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Fund Raising For The Performing Arts: Life After The Lottery – How Can We Adapt?

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Introduction

In this paper we identify some practical examples of fundraising and set them against lessons drawn from interviews and a literature review. The primary research consisted of a number of semi-structured interviews with individuals who had recent experience of fund raising in the performing arts. The central section of this paper consists of a brief outline of a four-year fund raising campaign at a provincial theatre. The outcomes of this research include a menu of widely used options along with some reflections for consideration in future projects.

Arts fundraising and the contemporary context

In the case of the Arts, the prevailing UK culture is that ‘government shall provide’, with the generation of funding from private sources being essentially a backup that might provide the icing on the cake rather than being anything more substantial or serious. The first thing to state is that the process of fund raising over the last few decades has in general been a growth area. The most dramatic contemporary change in arts funding has been due to the arrival of the National Lottery and subsequently the distribution of a share of the proceeds. This has been channelled through a number of arms’ length agencies such as the Regional Arts Boards and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Since its priorities were originally set in 1994 these have enabled an unprecedented number of capital projects, albeit with partnership funding in various forms. However, there is evidence that the climate is changing. State funding for the performing arts in Europe is being reduced, and the competition to find money from other sources is increasing.

Charitable organisations, of which universities are rather specialised examples, are finding it increasingly hard to raise money in the UK. In fund raising for HE, UK universities have been slouches when compared to their US comrades. From 1993-1999, the amount of arts funding from charitable trusts halved in money terms alone (Dunlop and Selwood 2001:166). Sponsorship from business, however, showed some significant increases, though this varied from arts sector to arts sector.

Income and donor categories

Various elementary categorisations of income exist. There is “earned income” such as box office receipts; and “contributed income” i.e. corporate, civic, or foundation grants and individual donations. The latter category can be channelled either to meet running or revenue costs or to capital funding; and can be quite specifically targeted or focused, such as an appeal to upgrade lighting or improve access. The ‘product range’ or opportunities on offer to donors could therefore be considered in terms of value of donation; duration and frequency; and type (not just money but payment in kind such as management time or special skills or product placement).

In the case of substantial gifts, the donor may be able to arrange that the very name of the institution be changed to incorporate their own in some way. The Tate, itself named after its founding sponsor, a real life ‘sugar daddy’, let it be known that Tate Modern could be named after anyone willing to provide £20m towards its development (Thorncroft 1997). At one extreme, organisations want to encourage people to feel free to contribute small sums anonymously and frequently. On the other hand, it is assumed that potential donors are at least partly motivated by public recognition by way of publicity in a programme, or being memorialised on part of the building.

Where then do arts organisations turn? Firstly there are the various arms of government; local authorities, UK national government (most likely through the relevant arts councils); and the EU. In grouping, most would also include in this grouping the Arts Heritage Lottery Fund. Then there is the third or charitable sector where there is a large number of existing institutions, often quite specialised in their aims and objectives. Then there are private corporations. And, finally there are private individuals who may give on either a small or large scale. There are increasing numbers of these, the art being to identify those who empathise with one’s project.

Two further categories tend to be forgotten in such listings. Most important, there are paying customers about whom more will be said later. Equally critical are the performers and participants themselves, who often subsidise the arts through opting for psychic income as much as any economic gains they may obtain. Even those who reach the top of their profession and earn large sums of money as a result, are often willing to take significant and unpaid roles in fundraising, for example in various kinds of benefit concert for which they may or may not accept pay.

When arts organisations seek grants, they find that awards are often made on condition that matching funds are raised, thus doubling the impact of the grant and ensuring that fund raising becomes a continuous and diverse process for the organisations concerned. The tax regime also plays its part, and until recently, notoriously disadvantaged UK organisations in relation to their US counterparts. Now the changes (for example gift aid) have provided a boost to donations. Nevertheless rules on taxation such as VAT are commented on by arts organisation as being major sources of concern.

Some good guides to fund-raising exist (Cook 1996; Norton and Eastwood 1997).

Research process

What sources were actually used? The authors carried out interviews with a range of relevant fund raisers and marketers at UK institutions including:

Byre Theatre, St Andrews

Dundee Repertory Theatre

Perth Theatre

Whitehall Theatre, Dundee

Edinburgh Festival Theatre

Shakespeare's Globe

Sadler's Wells

English National Opera

Scottish Arts Council

Local authorities (Various including lottery and other relevant bodies).

Let us now turn to examine one of these in more detail.

