

Convene Podcast Transcript

Season 3 Episode 1 with Madeline Schimeck and JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan

**Note: the transcript is AI generated, excuse typos and inaccuracies*

[00:02] **Madeline Schimeck:** What we want out of a project. People leave feeling good knowing that somebody's going to be positively affected.

[00:10] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Welcome to the Convene podcast. My name is Magdalena Atanassova, your host and digital media editor of Convene. I'm excited to have you join us for season three as we offer an exCLusive behind the scenes glimpse into convening leaders 2024, held in sunny San Diego this January along alongside the PCMA staff. Our first episode explores the PCMA foundation events during convening leaders and beyond. Join me as Madeline Schimeck and JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan unveil the secrets behind making giving back fun. Enjoy the episode. Madeline, JoAnn, welcome to the Convene Podcast. It's a pleasure to have you both. Can you briefly introduce yourselves to our listeners and share a bit more about your responsibilities in general and at convenient leaders? And Madeline, let's start with you. Awesome.

[01:11] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** Yeah.

[01:11] **Madeline Schimeck:** Thank you for having us. I'm excited to talk about the foundation for the listeners. My name is Madeline Schimeck. I am the manager of community engagement here at PCMA, and my responsibilities primarily lie with the PCMA foundation, managing most of our scholarships and awards programs, as well as our volunteer program of the foundation and coordinating a lot of those engagement opportunities with our scholarship recipients and award recipients throughout the year.

[01:39] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** Hi everyone. I'm JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan and I'm the senior director of the PCMA Foundation. A bulk of my time is spent raising funds for the foundation, and it is a fun job because when we get to talk to you today, you'll hear about all the fun activities that we do at CL and touch on other ones that we do other places. And you'll see that it is a fun way to raise money. But thank you for having us, and I look forward to this conversation.

[02:06] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Can you share both of you a bit more about the community engagement during community leaders for those that did not manage to attend in person?

[02:14] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** Yeah. So we're going to start with our get fit events. The foundation has been known to be very connected to wellness and well being, so during CL, we offer several morning activities that offer our attendees a way to get fit. We have a fun run this year at CL. We had 195 people sign up for our fun run. We have the sound bath, which is a new kind of meditation session with gongs and bells. We had 89 people sign up for that, and then we do a bootcamp and we had 45 people sign up. So when someone signs up for one of the get fit events, they're paying \$45 or \$40 whichever the event is, and the funds for those events go to the foundation, we're very happy to report that we get sponsors from our wonderful partners for each event. So there is a sponsor, so that offsets costs for us. And then the foundation is able to reap some benefits from the registration that is collected.

[03:17] **Madeline Schimeck:** Yeah, and then we also have a number of community engagement projects, such as the hospitality Helping Hands program, which is quite popular and happens on Sunday morning. And that is an opportunity for our attendees to give back to the local community. It's also a great networking opportunity as we usually bring them all together to complete some sort of service project to benefit a local organization of the city that we're in. So that took place on Sunday morning. We had over 100 volunteers turn out to help us at Perkins Elementary School with kind of like a beautification project for the school. Most of the population of that school is actually homeless children. This school served that population and it was pretty incredible. And then we also facilitate a number of meetups for our community related specifically to the foundation, such as our Legacy society members. And those are longtime donors and supporters of PCMA, as well as they meet up with those members and our scholarship recipients. A great way to connect some of our newer members or people entering the industry with those who have been long serving members of the business events industry and are also supporters who help us fund those scholarships year over year. Also, our 20 and our twenties gets recognized at convening leaders. And so this year we held our annual next up breakfast connecting our 20 and our twenties with alumni of the program as well as board members and senior leaders of PCMA and celebrating the ten year anniversary. We did have a little celebration where all of our alumni that were in attendance, we celebrated and kicked off the week with kind of those board members who had created the program for us. So it was a celebration of ten years, eleven classes of 20 and our twenties at this point, and just a great way to connect our members with one another.

