

SUSAN J. RAGUSA

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Professional Profile

Independent consultant to nonprofit organizations, with broad experience in working with startup and established nonprofits on organizational leadership and other needs. High-energy, collaborative professional with active listening skills for pinpointing issues; strong problem-solving skills for conceptualizing solutions; and a well-honed capacity to guide stakeholders in implementing new ideas and strategies. Natural networker with a wide circle of professional contacts in multiple fields; dedicated to gathering and sharing information and anticipating trends that impact nonprofits. Fresh thinker and advocate for change, including promoting greater diversity, relationship building and digital strategizing to strengthen nonprofits.

Career Pivot

Seeking formalized affiliations with other professionals and consulting organizations in the nonprofit field to expand opportunities and potential impact as a nonprofit strategist. Strong collaborative skills to apply in building professional relationships that serve client organizations. Forthright and giving personality with intuitive understanding of situational needs and vital role of patience and compromise in achieving goals. Deep respect for the generosity that characterizes the nonprofit world – from organizations to donors to fellow consultants.

Professional Skills

- Board Development, Orientation and Assessment
- Executive Coaching (Individual)
- Leadership Training (Board & Staff)
- Individual Donor Development
- Peer-to-Peer Fundraising Planning/Implementation
- Special Events Measurement/Management
- Workshop Development/Retreat Planning
- Large & Small Group Facilitation
- Presentations (Speaker & Panelist)

Professional Consulting

Susan J. Ragusa, LLC
Founder & Principal

2012 to Present

Independent consultant and strategist working with nonprofit organizations in the Hudson Valley and metro New York. Expertise in board development, orientation and education; executive leadership development; strategic fundraising and development; startup support in strategic planning and board creation/development.

Representative organizations include: TMI Project, Kingston, NY (startup support); O+ Festival, Kingston, NY (board development); Boys and Girls Club, Wallkill, NY (board retreat); NADD: An association for persons with developmental disabilities and mental health needs, Kingston (strategic planning); Ashokan Center, Olivebridge, NY (executive coaching); Rondout Valley Growers Association, Stone Ridge, NY (strategic fundraising planning)

and implementation); Safe Haven Animal Shelter & Wildlife Center, Hopewell Junction, NY (fundraising workshop series development and presentation).

**Nonprofits TALK
Founder & Lead Facilitator**

2017 to Present

Leading and sponsoring monthly forum that offers elements of discussion, workshop and collaborative problem solving to address key organizational needs of Hudson Valley nonprofits. Founded in response to common challenges articulated by nonprofit clients and to encourage collaboration and networking among local nonprofit professionals. Serving in all capacities – planning each topic-focused session, facilitating guided group activity/discussion and marketing this free service.

**Cause & Event, LLC, New York City & Rhinebeck, NY
Founder & Principal**

2008 to 2012

Event planning, specializing in creating and managing special events for nonprofit organizations to build organizational profiles and reach; develop and implement strategic fundraising plans; expand donor base and enhance donor development through strategic before-, during- and after-event planning and activities. Successful track record of revitalizing lagging events and innovating to institute new ones.

Representative organizations include: Heart Gallery NYC, Paws for Patients (New York Presbyterian Hospital, Manhattan), Geneva Worldwide, Dutchess (County) Democratic Women’s Caucus, Hudson Valley B2B Bash.

Nonprofit Staff

Executive Director, 100 Year Association of New York

2006 to 2009

Leadership role for Manhattan-based organization that highlights achievements of public and private city institutions in existence for a century or more. Primary responsibilities involved membership development and stewardship, event planning and implementation for member organizations.

Early Career

Special Education Teacher, New York City Schools

Professional Associations

The Alliance for Nonprofit Management, Affiliated Consultant

Board Member, Astor Services for Children and Families, Bronx and Hudson Valley (2010 to Present)

Resource Sharing

- [Blog](#): Continuing The Conversation
- [Resource Roundup](#): Suggested by SJR (discontinued but archived)
- [Dashboard](#) (discontinued but archived)

Reputation for innovative and substantive thinking, with well-researched topics and actionable ideas, presented online via email to subscriber base of industry associates and via social media.