Case Study: the new Byre Theatre, St Andrews

The Byre Theatre, which has charitable status, has an honorary President and fifteen patrons, chosen because of some connection with the theatre or town. It has significant presence in the local community. Alexander B Paterson, a local freelance journalist and prolific playwright, founded the original Byre Theatre in St Andrews in 1933. In 1970, the theatre moved to a new location when the old building was demolished. However, the need for further development to improve facilities and to meet contemporary standards such as special access needs became increasingly obvious. After closure for a major rebuilding, in fact a complete reconstruction, the Byre reopened in July 2001.

This latter project can only be described as a challenge for all concerned. In total, over a period of four years, around £6m was required. How was this major development paid for? In part, this was through the availability of lottery funding, something that has sadly since declined (Creigh-Tyte and Gallimore 2000). St Andrews is better known for its ancient university and for golf rather than for industry. North East Fife is considered a wealthy part of Scotland but not necessarily an obvious place for arts fund raising.

Rebecca McSherry, Marketing and Development Manager, explained that donations were sought under a range of activities. The Byre successfully employed a fund-raiser for a short time. In return for a lump sum, the fundraiser drew up the various schemes and she herself targeted local industry. Raising the capital through an appeal was a real challenge. In the event, they raised hardly any from commerce. There are few businesses rooted in St Andrews.

In their form, the schemes were not particularly creative or unusual but were held to have worked quite well in general. The major donations obtained were

- £ 4 085 000 from the lottery
- £ 625 000 from Fife Council
- £ 249 500 from Fife Enterprise

There were few large donations from companies or trusts, one of £250,000 being notable. Initial success with local trusts led to further efforts being targeted on them and the Levy Trust, the Gannochy Trust and the St Andrews Common Good Fund all contributed.

When Rebecca arrived she took on the challenge of raising money from trusts and individuals. Her approach was to write to the trusts individually, having first found out what conditions require to be met. A standard letter was sent out, but ideally this was fronted by a personal letter to the recipient so the appeal came from a known individual. When the theatre finally reopened, they held a special reception for representatives of the trusts that had contributed. They were surprised just how many people turned up from all over Scotland. She reckons she had reasonable success, raising in two years £120,000.

The “Friends” raised about £50,000. In relation to the other, smaller, schemes, she stressed the importance of making it easy for people to pay, for example the use of credit cards is important; and schemes for gift aid are essential. They illustrate the advantage of offering a range of prices to suit all pockets. In more detail these were:

Buy a slate

Have your name recorded for posterity in the “Book of Slates” on permanent display in the theatre foyer. £10 per slate but buy as many as you want.

Become A Star

A donation of £50 of five monthly payments of £10

Name a Seat

£250 or five monthly payments of £50 enabled donors to have their name recorded on a seat. The 220 seats sold out, raising £55, 000 plus another ten beside. These donors were given wall plaques.

Become a benefactor

To become listed as a benefactor required a one-off donation of £8000, or four annual payments of £2000. In return for this, benefactors would be given some facilities for entertaining, ten free tickets for one performance a year and an acknowledgement in the theatre’s promotional literature. Where donors committed to this before the theatre

opening, they were also given membership of the Founders' Circle. Benefactors include Belhaven (who supply the bar), Pagan Osborne, The David Stevenson Trust, Murray Donald and Caithness, the R&A and the University of St Andrews.

Founders' Circle

In return for £1000, benefits would last for ten years: two free tickets for a founder's circle performance and an annual reception, together with a permanent acknowledgement in the new theatre.

Reflections

In this particular case the Lottery provided a huge proportion of the total funds raised. For purposes of comparison, at a rural parallel, Pitlochry Festival Theatre, much of the funding came from EU sources, and the sponsors were much more commercial in character. At Pitlochry, they included: Arts and Business (formerly ABSA); Bank of Scotland, Concept (document solutions) BT, Scotland on Line, Elizabeth Yule, Cruden Foundation, House of Bruar, Robertson Trust, Tay Charitable Trust, and Forth Wines Ltd.

A project such as the rebuilding of the Byre Theatre seems of clear significance. In context the Byre would be considered very much a local and regional theatre, outside the central belt of Scotland, let alone the south east of England. But the separation of national, regional and local is not so distinct. Theatres such as the Byre still offer a whole range of training opportunities, providing first jobs for aspiring young actors as well as theatre technicians and managers. Local conversations and activities can feed into the national. Rebuilding is not frequent, coming along only once in generation, so motivation is strong. There seems to have been something of a surprise among those at the Byre that it proved so hard to raise money from industry, and conversely that approaches to Trusts were relatively so successful. Conspicuously absent also were large donations from private individuals. The other obvious issue would be the substantial lead times involved in such fund raising - in this case, four years. Other fund-raisers have explained the benefits of opening activity with a menu of diverse schemes which are then adjusted depending on success levels.

