



Why Nonprofit Leaders Should Leverage COVID-19 to Advocate for Virtual Workforce Development Programs

Interviewer: TeQuion Brookins, Director of Operations of [McGregor Fund](#) and Founder of [The Minority Freedom Community Fund](#)

Interviewee: Nilda Thomas, Founder & CEO of [Workforce eTraining Solutions](#)

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TeQuion: What is Workforce eTraining Solutions and how did it come about?

Nilda: Workforce eTraining Solutions (WETS) is poised to become the leading online training provider of e-learning courseware, web-based learning platforms, virtual events, and consulting for foundations and nonprofits. WETS was established in 2007 with a vision of bridging the skills gap by providing access to online career and technology training to minorities, women, youth, veterans, and underserved communities of which nonprofits support.

Additionally, as an advocate of bridging the digital divide, we believed that e-learning was the platform needed to close the gap. We were passionate about the work nonprofits are doing in their local and global communities and saw a need to provide a virtual platform to help them build their skills and competencies not only within their respective organizations but also as a vehicle to provide robust workforce development programs in their communities. Our high quality and cost-effective courses help nonprofits achieve internal operational sustainability, better organizational effectiveness, financial management, building stronger teams, more effective ways in presenting their cause as well as better community outreach and engagement, for example.

TeQuion: As a small business owner, what would you describe as your concerns about your financial prospects in light of the coronavirus epidemic? How is it different than Workforce eTraining Solutions' pre-crises outlook?

Nilda: As a small business owner myself, I understand the problems that resource-strapped, community-based organizations face. The COVID-19 crises has challenged how nonprofits and organizations will operate. More and more people are working independently at home,

so organizations have to enable them to upskill and reskill to be prepared for this “new” way of doing business. In addition, providing access to online training also has the potential to help strengthen your staff’s mental well-being and confidence.

Because WETS is a virtual company and people and organizations are forced to have to do things virtually, our prospects will still need to build a case both on the importance of how online training is a cost-effective way to continue staff training and development and for the necessity of workforce development efforts when applying for funding and grants. Also, organizations will need to think creatively on how COVID-19 Relief resources could be used to implement such an initiative because it is tied to operations and sustainability. Prior to this crisis we found organizations to be more closed minded because it was too forward thinking to implement a virtual training program for their staff or workforce community development programs. COVID19 has changed that.

TeQuion: In your opinion, how might the current COVID-19 crisis impact the future of how work gets done?

Nilda: Our lives have forever changed. I believe this crisis was a wake-up call that it’s no longer business as usual and that working virtually is our “new normal”. Suddenly organizations are having to support an entire remote workforce.

Anytime there is a disruption to normal business procedures, organizations will need to evaluate their current operating norms and decide how the crisis could impact internal controls. I suspect most are re-evaluating and updating policies and procedures to allow for a flexible work environment. For example, organizations will need to document and utilize technology where possible to monitor internal control processes. In addition, staff who are not typically part of these processes will need to become more involved on a short-term basis.

Our courses in:

- Operations Processes – will provide knowledge and skills to individuals unfamiliar on how operation processes are developed and implemented.
- Understanding Financial Management and Assessing the Financial Performance of your Organization – will provide individual(s) with the knowledge and skills to efficiently manage and analyze the organization’s financials.
- Rational Decision Making – will provide the knowledge and skills for making sound decisions. For example: Your organization may be struggling with how to best leverage your cash reserves. Do you fund a short-term deficit or a new project that would bring in long-term revenue over time?

These are just a few of the plethora of courses available to upskill your staff.

I believe once we’re on the other side of this many companies and organizations will realize you can actually get more work done outside of the office and they will continue to allow their employees to work virtually a few days out the week.

TeQuion: Nonprofits are notoriously under-resourced and those with a large funding base often have to grapple with donor-enforced restrictions on funds they receive. Why might they be motivated to implement workforce development programs like WETS?