[05:01] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** There is an event though that everyone looks forward to that we have to certainly mention is Party With A Purpose that is 1000 people attendees attending a party at night at 09:00 that just have a lot of fun dancing and celebrating with each other. So we've been very fortunate that we have two great sponsors and Visit Austin and Austin Convention bureau and GES that speak sponsored this for us. We have 1000 people buying tickets and it is just a fun event that has been a staple of convening leaders forever and ever. Something new that's also fun is our shop with the purpose. So at PCMA Connect, that's kind of where you go to find anything out about PCMA. We sell merchandise. So, for example, one of our partners gave us a Nike gift card, and it's Nike because Portland is the home of Nike. And so we were able to sell that to one of our attendees, and the funds went to the PCMA foundation. We had so much fun doing it. We had handbags from Toronto. We had gift cards from Columbus, from Des, and all the other brands. We had a painted suitcase right from Palm Springs that we sold. So it's a lot of fun, and it's a good way to connect our attendees with the cities that are donating things where the brands really belong in those cities. So lots of fun at CL on our fundraising activities.

[06:30] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Yeah, it does sound like that. And I just want to bring you back to hospitality helping hands, which we've anecdotally heard so many great stories of those attendees being there and really connecting in a meaningful way, not only to the local community, but to one another, because they're doing, essentially something to give back. And how do you select these causes each time so that they have this right mix of giving back and also giving something to the participant?

[07:02] **Madeline Schimeck:** As you know, coming into a city, it can be quite disruptive to bring a whole bunch of people into a city for a weekend. So we always want to leave a positive impact on the city that we are hosting our events, leaving it better than we found it, or just making some sort of long lasting impact. And so we do that through hospitality helping hands, where our events and experiences team does extensive research into local organizations of the city that we're hosting our event, and then we bring it. They bring it back to the team, and we kind of go. We have extensive conversations over which projects are available to us, what are our opportunities, and how do they align with what we want to get out of hospitality helping hands before we make the final decision. Because when we're picking an organization, we want to look for an opportunity that allows our participants to feel really good when they leave, knowing that they've made an impact. They can see a change. They can either be seeing the individuals that are directly impacted by it, or something like a beautification project where you see the before and after. And we want to be able to also allow for our participants to engage with one another, you know, the purpose of communing leaders. We really want to be able to let our attendees network and engage with one another, foster relationships. And so a project that's hands on like we did this year really is all about teamwork and working together to accomplish a goal. I was lucky enough to be on site this year at HHH. Met Perkins elementary with over 100 volunteers where we beautified their outdoor space with bunch of painting projects, built furniture for them, outside places for them to play games, really, you know, brought it back to life a little bit, brought joy to the individuals and the children that are going to get to walk in there and see it. It was just, I mean, it was a beautiful day. The sun was shining, but everybody was so engaged and excited to be helping. And the principal of the school, I'll never forget seeing his reaction when he got to see the finished product and then also was presented with a check for \$10,000 that he had no idea he was receiving. It was just the coolest thing in the world. And we got to see videos of the kids when they showed up for school that week, also of them seeing it for the first time and the joy that was brought. I think that's what we want out of a project that we choose for HHH, people leave feeling good knowing that somebody's going to be positively affected. And again, we really can't do that without the support we receive from our partners and also from the attendees who sign up. But we have great sponsors this year in GES, merits, and MGM, who are the reason we're able to do the projects and also make those donations to have that long lasting impact.

[09:40] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** Yeah, if I can just. I want to just go in the history box of HHH for a second. We've been in Vegas where we were CLeaning textbooks that. That are used in CClassrooms. The thousands of textbooks were dumped into a ballroom, and 150 people sat for 4 hours CLeaning them up and getting them ready for little kids to read. We bagged food in Toronto, we pack care packages for homeless people. We do this twice a year. We also do it at edUcon in June, which is our summer meeting. So it's just really interesting to see how every city, it's a new project, new fun, and really a new way for everyone to feel good about themselves on the very first day of meeting, because that's normally when it is. So I didn't get to go to Perkins, and I'm sad about it. I was at the golf outing, but I know that it was just a special thing to see the principal and that school.