The challenge for the Byre and for other provincial companies is that UK arts sponsorship and fundraising is significantly skewed towards the south east and towards the larger more

glamorous projects. According to figures released by Art & Business, “sixteen of the twenty-three organisations that managed to raise £1m or more from business (in 1999) were London-based. And it is relatively rich and well-connected institutions such as the Tate Gallery and the Royal Opera House that are getting the biggest slice of the cake”(Gibbons 2000). “The richest 3% of organisations - which employ teams of full-time fundraisers - took more than half of all business sponsorship”. In the arts world, concludes Gibbons, the gap between rich and poor is widening significantly. Colin Tweedie of Art & Business, points out that 'The Tate has 34 full-time fundraisers. Smaller arts organisations can only afford to devote a person here or there. How can they compete?'

To see how much some campaigns can achieve in the south east, perhaps we ought to seek comparison with some of the country's major arts organisations. Chichester Festival Theatre operates without public subsidy. Opera has always been considered one of the most expensive and elitist of the arts. Glyndebourne, essentially a private opera house, is said to be the most successful fundraiser in the UK. The Royal Opera House redevelopment required significant sponsorship and recorded its biggest single donation of £10m from Alberto Vilar (2001). English National Opera (ENO), like the Byre, is involved in fundraising to finance the £41m renovation of its operating base at the London Coliseum but the sums involved are dramatically larger than at the Byre. Five members of the ENO Board contributed personal donations of £1m or more, with the largest single sum being £5m (Thorncroft 2001). At ENO also, there is emphasis on a wide range of smaller schemes for fund raising. A 'small group of highly valued donors' are given the title of 'The General Director's Circle'. This is further segmented as their titles and suggested amounts are Associate (£250), Benefactor (£500), Patron (£1,000) and Fellow (£2,500). In return, individuals have their name listed in ENO programmes and obtain other minor privileges. These categories apply to one year only and are complemented by a range of other offer schemes including legacies, syndicates to support young singers, sponsorship of particular productions, and membership of 'Friends of ENO'. In fact the use of Friends societies seems to vary enormously. In some theatres, for example, they can make a substantial contribution to operating costs not just in fostering regular attendance but in raising significant sums.

Yet while they seem to be an underused resource, Fraser reports some ambivalence among theatre managements, partly due to anxiety over the power, latent or realised, that may

accrue to donors. Some groups of benefactors are not keen simply to raise monies for others to spend but undoubtedly wish to try and influence artistic policy (Fraser 1999).

Segmentation in the arts is known to be problematic. How then are donors to be identified and targeted? Of course there are directories of organisational donors. Newspapers such as the Sunday Times produce listings of the UK's wealthiest individuals but, of course, being wealthy does not guarantee generosity with donations. Potential donors have to be identified through an iterative process of networking. Careful research is essential to prepare the ground for an approach. One American fundraiser says, 'the larger your budget, the more you have to know your funders' (Jacobs 2001). Some donors give in relatively small amounts while others are interested only in making a major contribution. The temptation is to set up an events programme to suit the perceived needs of a particular donor segment. However, it is dangerous, say others, to 'fit funding criteria by launching some flavor of the month project'. Clear and consistent goals, they say, are critical for both fundraising and artistic matters. Tisa Chang, an artistic/producing director of Pan Asian, is quoted as saying it is far better to stay focused on your artistic work 'and to then find the donors who take an interest in it' (Jacobs 2001). Others comment on the value of theatre in education and similar programmes: these are attractive to would-be donors and they represent one way of trying to ensure 'the perpetuation and integrity of their chosen art' (Jacobs 2001).

Some emerging issues

From this and other cases, one critical choice seems to lie between hiring a professional fundraiser or fundraising company, and setting up a committee or internal organisation. Each has their advantages and disadvantages. The 'buy in' or professional approach seems expensive as the commission involved can be considerable. On the other hand, overhead is kept to a minimum. With the other DIY approach, the issue is one of who will be effective in what particular circumstances. Some individuals, themselves generous and regular donors, avoid committee work like the plague.

One anecdote concerned a professional fundraiser who was sacked less than one year into his contract. However he had been focussing on the long term and had signed up support from organisations to run over three to five year periods. Only after he was gone was it realised that he had actually been very effective. In this case communication does not seem

to have been a strong suit on either side. The aftermath also highlighted short-comings in contractual arrangements for such approaches.

