

In Conversation

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# From arts to cause-led fundraising

Rebecca Taylor, NSPCC Fundraising Manager,  
speaks to Sara Lock, AMA Associate Editor



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# In Conversation with Rebecca Taylor

Rebecca reflects on working for arts and cause-led charities and shares her recommendations for successful fundraising

Rebecca Taylor began fundraising in 2007 as a Fundraising Assistant for the NSPCC.

Since then she has worked in several roles for the NSPCC, as Major Giving Manager for Cancer Research UK and as Head of Philanthropy for The Prince's Trust.

In 2014 she joined the arts sector in a Head of Development role for a busy arts centre but was tempted back to the NSPCC earlier this year.

We caught up with her to talk about the differences in fundraising between the arts and wider charity sector.

What can the arts learn from cause-led charities and how can the arts and cultural sector make the most of its assets?

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# From arts to cause-led

## **What struck you as the major differences when you moved into arts fundraising?**

Arts and cause-led charities are very different and I think there are pros and cons for both.

It felt much harder in the arts to form a compelling call for action. Stopping cruelty to children or finding a cure for cancer are very clear messages. Articulating the reasons why people should give to the arts in such few words is much harder.

In cause-led charities it is common to contact high net worth individuals that have no relationship with your organisation and for them to give large sums of money. They welcome the conversation.

In the arts I was taken aback by some of the negative responses I received from people wanting to know why I was contacting them. It seems it's far more acceptable to contact people about cause-led charities.

You then become constrained to audience data and personal contacts of staff, board members and existing donors. Building your networks is really important.

On the flip side, if you're fundraising for an arts venue you have people coming through your doors every day who are engaged in what you do. You have a captive audience for fundraising.

The challenge is that many of those people will think your organisation is a commercial entity because they have bought tickets to attend. There is so much unlocked potential there if you share a clear message about what you stand for and why your organisation is worthy of support.

## **What do you think are the arts and cultural sector's greatest fundraising assets?**

The people. People who work in the arts are really passionate. I was struck by how many people know from an early age that they want a career in the arts. This is a huge asset as it means they are devoted to their work. They don't seem to care what they get paid or what role they do; it is a life choice to work in the arts. For major donors and corporates that passion is a real strength that should be harnessed.

It's that unique passion and entrepreneurial spirit that enables arts organisations to achieve so much with so little budget and capacity.

The ability of the arts to deliver events that are

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attractive and engaging for major donors and corporates is also a real asset.

**Were there things you missed from previous roles while you were working in the arts?**

You are so busy in the arts that it’s hard to find the time or headspace to think properly about what you’re doing.

The culture is also very different. In the wider sector the fundraising team are the money and they lead activity. Fundraising teams have less influence in the arts. For fundraising to really work it can’t be an add on.

The major thing for me though was the lack of peer support. In a charity like the NSPCC there are other people doing the same job as you. If you get stuck or you have a bad day there is always someone who knows what it’s like to be in your position. You have people to bounce ideas off and share experiences with.

If you are the only fundraiser in your organisation or the only fundraiser working with major donors, no matter how supportive the team is, you just don’t have that level of support.

**What are your recommendations for the arts?**

- Do everything you can to get your entire staff team thinking about and participating in fundraising. Chief Executives and front of house staff alike need to feel comfortable talking about opportunities to support your organisation.
- Use your passion, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit to make a real impact with your fundraising. Your programmers, artistic directors and curators are so full of knowledge and enthusiasm. Involve them in meetings with potential donors and make that passion work for your fundraising as well as your programme.
- Seek support from fellow development staff from other organisations or through networks such as Arts Fundraising and Philanthropy to keep you motivated.
- Get to know your board and regular attendees. Find out who moves in the right circles and ask them to open doors for you.
- Be strict about making time to learn, to think and to do things differently. I know from my work outside the arts what a difference that time can make; it’s a very worthwhile investment.