[10:31] **Magdalena Atanassova:** So, yeah, this reaction is captured in one of the videos post convening leaders for those that want to see it. And you mentioned the golf outing. Can you explain a

little bit more about it? And were you worried to schedule it at the same time with something that is quite popular as an activity, as hospitality helping hands?

[10:52] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** Correct. So, as we know, anyone who's planning meeting schedules are full. And the golf outing got a lot of support from some of our members who love golf. We're in San Diego at a beautiful golf destination. We golfed at Aviario, which is a course that is hard to get on. So when we had the opportunity to offer that as a golf option, fortunately, the only time slot for us was on Sunday. That was in right at the same time as helping hands. So we opted to do both. And we had a great group of golfers. We raised over \$22,000 from the golf outing for the foundation due to our generous support for our sponsors and those who had a foursome. And a golf outing had been in existence a couple of years ago. So we did decide to bring it back, due really in part to the fact that we were in a destination, that there are so many opportunities and golf courses that our members really raised their hand and said, we'd love to golf. Can you put a golf outing together? We'd love to golf, but we'd love to give back to the foundation by golfing. So it was also, as Madeline said, it was a beautiful, sunny day. I had the bad opportunity of going up there and being up there all day, which was so much fun, and it was a beautiful course, and our golfers certainly did enjoy it. Like, we all know it's pick and choose, you know, and those golfers, we're going to golf no matter what.

[12:17] **Madeline Schimeck:** So everyone likes to give back in their own way. And so some people give back participating in HHH and others are golfing for a cause. And so we have a little bit of something for everybody on site. So.

[12:30] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** So that's the foundation cup. It was. It was a lot of fun.

[12:34] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Madeline, you just said it. There was a little bit for everybody on site, and there were all these little activations during breaks as well, like the sneaker, decorating and assembling lunch bags. What were the results of all of these activities?

[12:51] **Madeline Schimeck:** Yeah, we had conversations leading up to convening leaders about other ways that we could provide projects for our attendees to do to give back. Like we said, you know, one of PCMA's goals is to drive social change through business events. And so part of that is giving back to our communities and making a positive impact. And when doing the research with our events team, there were so many organizations to choose from in San Diego, and we kind of want to spread the wealth as much as we can if we have the opportunity to do so. And luckily, we do receive enough support that we were able to take on additional projects. And I think, you know, when you are at a conference and it's go, go, go all of the time, sometimes you're just looking for an excuse to sit down and do something to take your mind off of the kind of information overload that you're getting on site. And so we thought, why not do something else to give back? Let's keep, you know, the good vibes rolling from HHH and spread that throughout the conference. It gives everybody that opportunity to have that moment to sit down, but still engage with their fellow attendees, but also do something that makes them feel good. And not everybody's able to make it by Sunday's hospitality, helping hands into the city. So, you know, and we often hear that they. They missed it.

[14:04] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** They.

[14:04] **Madeline Schimeck:** We've created that FOMO over the years that people want to be there, but the reality is that they just can't make it in time for the project. So this is kind of another opportunity for us to let our attendees give back. And we found the projects were so popular this year that the supplies that were there for, you know, the shoe decorating or the packing of the lunches was so popular that some people couldn't even make it to the tables before the project was completed, which is incredible. And it was wonderful to see. So we know that the interest is there. People are looking for that opportunity. So it's something that we'll definitely, you know, continue to revisit if it's an option for us and the conferences to come to continue to bring back those additional events.

[14:43] **Magdalena Atanassova:** I think it also helped the location where you had all these activities. It was in a very busy spot, so people could see, and everybody seemed very interested in, even if they didn't see it in the program, they were like, okay, that's interesting. Yeah, you're right.