Nilda: Most nonprofits work under restrictive guidelines on how to use the funding they receive. Nonprofits are going to have to become more creative in generating their own funds by creating product and digital courses helping them with sustainability.

Our vision is to create an international network of nonprofits that are deploying their own in-house online training department to support their organization's leadership and professional development efforts.

Some of the benefits to having an in-house online training department include:

- **Courses align with organizations' unique needs**
- **Self-managed learning offers flexibility for trainees to learn at their own pace**
- **Boost confidence and skills needed for career advancement**
- **Ability to track individual staff member's progress for performance management purposes**
- **Record of Achievement – certificate of completion for each course**
- **Improved organizational sustainability**

In addition to these benefits, becoming a Licensed Partner will allow nonprofits the opportunity to earn income by introducing and encouraging their peers to set-up their own in-house training departments with us and receive a referral fee.

We will work in partnership with foundations, enabling them to help empower their grantees in supporting the training and development of their management teams, staff, volunteers as well as their sustainability and growth initiatives. This community investment supports improved effectiveness and efficiency of their grantee organizations.

For nonprofits whose focus is on workforce development and training, the platform can help them make an impact with community development initiatives and help bridge the digital divide.

TeQuion: What's the difference between "upskill" and "reskill" and why does it matter?

Nilda: Upskilling can help you to remain relevant, stay indispensable and progress in your current field. Reskilling becomes important if your current job role is no longer relevant, or you'd like to migrate into a new field. A culture of upskilling and reskilling promotes increased motivation, enhances the employee experience and encourages higher levels of employee loyalty.

TeQuion: We've seen a wave of free and low-cost online learning resources being promoted recently, as more workers are being laid off or experiencing reduction in hours and looking to remain competitive or switch industries all together. In what ways does your solution provide value against these low-cost workarounds to education & training?

Nilda: Our training helps to build stronger communities through a range of online learning initiatives. We provide value through our one-on-one consulting to develop deep understanding of your organization's operations in order to identify training needs for your staff and workforce development efforts.

We achieve this through a 360-skills gap assessment to know where your staff needs improvement and what courses and knowledge management materials are needed to get them to where they need to be.

Likewise, for those looking to advance in their career or switch industries, the assessments would provide insight into what careers the individual would be suited for so they can be successful. We have over 1500 courses and provide a comprehensive solution for every organization and can help your staff at all levels.

TeQuion: Your product sounds amazing but is now the right time for nonprofits to be investing in employee development? Shouldn't our resources be laser-focused on our organization's COVID-19 response efforts?

Nilda: That is a good question...You must do both. We're going through an unprecedented crisis that is fundamentally forcing the way we live and work to change. While organizations are focused on their COVID-19 response efforts, they must not lose sight of their employees who are helping to continue to run the organization. When an organization hires in a new employee due to their skill level, it is also crucial to proactively manage and support how they further develop their skills throughout their tenure.

People are sitting at home struggling with finding things to do and you want to keep them motivated. Your employees need to feel valued and empowered. Providing training will help them feel confident in doing their jobs and when given more responsibilities. The real goal is making your organization and your people more productive, responsive, and competitive.

We are seeing a huge shift in the demand for eLearning and doing business online. Nonprofits whose focus is on workforce development and training can leverage the platform to scale their COVID-19 community outreach & engagement initiatives as well.

TeQuion: What are some examples of courses within your platform that you think could equip nonprofit employees with skills and competencies that can help them respond to and recover from crises such as COVID-19? How can development courses help prepare nonprofits for what's next?