Techniques and approaches

Outline checklists can cover a wide range of issues but are not comprehensive. Obviously the earlier fund raising strategies are considered and put in place, the more ready the relationship to develop and the more likely the chances of success. Some comments might be in order here.

Some sports and theatre organisations have worked on the basis of selling the very components of the building. We have already mentioned the issue of ‘selling seats’ in the auditorium. A nameplate on the seat would then be named after an individual chosen by the donor. Such schemes can however have their complications. Some theatres downplay in their campaigns the obvious point that all components have a limited life, though in the case of seats this might be one or two decades. Sponsors of seats at one theatre have been known to get upset when they have been unable to book ‘their’ seat for a performance, and sometimes the adjacent seats also. Complications can be avoided by a straightforward financing deal such as selling debentures. This had been successful not just for sporting venues. The Albert Hall was originally financed in this manner and many of the seats are still used by descendants of the founders. However this also raises the challenge of equity and access. Debenture holders, in return for their investment, control access to seats. Organisations making use of this type of funding cannot so readily pursue audience development and reach out to non-attenders.

The example of the Byre shows that the straightforward and indeed conventional approach can be extremely successful. However we might pose some questions about the effect of some of the strategies. People have commented over the years that the arts in general have an image of being expensive and exclusive. Establishing fund raising arrangements in the sorts of ways that we commonly see are undoubtedly effective in increasing income. This income may enable arts organisations better to survive and develop, but one disadvantage

is that such methods may perpetuate the perceived exclusiveness. There are circles within circles. While I may aspire to become a Friend, I cannot do so unless I gift some money. Even if I am a regular attendee, I may feel that I am not really someone who matters unless I pay substantially extra to belong. You could say in fact that the very process of fund raising and the formal structures that are set up are also establishing in-groups and out-groups, reinforcing some of the stereotypes that many in the arts community are trying to weaken and remove in the name of access. Does it have to be like this?

At least one fundraiser does not think so. In Seattle, local pride is appealed to and not much more.

Peter Donnelley raises money for the arts. He lays it straight on the line to prospective contributors: "There is no sponsorship; no parties; no names" - just the knowledge for the companies, trusts, and individuals that give that they are helping to improve the quality of life in the local community.

(Thorncroft 2002)

It has to be said that such downbeat approaches seem to be very much in the minority.

As the importance of sponsorship grows, so too does its coverage and analysis in the academic literatures. Olkkonen et al are unusual in pointing to the traditional nature of much marketing theory in this field and pointing instead to the value of what they describe as an interaction/network perspective, one that tries to understand the “development of sponsorship relationships and networks, as well as on interpersonal communication processes going on between the sponsorship parties” (Olkkonen 2001; Olkkonen et al. 2000:12). Olkkonen comments on the sense that because of its nature, such network related activity is particularly difficult to ‘manage’. Stacey, Griffiths, Shaw and others, taking some themes from complexity science, have moved on to develop in the course of several books a consideration of complex responsive processes (Fonseca 2002; Griffin 2001; Shaw 2002; Stacey 2001; Stacey et al. 2001; Streatfield 2002). From this perspective, the notion of management becomes even more problematic. Fonseca has described the development of a new product from this angle, pointing to how much the networking activity which gave rise to it was spontaneous, unplanned and emergent. Indeed it is notable in the case of fundraising how the identification and involvement of major donors can be almost

accidental, as in the case mentioned above of Vilar. Adopting a complex responsive processes perspective, fundraising strategies might focus on simply increasing the number and range of small scale interventions.

Conclusions and reflections

Whatever is said about fundraising in the performing arts, and however critical it is, nothing is as important as mounting arts performances that will attract people and that the audience will enjoy. A 'full house' gives the very best opportunity for maximising income from attenders as well as for sparking off local conversations, whether positive or negative in their content. A performance emerges from the relationship between performers and members of the audience and is co-created. An alert and receptive audience is not simply passive as often portrayed but can make a positive contribution to the experience for all concerned. Here too it is said that allowing a crowd, whether in sports or the arts, to be dominated by wealthy but perhaps ignorant or uncommitted 'suits' can detract from the experience for all.

Similarly fund raising can be looked upon as emerging from a developing relationship between the theatre and a local community, with individual consumers and managers in industry or local authorities. While industry in some geographical areas may be of limited significance, it is surely of concern that the arts seem to feature in such a limited way. Local industry may not have a sense of the value of local identity and being part of that community. It seems important that the performing arts community makes opening gestures whatever the nature of the initial response and fundraising may well be a good vehicle for increased levels of interaction.