[14:57] **Madeline Schimeck:** It was great visibility. Everyone was kind of stopped and was curious, and then once they heard what it was, it was like, oh, yeah, I'll sit down for a few minutes and help out. So, yeah, it was great.

[15:08] **Magdalena Atanassova:** What about these activities like the sound path and the next breakfast for 20 and their twenties? Again, they are targeting kind of different audiences. And did you see an overlap? So what I'm alluding to is, do you see the same people over and over again engaging with these activities, or do you see different people engaging with the different options that you provide for them.

[15:33] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** Well, let's just talk about get fit, and then Madeline can pop over to the next gen breakfast. But. So the Get Fit. No, we don't see the same people. The group gets bigger. It changes up. We have suppliers inviting their CLients as their guests. This year, we did something

kind of thinking out of the box. We asked a couple of our suppliers if they would like to sponsor students into the get fit events. The get fit being fan run boot camp, or Sound Bath. Our student members were over 100 in attendance. At CL, students don't have money to spend \$45 to do a fun run. So the generosity of Caesars and Seattle CVB sponsored 20 students each into one of the get fit events. So Caesars and Seattle went out to our students and said, we'd love to host people into these get fit events. And seriously, those spots were taken so fast by students. They were so appreciative of the fact that they could do fun run being sponsored by a Caesars or visit Seattle, and it was just a great way. So we're going to continue to do that. We realize that our students might not have the funds to participate in some of the events that are costing money. Same with our twenties and their twenties or next gen. So we are really going to be thinking outside the box in different ways of how can we help those folks who really want to participate? How can they participate? So that was just kind of a different thing we did for the get fit events. But interestingly, the sound bath event, we had never done anything like that. We used to do yoga and then we switched it up because we did sound bath at our CEMA meeting last summer, and it was 80 people were in the room. And I said, oh, my gosh, I have 80 people in the room there, and their attendance is so much smaller than CL. Why don't we try it at CL? And it flew off the shelves with people buying tickets. So it was a good change for us. We're going to keep sound bath in for edUcon, and then, you know, if yoga decides to perk its head back up, we'll add it. But it was really good. Our get fit events were all very well attended, and we were really happy with the amount of funds we raised, but also with people really enjoying them. Yeah.

[17:44] **Madeline Schimeck:** And offering the variety of get fit events allows for a larger portion of the audience to participate, because not everybody looks at fitness like, I want to go run a five k before a conference all day long, or, you know, boot camps. Not for me, but I want to do something, to center myself and focus. So something like the Sound Bath allows for a different sector of our audience to engage in the get fit brand of the foundation. So we do get to kind of bring more folks into the fold, which is great to see it. I want to do the Sound Bath, I want to do that. But then something like the next step breakfast, the nature of it, it really is dedicated to a smaller group of individuals. So it's primarily just our current class of the 20 and their twenties for that year. And then we introduce them to our legacy society members that are in attendance, our board from PCMA. And it's a great opportunity for these next gen of folks to engage and network with senior leadership, not just at PCMA, but senior leadership in the industry. So it really is kind of a benefit to those who are awarded to the 20 and their twenties. This year was really interesting and exciting because we were celebrating the ten year anniversary of the program that we did open it up to all of our alumni in attendance as well. And since we do have ten years of alumni, those folks who were awarded ten years ago, they're also becoming senior leaders of the industry now. They've been in it for a long time, so they have invaluable information to share with the current class, but also as a go between the Legacy society members and board members who they may be on their way to becoming and not too long of a time. So we do think it might be something we will keep our alumni in the program and kind of open it up to a little bit of a larger audience, but it is meant to be a little bit exclusive to this group as a benefit to them. But still, it was really nice to see the bigger room this year filled up and just the way that relationships have progressed in some of those 20 and their twenties from ten years ago are close with the board members that they were sitting with because they were introduced to them or their legacy society members ten years ago or in the last five years making relationships on site at different conferences over the years. So it's really cool to see those relationships progress and continue for individuals careers.

