solutions® (Ascend NBS®), a national consulting firm that helps nonprofits, government agencies, educational institutions, and small businesses strengthen organizational capacity, funding strategy, compliance, and long-term sustainability. Since founding Ascend NBS® in 2019, organizations supported by the firm have secured more than $188 million in awarded grant funding. With more than 30 years of experience, Dr. Siller has worked with organizations nationwide to improve strategic planning, funding readiness, grant management, organizational development, and leadership practices. She regularly provides training and technical assistance for nonprofit leaders, grantmakers, and intermediary organizations, helping them build stronger systems that support responsible stewardship of grants and other funding sources. Dr. Siller has served as a trainer for organizations including the San Antonio Area Foundation and Kronkosky Foundation and has coached business leaders through the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) and the U.S. Small Business Administration's T.H.R.I.V.E. program. She is a frequent conference presenter recognized for translating complex funding and operational challenges into practical, actionable strategies that organizations can immediately implement.

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Fueling the Journey: Resource Development

Daniela Paz | Ascend Nonprofit & Business Solutions

Chief Operations Officer

SESSION TITLE:

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(Co-Presenting with Arlene Siller, PhD, Ascend Nonprofit & Business Solutions)

Daniela Paz serves as Chief Operations Officer of Ascend Nonprofit & Business Solutions®, where she leads organizational strategy, compliance, grants management systems, and operational excellence initiatives for nonprofit and public sector clients. With more than a decade of experience in nonprofit operations, federal grants management, compliance, and organizational capacity building, she helps organizations design sustainable systems that strengthen accountability, reporting, cross-functional collaboration, and long-term funding readiness. Prior to joining Ascend, Daniela held executive leadership roles overseeing federal and non-federal grant compliance, monitoring, reporting, audit coordination, treasury management, and organizational performance measurement. Her experience spans community development, economic mobility, workforce development, housing, financial capability, and public-private partnerships. Daniela regularly provides technical assistance and training on grant management, compliance, organizational systems, data collection, performance measurement, and operational workflows. Her presentations focus on translating complex compliance and operational requirements into practical tools that nonprofit leaders can immediately implement to improve organizational effectiveness, reduce risk, and strengthen long-term sustainability.

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Navigating with Purpose: Charting the Future of Nonprofits



Fueling the Journey: Resource Development

Paul Dunne | The Nonprofit Group

CEO & Founder

SESSION TITLE:

Pop Goes Development!

As development professionals, we are charged with the huge task of juggling many different segments of donor activities: major donors, direct mail, marketing, events, board relationships, and even planned giving. This presentation will help prioritize and give clarity to those individuals who always feel they are reacting rather than being proactive in their work to ensure the greatest return. This presentation is incredibly informative for smaller organizations where the development director is in charge of many different areas.

After a successful business career and inspired by the need to serve after the event of 9/11, Paul joined the nonprofit sector as a Senior Development Officer for the Denver Rescue Mission. He furthered his career serving as Executive Director of Development for the Inner City Health Center where he started the development department and quadrupled donations in a 3 year period before leading them in a $ 5.5M campaign for a new clinic. Mr. Dunne followed up this success by accepting a position with the North Hawaii Community Hospital and guided them through a tumultuous year and managed to cap off their $ 32M campaign by raising the final $14M. Throughout his varied fundraising career, Mr. Dunne has been involved with different boards and assisting them in their development needs. He recently served as the Chairman for the AFP International Foundation Fundraising Board along with other national committees and boards. Paul has been awarded the Colorado Chapter AFP Outstanding Fundraiser and was nominated for the Colorado Outstanding Professional in Philanthropy. Driven by the need to give back to his alma mater, Mr. Dunne served as the Vice President for Development for Howard Payne University in Texas, where he and his staff have quadrupled their donor base and helped design, identify and raise the first $6.2 million dollars of their new $18M campaign. Before coming to Texas, Paul was the Vice President with the Kempe Foundation in Colorado - a world leader in the fight against child abuse and neglect. After some gentle nudging, Paul started thinkpadsolutions which eventually merged with Catapult Fundraising out of Henderson Nevada where he served as Executive Vice President heading up multiple client campaigns ranging from $15MM to $155MM. With a desire to serve all nonprofits regardless of size, Paul started The NonProfit Group where he serves as founder and CEO.