

# An integrated approach

**F**undraising is an extremely broad profession, bridging the full range of charitable causes, from healthcare and medical research, to animals, wildlife and the environment, to disability and faith, naming just some of the most popular. Year on year arts charities are also listed in the top five charitable causes by voluntary income (CAF, *Charity Trends 2005*), but while large arts institutions and museums consistently succeed in attracting big money, income generation within the arts is often seen to stand apart from the fundraising activity of 'traditional' charities.

Fundraisers across the voluntary sector face many common challenges and share similar goals, but the messages and techniques used can vary. This begs the question if greater integration between mainstream fundraisers and income generators working within the arts would lead to raised standards of practice throughout the fundraising community.

Arts charities encompass a broad range of organisations both large and small, including museums, galleries, visual and performing arts. There are clear opportunities for arts fundraisers to learn from each other's experiences and knowledge, and perhaps greater still prospects of learning from those within traditional charities.

Currently, many arts fundraisers openly regard themselves as 'different' from mainstream charities and their communication to donors and the general public reflects that differentiation. Public perception of arts organisations can also vary

While the fundraising aims of arts charities may be the same as more 'traditional' voluntary organisations, the techniques they employ to bring in capital are generally rather different. As both, though, have their own particular strengths, says Laura Webb, there is no reason why they shouldn't learn from each other

considerably. Those that are arts supporters are aware of the charitable status of arts organisations, but many others may not realise that the term 'charity' might apply to the cultural sector.

Perhaps the most distinguishing factor that sets arts fundraisers apart from others, is that their 'ask' is often far less emotive than that of their traditional counterparts. Although they serve a vital and very real need, they are acutely aware that their cause is not a question of 'life and death' and that their needs will rarely come top of the priority list if compared with some of the most popular causes like international development, emergency appeals and cancer. Arts fundraisers, instead, often use sophisticated language to convey the need for donations, rather than the more heartfelt pleas of mainstream charities. However, even this fundamental difference might be regarded as overly simplistic. Many of those organisations who regard themselves very much as traditional charities deal with adding value to the quality of the lives of their key stakeholders, and this isn't necessarily that different from the work of arts based organisations.

This may account for noticeable trends in income to arts organisations. Rarely will arts fundraisers use the '£2 a month' message, but rather they put their efforts into a more complex ask, and the reward is often much greater. Therefore, arts fundraisers are often highly successful in the field of major gifts and corporate fundraising. It is interesting to note that donors to the arts are often rewarded for their generosity with public recognition of their support, which is at odds with the traditional image of British donors who are often very private about their giving.

Arts charities also dominate the league table of fundraising organisations by lottery income, filling all of the top ten places, but are noticeably absent from the top legacy fundraising charities. This difference in legacy performance alone makes the case for the different sectors to learn more from each other.

In fact, the bulk of income to the largest arts charities comes from lottery grants. For many fundraisers working within smaller arts organisations, the lottery was their first foray into the world of capital fundraising and the catalyst for an increase in fundraising activity to follow. This does lead to much volatility within these organisations' income levels, as lottery funding

(and government grants which also heavily impact arts charities) can lead to major rises and falls in income.

Many mainstream charities would love to have the potential level of access that arts organisations have to their audiences. The added dynamic of being able to offer a clear, tangible benefit back in terms of access to their art, whatever form that takes, puts arts organisations into a position with potential donors that mainstream charities are good at developing.

Generally, arts fundraisers do not engage with direct mail with the same enthusiasm as other charities, with the possible exception of when they are marketing shows or exhibitions to potential attendees. While benefit-led membership and friends schemes are hugely popular and run very successfully, there is sometimes little interaction between ticket sales and donations. It would seem that the major challenge is one of conversion; many arts organisations are yet to succeed in transferring box office customers to regular and committed donors.

With greater integration between arts and mainstream fundraisers, there are many opportunities for best practice, knowledge and experience to be shared across the sector, with the ultimate result of raising standards.

For example, many mainstream charities could benefit from arts fundraisers' knowledge about developing a more sophisticated ask to appeal to major donors and corporate supporters. The time invested in tailoring the ask seems to be a successful strategy in terms of engaging major gifts at an individual or corporate level, and to form strong foundations for a continued donation stream. There is also much that could be learnt from their expertise in acquiring lottery grants.

In the same grain, mainstream charities could share their expertise in legacy fundraising with those working in the arts. Advice on combating the challenge of converting ticket sales customers to donors could be addressed by shared experience with development managers in the field of education who

face many of the same challenges, including the complex nature of their fundraising ask. Alumni fundraisers, in particular, have become experts in converting their alumni database to regular supporters.

Fundraisers are innovative marketers and their expertise in proactively marketing their cause and the need for donations far and wide beyond their existing donor database may also be something that arts fundraisers can learn from. Perhaps the most significant benefit to arts fundraisers of learning from other charities' experience is the opportunity to maximise use of the tax relief available, particularly Gift Aid, Payroll Giving, Share Giving, legacies and not forgetting gifts such as works of art.

So how might this learning take place? There is already evidence that the number of individuals crossing from one sector to another is on the increase, and peer-to-peer influence can be a highly effective learning mechanism. Attending networking events, conferences and debates beyond your usual marketplace is another popular route. Whether over email or face-to-face, there are many forums or groups that you can contribute to and hear from others about their experiences.

And there is much to be gained from better integration. From the Institute of Fundraising's perspective, we are looking to increase our provision of support services to enable fundraisers to share experiences. We already offer a number of national, regional and special interest groups for fundraisers and related professionals to meet and consult with each other, and these, as well as our regular programme of events provide both educational and networking opportunities to fundraisers operating across the country.

While the terminology and challenges faced may differ, fundraisers are encouraged to look outside their traditional sphere of influence and benefit from the expertise of other fundraising specialists.

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