



Melissa Sawyer Biography

Co-Founder & CEO, Youth Empowerment Project (YEP)

Melissa is a Founder and CEO of Youth Empowerment Project (YEP). Melissa received her B.A. from McGill University in Montreal, Quebec and her M. Ed from the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE). Melissa first came to New Orleans through Teach for America (TFA) and she returned to the city after receiving her Master's Degree and spent three years working to reform Louisiana's juvenile justice system before launching YEP in 2004. YEP was the first program of its kind in Louisiana to support young people transitioning back to their families and communities from incarceration.

Under Melissa's leadership, YEP has grown significantly in scope, size and impact. Today, YEP is nationally recognized for its innovative, high-quality programs, and is the largest and most comprehensive organization in Greater New Orleans that supports young people who live in chronic poverty, have experienced trauma or are out of school or work. YEP engages more than 800 young people each year through four pillars of programming – YEP Works, YEP Educates, YEP Enriches and YEP Mentors.

Last year, Melissa was named the "CEO of the Year" by *Biz New Orleans Magazine* (2022). *The Times-Picayune* recognized her as one of the "300 People Over 300 Years Who Have Made New Orleans, New Orleans" (2018), *the Chronicle of Philanthropy* included her in their "15 More People Changing the Nonprofit World" (2017) and *Gambit Weekly* selected her as "New Orleanian of the Year" (2016).

Dean Howard, Chief Development Officer

Dean joined YEP in 2023 after more than two decades directing a breadth of noteworthy development and capital projects and brand strategies for a range of historic New Orleans nonprofits. Most recently, Dean served as the Director of Philanthropy of LCMC Health's Foundation for University Medical Center New Orleans, where he raised nearly \$2 million in post-pandemic donations. Previous roles include VP of Development at the Louisiana SPCA leading a \$16 million capital campaign and Founding Development Director at the Tipitina's Foundation securing over \$3 million for New Orleans public school band programs. He holds a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies and Political Science from University of Louisiana Monroe.