Nilda: Some of the courses in our platform to help nonprofit employees build their skills and competencies during and after a crisis include:

For Immediate Release

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- **Risk and Crisis Management** – learn how to manage risk during a crisis and be prepared when the next crisis arises.
- **GDPR Readiness: Creating a Data Privacy Plan**- increasingly more important as nonprofits are asking donors to input their information online and need to be compliant.
- **Working Smarter: Using Technology to Your Advantage** – many tasks can be automated or done quicker with technology. This course will help in streamlining operations.
- **Digital Citizenship: Conducting Yourself in a Digital Workplace** – now more than ever there are protocols one must adhere to and today's workforce must learn the proper etiquette working in a digital world.
- **Managing a Virtual Workplace** – knowledge and skills for the leadership team in managing a virtual workforce.
- **Getting Stuff Done: Personal Development Boot Camp** –teaches how to increase personal productivity, develop a plan to become more efficient, learn how to prioritize, and more.
- **Project Management** – will help in managing grants, fundraising projects, and events more efficiently.
- **Microsoft Teams** – helps new Team members get up to speed quickly, increases transparency within your organization, virtually collaborate, and improve communications with your team.

These and other courses we offer will help nonprofits become more confident and prepared when a crisis arises and not have to scramble on what or how to implement systems and processes as many are currently doing.

TeQuion: The philanthropic sector is working diligently to quickly revamp their grantmaking procedures to streamline more general operating support to grantees. How could nonprofits leverage this trend in giving to get your product and what are some ways they might build a case to their funders to allow them to invest in staff development as part of their COVID-19 response?

Nilda: Nonprofits could build a case for funders to invest in staff development as part of their COVID-19 response by

1. **Advocating how an investment in online training will help boost the moral and confidence of staff members by empowering them to be more confident in their abilities and creating a higher sense of self-worth.**
2. **Emphasizing the importance of upskilling and developing staff for them to be more effective in achieving the organization's mission.**
3. **Expressing how the flexibility for staff to learn anywhere, anytime, and at their own pace minimize disruptions to their work schedules.**
4. **Conveying that they need to implement new ways to acquire resources for sustainability.**

As a result of COVID-19 we need a different level of response and to level-up and move forward in a better way. Workforce eTraining's platform is the most cost-effective way to upskill and retrain staff members so they are prepared for the "new" way of doing business.

TeQuion: What do nonprofits stand to lose by not investing in the professional development of their employees & volunteers?

Nilda: Investment in an employee's career development has been shown to play an important role in an employee's satisfaction and feelings of efficacy. Nonprofits not investing in their employees risk

- 1. Losing donors and subsequently the level of support for mission-critical initiatives**
- 2. High employee turnover**
- 3. Reduction in their credibility and impact they have in the community**
- 4. Loss of their perceived leadership role within their community**

It is well documented that nonprofits pay lower wages than private sector employers and that employees often are overworked. Nonprofit employees want to work in a place where they can advance and develop skills. The investment in training has the dual effect of creating both higher levels of engagement in the workforce as well as the potential to make employees more effective at their jobs by increasing skill levels.

TeQuion: The State Superintendent for the Michigan Department of Education recently noted in a call to foundations that schools need to invest in the professional development of their educators who are tasked with having to figure out how to support learning among kids with special needs, language barriers, and limited technological skill. How do you envision your platform helping to address this call-to-action?

Nilda: Our team can provide training and support *and* advice for teachers. Our consultancy and advisory support services will help them identify programs and integrate the training into their classroom while taking advantage of new learning technologies. For example, we offer course authoring software where teachers can develop the online course or the teacher can provide WETS with the content and we develop the course for them. Another value add is we can digitize course books. We know some teachers may feel challenged with using and learning new technologies and that is understandable. Employers must invest in every employee, which is a key value proposition we bring. Our comprehensive, customized onboarding process will put teachers at ease and make them feel comfortable in using our platform and other learning technologies. Additionally, our customer support services are always available to assist.

TeQuion: Say you have a nonprofit reach out to you after reading this article and ask to license your product? Obviously with the current environment, not many have extra time to configure and implement an organization-wide learning program. How quickly could their workforce development program be up and running and what would be the time investment required?