[19:56] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Absolutely. And I just have to mention here, we had a whole season of the convening podcast weight 20 in their twenties recorded it convening leaders just because of this anniversary that we want to celebrate and we had a good mix of alumni and the current class, which was very fun to record.

[20:15] **Madeline Schimeck:** Yeah, very exciting.

[20:18] **Magdalena Atanassova:** This kind of wraps up the day activities and we should move to Party With A Purpose which is always quite a hit. Can you tell us a bit more about the whole vision of the event?

[20:30] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** One of our major sponsors for party with the purpose is Visit Austin and Austin Convention Center. They are the ones who are supplying the entertainment every year. So that band that played in San Diego came from Austin. It's a very popular band in Austin, and the Austin folks brought them in to perform at party with purpose. We have to all remember people who are attending CL might only see each other once a year. There's a lot of friendships that have formed in our industry. Where I live in California, you live in DC. I see you once a year at CL, and let's meet at party with a purpose. And I'm not. I'm not making that up. So it's true. So it is a spot where people are

reconnecting with friends. It's very busy during the day, really. I have to say that at the end of the day, it is a party, it is a fundraiser. Thank you to our generous sponsors. But it is a place where you're reconnecting with friends who you might not see any other time of the year.

[21:26] **Madeline Schimeck:** And it's fun to give back. I think it goes back. There are different ways to give back, and doing it through something like Party With A Purpose is fun. Through our sponsorships and our ticket sales, the event itself raised over \$270,000. And the funds that are raised from Party With A Purpose are spread through different organizations. We are able to donate \$25,000 to the above and beyond foundation with these funds, as well as the \$10,000 donation that we made to Perkins Elementary School. That's what the purpose of this Party With A Purpose is, so that we're able to raise the funds to support our partners and these local organizations. So, you know, we're only able to do that through people attending this party.

[22:07] **Magdalena Atanassova:** What were your main takeaways from all of that experience during convening leaders, and maybe what would you do differently? Moving on to our next events.

[22:17] **Madeline Schimeck:** The takeaway was that for me personally, and I think a large number of our attendees who participated in our foundation events left San Diego feeling like they had made an impact on the local community based through those hospitality helping hands programs, the ones that we did on site at the conference center. And kind of just being able to see that impact humanizes the experience, I think, of what we do here, and, you know, a lot of folks don't really understand, I think the business events industry, and you're like, oh, you're going to a conference, but there's a lot that happens. And being able to see some of those takeaways firsthand is just really impactful and makes you want to continue to do good, continue to spread that feeling. When you leave the city, as well as, you know, it's fun to give back. There are opportunities to have fun while you're doing it. I don't know. JoAnn, is there anything else?

[23:03] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** Yeah, for me, I'm going to have two things, really. It's the students. We do offer a lot of scholarships for students to attend CL. So when you see the students walking around together or trying to, you know, butt into conversations and learn from people, it is very heartwarming. And with our students now being able to do some of the get fit events, I feel like the students are just going to become a bigger and bigger part of our experience. They're watching them kind of get into our industry, understand it, learn it, and our members are so generous with their time with students. Why at CL? So I do think students are becoming a big part of kind of the thread of CL. The other thing is one of the things that the foundation does do is give to charity through the foundation. And one of the charities that we have been giving to is the above and beyond foundation. It's another industry organization. But for me, and this is the second city that we have done it in, the foundation awarded four frontline workers \$5,000 checks. So, for example, a Bellman captain, two housekeepers. So that kind of worker is nominated by their employer through the above and beyond foundation. Unbeknownst to them, they're coming to the PCMA CL meeting to receive a \$5,000 check. So for me, watching the bell captain from the Hyatt with his family there, he didn't know his family was coming and is handed a \$5,000 check is very heartwarming and very, you know, you learn a lot about what our industry is about by watching our folks who are frontline do our customers, our members, all of us, all the time being rewarded. So that's one of the most heartwarming thoughts for me at the CL. We did it in Columbus as well, and here. And I just think that it's something that the PCMF foundation should be proud of, that we really, in the city that we are going to, you know, really awarding these checks to folks who make a difference every day.

