

The good trustee

*Trustees of arts boards should be playing a significant part in supporting fundraising activities, according to **Sir Thomas Hughes-Hallett**.*

It has been several months since I started working with the Arts Fundraising and Philanthropy team to develop a strand of work around trustee leadership in the arts – and it has been a fascinating journey so far. The challenge set us by Arts Council England (ACE) is a big one. How do we support the trustees of arts organisations to think about their leadership role in supporting fundraising?

In my role as a trustee of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, I often come across trustee boards that consider fundraising ‘not as their role’. This continues to surprise me. If we are going to ensure a thriving arts sector, we simply have to change this: fundraising has to be everyone’s responsibility. When we consider that the average fundraised income for an ACE-funded National Portfolio Organisation is just 12%, then the need to develop resilience and additional income streams is more vital than ever. Given the reductions in local authority funding, and likely further reductions in ACE funding, one of the only likely areas of growth for arts organisations over the next ten years will lie in fundraised income.

At the very least, trustees need to understand the fundraising needs of their organisation and their role in supporting entrepreneurial strategies and development. Similarly, executive teams need to regard their trustees as key assets in the fundraising stakes. And, as with any good asset, trustees need to be nurtured and supported in relation to fundraising.

The very best organisations that I work with have the whole organisation – trustees, executive and staff – behind its fundraising strategy. If any part of the team does not believe that fundraising is important, and a key responsibility, it will not work. It is all too frequent that we see a disconnect between trustees and executive: the trustees wanting to help but not knowing how to, and the executive frustrated because they feel that trustees are not engaged or leading from the front.

The sessions for the Arts Fundraising and Philanthropy programme bring together chairs of trustees and CEOs to consider the role of the board in fundraising. For many trustees fundraising is a new area, and they can feel at a loss as to how to help, but they recognise their responsibility to support it.

In my view, the first key role of a trustee is in supporting strategy – to help the executive team shape strategy and to challenge thinking, particularly in organisations that are under-resourced, or with small numbers of staff. The second key role is as an ambassador – somebody that can always talk positively and knowledgeably about an organisation, from its key message and purpose, to its financial needs. A good trustee should provide support in every way they can: financial, time, contacts (current as well as new ones).

So how do we take the fear out of fundraising for trustees? I have seen several key themes in arts fundraising sessions, here are some that regularly occur:

- See fundraising as an investment: Trustees need to see their role as one of investment. If organisations are to thrive and grow, good resourcing for fundraising is a no brainer. Trustees need to be prepared to take strategic risks and to support the executive to try new things.
- Make fundraising a priority: Fundraising should be high up the agenda of the trustees' meeting. Too often I see it hidden, or the last item when a meeting has run out of time and energy. How can we prioritise fundraising with no dedicated discussion?
- Forget the American model: Too often we are asked to make comparisons with the American arts board model, where all trustees give at high levels – it is part of the culture and expectation. I shudder when it is suggested here in the UK. I agree with the principle that all should give, but it is not all about the five figure cheque! Small donations are important, as are contributions in time and connections.
- Do not ask trustees to fundraise: In general we need to break down the fundraising elephant into bite-size chunks to avoid it feeling like an overwhelming task. For 12 years I was CEO of Marie Curie Cancer Care, and my whole guiding principle in relation to fundraising was not to ask trustees to fundraise but instead to give them two or three achievable tasks to undertake and report back on at the next meeting.
- Get trustees to lead cultural change: One of the key roles of trustees is leading cultural change in the prioritisation and understanding of the fundraising strategy. It is not necessarily about 'asking for money' but instead creating a supportive culture where fundraising is an embedded strategy, rather than an 'add on'.

And what about the future? The Arts Fundraising and Philanthropy team is looking at two key developments. Firstly, we are planning a leadership programme for emerging chairpersons. We need to identify the chair people of the future, to train them and support a thriving trustee culture that is diverse and experienced. Secondly, we are looking to develop a programme working with the SME entrepreneur community to encourage more owner-managers on to boards, people with experience of start-up and growth that can provide challenge and support to the executive at a key time of growth and development.

Trustees are a vital asset to the arts sector as a whole. Encouraging more to grasp the mantle of fundraising, can only serve the creation of a thriving arts sector.

Sir Thomas Hughes-Hallett is Chair of Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, the Global Health and Innovation Unit at Imperial College and the fundraising and development enterprise [Cause4](#). He is also a trustee of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.