Nilda: We understand the time constraints particularly at this time when nonprofits and community organizations are struggling because everything has been turned upside-down. They must embrace doing things virtually and we can assist with our consulting advisory support services in developing a strategy and implementation plan for them to be successful. What we have done is reduce all of our courses by 65% as our way of giving back during this COVID-19 crisis.

Workforce eTraining Solutions wants to help nonprofits make a greater impact in the community. Given the current environment, we would recommend a 6-month pilot approach. This is where we onboard a small group of staff members who test the program and provide feedback before rolling it out to the rest of the organization. We could also do a 6-month pilot for a workforce development initiative.

Before the pilot program can rolled out organization-wide, our process would be as follows:

- 1. Facilitate an initial Discovery virtual conference.**
- 2. Conduct comprehensive consulting to understand what the organization's needs are for their internal training and development and/or workforce development initiatives and provide a skills gap assessment for the team.**
- 3. Assist in developing a unique strategy and learning program for your organization.**

The investment and time required is predicated on the number of courses and staff or participants in the program. However, we can get a program up and running in a short period of time.

We will be rolling out our Google Grants program in May helping nonprofits receive up to \$10,000 in FREE Google Advertising dollars to help with fundraising and sustainability. We have found either nonprofits are not aware of Google Grants or they acquired the grant and do not have anyone in-house to manage it properly and subsequently, lost the grant.

Please [contact us](#) today to explore opportunities for Workforce eTraining Solutions to work with your organization.



About Workforce eTraining Solutions:

Workforce eTraining Solutions (WETS) is the leading online training provider of e-learning courseware and web-based learning platforms, virtual events, and consulting for foundations and nonprofits. WETS was established with a vision of bridging the skills gap by providing access to online career and technology training to minorities, women, youth, veterans, and underserved communities of which nonprofits support.

We are advocates of bridging the digital-divide through online training and seeking to partner with nonprofit organizations, and schools to provide workforce readiness training and career pathways to help the current and future workforce acquire the skills and competencies companies seek for in-demand jobs and for companies needing a solution to reskill, upskill and recertify their workforce. Additionally, we offer virtual classrooms, conference expos and tradeshow that simulate these live events.

WETS is a minority woman-owned company. Website: <https://workforceetraining.com>.



About Nilda Thomas

Nilda Thomas, MBA has over 20 years of experience in technology serving in senior marketing roles at Deloitte, Microsoft, AT&T, and EDS where she helped to launch the Distance Learning Services Group in the late 90's and became fascinated with the technology. In 2000, she was featured in Black Enterprise and was quoted, "If we do not embrace it [technology] as a people, we're going to be left behind. We need to embrace and be afforded the opportunities to take advantage of the way we learn technology so we can become more marketable in the workforce". She was also featured in Hispanic Women in Business and Women in e-Commerce magazines. Additionally, she has served on a Workforce Development Commission Board in Michigan and several other community boards and serves as a trusted advisor to

senior corporate and philanthropic executives. She is also a certified SCORE Mentor and STEM Coach.

Ms. Thomas can be contacted at 800-228-7412 and via email at nilda@workforceetraining.com.

About TeQuion Brookins

TeQuion Brookins serves as the Director of Operations at the McGregor Fund, a private-foundation in the City of Detroit dedicated to relieving homelessness & chronic unemployment for Detroiters. She is the Founder and COO of The Minority Freedom Community Fund, a newly established nonprofit currently poised to tackle existing and imminent resource disparities for minorities across the country impacted by COVID-19. She is also an active member of PEAK Grantmaking, Technology Affinity Group, Council on Foundations, Council of Michigan Foundations, Emerging Practitioners in Philanthropy, Michigan Nonprofit Association, and the Association for Black Foundation Executives, Detroit Chamber of Commerce, Southfield Area Chamber of Commerce. TeQuion provides pro bono consulting to small businesses and nonprofits in the areas of organizational development, human resources, and IT.