[25:15] **Magdalena Atanassova:** Absolutely. And I just have to say, again, all these scholarships that the foundation is giving and the support to students is amazing because it helps them also build their network and get really good start into the industry each year we are.

[25:31] **Madeline Schimeck:** Able to award over 200 scholarships to students, industry professionals, et cetera. But for specifically to convening leaders, we had 106 scholarship recipients in attendance. And so much of what we do, we're only able to do because of the support we receive from attendees, our partners, our sponsors. And we have a pretty large donor base for the foundation which comes from, you know, straight up donations, those sponsorships, raffle and auction support. And it's all of those supporters that are the reason we're able to allow for 106 individuals to join us at convening leaders and then another 100 scholarships that are awarded throughout the year. And it is pretty incredible. Like, we introduced the legacy society and scholarship recipient meetup to convening leaders last year and then brought it back this year. So really putting like faces to the experience of these individuals are the reason I'm able to be here is really rewarding. And you hear a lot of really cool stories about the connections that are made in those meetups. But it's a very rewarding organization to be a part of and specifically the foundation to get to hear those firsthand accounts of what people were able to do because of the scholarships received, for sure.

[26:46] **Magdalina Atanassova:** On that note, was there anything we didn't address and we should mention before wrap up?

[26:51] **JoAnn Bedrosian Ryan:** Yeah, just off of the CL topic. So the foundation doesn't just show up at our events. CL and edUcon, we're working all year long to really find fun, creative ways to raise money. So we're engaging chapters. The chapters are so important to PCMA, as we all know, and I'm sure everyone listening is a chapter member. So we engage chapters every year in a wellness event called stepping up. It's really tracking steps for a month. Our sponsor this year is Visit the Palm Beaches. And so there's categories, people are winning prizes, but really, at the end of the day, it's a walking challenge. We've now incorporated, if you do hit training in your gym, if you do peloton, if you do weightlifting, you get points for that as well. So it is really engaging the chapters in our fundraising initiatives for the foundation. The foundation is very generous and we do offer each chapter, chapter one educational session a year. The foundation pays for it all through the year. There's different programming that we do, trying to really target every group that's in our membership to help us raise funds so we can continue to give scholarships and do research and give back to charities. So I just wanted to mention how important our chapters are and that we do engage them all year long. And, you know, we appreciate everyone's support that's listening, that has given to the foundation. If you have any questions or ideas, Madeline and I are always here. We love talking to everyone about new ways to raise money or change things up, and we're just thankful that you had us here today.

[28:30] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Madeline, anything else you would like to.

[28:33] **Madeline Schimeck:** I think we've captured it all. You know, we are just so grateful, as Joanne and I really are, the foundation team, obviously supported by a wider network of PCMA employees. But we're just so grateful for their support that we receive from our fellow co workers, as well as from all of our supporters, either with donating their time or their money to help us accomplish what we do year over year. It's pretty, it's a pretty cool thing to be a part of. So we're just grateful for the opportunity to share a little bit more about what it is that we do.

[29:01] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Absolutely. And I have to thank you on behalf of really, everyone listening, because you're doing a lot, you're giving a lot back to the industry, and I think that's very important. So thank you for all your work and for being on the podcast and sharing some of your experiences and knowledge with our audience.

[29:20] **Madeline Schimeck:** Thank you so much. Thanks for having us.

[29:27] **Magdalina Atanassova:** Tune in and subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts so you never miss an episode. For more industry insights, visit pcma.org/convene until next time.