The very nature of fundraising makes it difficult to research, particularly in the territory of individual donations. Private donors may wish for a variety of reasons to keep their gifts discreet. The motivations for giving may be complex and have a highly personal and emotional content. In this sense, the response that may trigger donations to the performing arts is largely intangible and often unknowable.

With very few exceptions, arts activity is directly supported by public sector funding. Indirect support is immense if we take into account what goes on in schools and other educational establishments. But the involvement of direct public sector funding

immediately raises issues of audience development, access and equity. Dealing with bureaucracy as well as power and political issues can become a significant challenge for management. This is all the more so when private sector donors, perhaps contributing relatively little in relation to total funding, can lay claim to what can be seen as disproportionate publicity and other benefits. Fundraising takes place therefore in the midst of challenging management activity and the interplay among complex partnerships.

This necessary preliminary over funding strategies should be established early and planned for the long term. Investment needs to be made in support mechanisms e.g. for administrative systems to support the bureaucratic process of submitting bids to arts charities, the lottery and various arms of government up to European level.

Many mentioned the importance of working together and building a team spirit. With a wide range of supporters and volunteers this can be harder than it sounds. Recruitment of such people needs to be undertaken very carefully to ensure that participants are both productive and have good team working skills. In voluntary organisations, people are often brought on board quickly and on a 'permanent' basis. Persuading 'square pegs' or 'extinct volcanoes' to leave is a challenge that is easily shirked.

Early on, the aim is often to develop a portfolio of sources for both capital and revenue. There is strength in cultivating a range of diverse sources so that the organisation's future is not risked by one major sponsor pulling out. Perhaps quite likely in the case of the arts, such decisions can be highly personal, and when a particular chief executive retires, the link can be broken. On an even more significant point, Lottery funding for the arts was first diluted in 1998 and, latterly, is shrinking as lottery income declines. Yet the relatively humble coffee morning, raffle, or other small scale activity can be highly productive in more ways than simply financial. Low value yet perhaps high frequency, these events have considerable potential. They need not even be held with the aim of direct fundraising, but with the aim of sucking people in to related conversation. Held on theatre premises, they can demystify the organisation, facilitate links with non-theatre goers and build a strong community spirit. Furthermore, as Bird suggests, they offer an easy entry point and scope for 'a database of sympathisers – a constituency, as it were - who are certainly interested enough... Then move them to greater levels of commitment over time; from giving small

sums - and eventually, perhaps, to helping in person' (Bird 1991). Ordinary subscribers have been known over time to become major benefactors.

Diversity is healthy in areas other than cash support. Colin Tweedie, chief executive of Arts & Business (formerly ABSA) has stressed the need for participating organisations to develop a new relationship based not just on large cheques but exchanges of time and people as well as cash, creating added value through the integration of different, but essential, skills. Such initiatives can bring creative artists into the workplace and take corporate knowledge into the arts (Thorncroft 2000).

Public fund raising campaigns need a clear vision, long term plan and plenty of publicity. Before construction starts on a building, campaigners can seek support towards building costs. Examples mentioned above include sale of individual bricks or the chance to buy a nameplate for seats.

What is successful for one organisation does not always work well at another. For example, even 'bucket' campaigns have their advocates. Shaking a collecting tin or bucket at the end of every performance in the venue, as was done at Watford, is a constant reminder to audience members that the fund raising campaign is alive. However, the response of some may be to think it is a bit too much 'in your face' or inappropriate for the venue concerned. If it embarrasses audience members or makes them feel unduly guilty, then of course it can be counterproductive. A more acceptable method might be that of a raffle, especially when prizes are donated. Much may depend on the nature of the individuals who are involved in trying to solicit contributions and on the type of venue. Some individuals are able to carry out this sort of activity cheerfully and raise substantial sums of money. Others point to the benefits of such approaches in requiring regular work with members of their community. Audience members are rarely able to forget the needs.

Ideally fund raising should be focused also on establishing reserves and some supporting trust fund, in order to help tide the organisation over the inevitable difficulties with revenue as well as capital sums.

But with the decline of Lottery funding looking set to continue, it is not clear how far arts organisations will be able and willing to adapt. A review of the literature in fund-raising

suggests that in the UK at least, far too little time is invested in preparing and targeting applications to trusts and other generally bureaucratic organisations. This can be very demanding when management time is so stretched. As with any process of this nature, success with one bid is likely to mean a history of past failures and a period of identifying the needs of particular organisations. Interviewees generally claim the essential ingredient is professionalism, enthusiasm – and time, time to plan and prepare. It is also unclear how much some organisations have tried to identify major private donors. All these issues may seem like common sense but with many simple issues, the devil may lie in the implementation.

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