Education/Credentials

[LinkedIn Profile](#)

Training, Facilitation & Consulting Certificate, Marlboro College Graduate Center for New Leadership

Certificate of Nonprofit Board Education, BoardSource

Exponential Fundraising with Jennifer McCrea, Hauser Institute for Civil Society, Harvard University

Event Planning & Management, Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City

MA, Special Education, New York University
BA, Queens College

Reflections on Consulting in the Nonprofit World

Susan J. Ragusa

As a nonprofit consultant, my mantra has long been the declaration, “We can do better.” At once a promise and a challenge to the nonprofits with which I work, I believe that it’s always possible to improve, to find ways to be more efficient and effective.

My tagline, *Enabling Nonprofits to Thrive*, is a window into my purpose as a professional and my central goal for every organization that I support. A thriving nonprofit sector is vital for the health of a community and, collectively, for society at large. Organizations of all sizes not only serve the needs of many, they raise hope in the world. Nonprofits demonstrate daily that solutions do exist to intractable problems and that decency and generosity exist in human nature to an encouraging, sometimes extraordinary, degree.

In advising and shepherding nonprofits, I apply my core beliefs that striving and thriving are the twin engines that propel an organization and without which no organization can ascend.

Blending Beliefs and Practical Experience

In approach, I draw from the diverse experience that has shaped my career. As a former educator, I understand learning is a process that builds by steps and layers. As a teacher of children with special needs in a New York City-wide program, I honed my ability to prioritize goals — to recognize what must be achieved first and then next in order for individuals (and organizations) to advance.

I’ve learned the importance of “place” — that being sensitive to community mores is key to productive relationships.

Lessons from my classroom years are never far from mind when I work with nonprofits. Whether analyzing an organization’s match of mission and services, establishing governance or leadership models, instituting new fundraising strategies — whatever the need — learning or unlearning frequently factors in the mix. My educator genes are at the root of my affinity for coaching and facilitating as a consultant, as well as my desire for knowledge and information on developments and trends that impact nonprofits.

In transitioning from teaching, my initial experience was with planning fundraising and profile-expanding events for nonprofits around metro New York. Those roles taught me how to maximize the value of an event before, during and post festivities. That close-up proximity to signature occasions for organizations also provided insight into the powerful hold of the familiar and why letting go, even when a formula no longer works for an organization, is difficult. It takes understanding the people and reasoning that came before — and, sometimes, plenty of finessing — to introduce a new concept and see it through to success.

Sharing Knowledge and Advocating for Change

Giving is the watchword within the nonprofit world. Donors give their support, organizations give their services and nonprofit professionals give their expertise. As a professional, as well as dedicated networker and resource “junkie,” I’m committed to sharing what I know. I aim to fill my blogs and social media links and tweets with substantive thinking.

I’m also a passionate advocate online, in print and in person for ideas — and change — that I consider critical for nonprofits today. My top five:

- Greater diversity — age, race, ethnicity, gender — within nonprofit boards in particular, as well as staffs;
- Nonprofit leaders who are better prepared and comfortable wearing the many hats that small and mid-sized nonprofits require;
- Building partnerships and relationships with donors to develop and secure their loyalty;
- Greater understanding that donors are motivated and inspired by the cause a nonprofit serves and give *through*, not *to*, an organization to further that cause;
- More nonprofits with a digital strategy, board members on social media and fundraising that maximizes the vast potential of the online universe.

I believe that we all learn from others. I have my nonprofit “gurus” whose resources I faithfully read and workshops I eagerly attend. From my experience, gathering sound ideas and applying them in clear and concrete ways is how “doing better” becomes the norm for a nonprofit.

I strive to enable nonprofits to thrive — and I’m deeply proud of it.

