

## Competing for Talent

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With fundraising in the UK currently suffering from an image problem, how can we find the next generation of top arts fundraisers? **Michelle Wright** makes some suggestions.

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Across the arts and culture sector, but also in the wider charitable sector, the number one talent crisis seems to lie in attracting the next generation of development directors and entrepreneurial fundraisers who can ‘make things happen’.

Why is it that our arts organisations are finding it so difficult to recruit to the top? The arts sector is vibrant and colourful. It’s a sector where you can not only make a difference, but also see real tangible change happen. And if you’re in charge of raising the income needed to realise a vision then you’re a pretty valuable resource. Excellent fundraisers can have stellar careers, and leadership of income generation is both highly visible and rewarding.

Nonetheless it seems that fundraising in the UK has something of an image problem. While the press and our professional bodies may point to the need for better pay structures, this is only a very small part of the issue. Those who are keen to pursue careers in the arts sector will value career structure, flexibility and training just as much as pay.

What’s more, the best fundraisers can earn tidy sums – something that is not lost on many artistic staff who can feel outdone by the more generous pay structures available to their fundraising colleagues. Where the problem really seems to lie is in finding the complex combination of aptitude, attitude, resilience and skills development needed for a successful fundraising hire.

In recent years the arts sector has needed to change dramatically in response to a new economic and digital environment. Faced with the need to create ever more daring and commercially focused income generation models, many organisations have redefined their strategy to be more entrepreneurial, only to realise that they have the wrong type of talent in their fundraising teams.

Perhaps the traditionally structured fundraising team is a thing of the past: major donor, trust and corporate fundraisers may need to be quickly replaced by more fluid, business-minded fundraisers – the ‘polymaths’ who can turn their hands to a broader range of tasks. What most arts organisations need is a team of responsive, digitally-savvy individuals who can respond to rapid change with passion and verve.

As a comparator, the same requirements in the sports sector are eliciting a growing number of traineeships that focus graduates on project management, digital delivery and fundraising. This range of skills is needed to meet the needs of grass-roots sport, and in the short-term we might need to consider evolving a similar structure for the arts.

There are some established programmes out there to support talent in fundraising, such as the Cancer Research Graduate scheme, and newer initiatives such as our own scheme, the Cause4 Entrepreneurship programme, which looks to support top graduate talent into leadership positions in fundraising.

Arts Council England has also made invaluable steps to create a national programme to support talent development with its Fellowship Programme. Delivered via Arts Fundraising and Philanthropy, this 'gold-standard' training and support programme is already making an impact. The first cohort of 15 graduate fellows are now making a tangible impact in their organisations with placements as diverse as Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Opera North and the Roundhouse.

But despite good progress, the urgent income generation needs across the arts sector and the lack of readily available talent suggests that we still need to bolster the talent pipeline. So what might we do to achieve this?

- 1 **We need to raise the profile of fundraising across the arts** – Fundraising is an essential role, and a great career, and we need to attract the type of individual that can respond quickly to change and work across a broad portfolio of activities. A sector talent campaign could be beneficial for the arts sector as a whole.
- 2 **We should draw on good practice across the sector** – The Arts Fundraising Fellowships programme is achieving success by working with a cohort of graduate fundraisers based in different organisations, giving them the chance to learn from each other. We should seek to build upon these examples to create structured programmes that can engage talent in 'milk round' graduate recruitment.
- 3 **We should look to the private sector for ideas** – We need to encourage healthy competition for top talent across the arts sector. If we look to famous private sector examples, such as the 'war for talent' that is part of the culture of Silicon Valley, bidding for top talent is commonplace. Talent after all attracts talent, and with UK fundraisers being some of the most sought after in the world, then it makes sense that the very best will be coveted.

- 4 **We need to up the stakes in supporting a training and leadership culture in fundraising** – The best leaders commit to life-long learning. There are surprisingly few fundraising directors that become CEOs, yet fundraising skills are essential in senior roles. Once we identify future leaders, we need to provide the training and mentoring that can support those with ambition and talent into the top jobs. Programmes such as the Clore Leadership Programme can play an essential role in encouraging fundraisers to be ambitious for the top arts jobs.
- 5 **Apprenticeships count** – A vibrant and colourful arts sector needs to be matched by a diverse and entrepreneurial fundraising workforce. In 2015/16 the Arts Fundraising Fellowships will also support a cohort of school leavers keen to work in arts fundraising. Trained via social media, video and digital, this group will enhance the skills and energy of the graduate Fellows and bring much-needed new ideas and approaches into the sector.

Undoubtedly, if we are going to see the arts sector survive and grow, a new plan is needed that can build the talent pipeline in fundraising. Managed in the right way with the right start and the right training, fundraising is a brilliant career, but there is much more to be done to encourage the best talent into key arts roles and see the arts and culture sector really thrive.

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