

Selling Yourself: Fundraising and the Arts

by Dianne Mackay

We live in tight economic times: in an age of cut-backs and downsizing the public is more concerned about preserving health care and lowering personal debt than they are about funding the arts. In fact, its difficult to remember when the arts have been so starved of public and private support.

In this environment arts groups have to be enterprising and entrepreneurial just to raise enough money to stay afloat!

And so we enter the modern era of corporate fundraising. But where should arts organizations start? How can groups convince businesses to support the arts?

In order to succeed at corporate fundraising, arts organizations need to do their homework. They must build a convincing case, showing that an arts project is doable and worthy of support. It's important to remember that corporations are primarily interested in their own bottom line: arts groups need to show potential sponsors that investing in the arts will be 'good for business'.

Once arts groups understand what is expected of them than successful corporate fundraising simply becomes a matter of following nine basic steps.

1. Set your goal.

Take a close look at your budget and decide what aspects of your organization would benefit the most from corporate sponsorship. Settle on a realistic amount of money that you hope to raise.

2. Identify your target.

Look for potential sponsors in areas that are related to your field. A person starting up a music magazine, for example, would probably target record companies and music store chains as potential sources of funds.

3. Research the giving policies of potential sponsors.

Have you seen a company's logo on promotional materials for arts events? Does a company have a reputation for generosity in the community? These are questions you need to ask yourself when trying to decide whether to approach a particular company.

4. Make contact with the corporation.

Introduce yourself and explain your situation. If the company seems at all interested in listening to your pitch then try to arrange a face to face meeting at which you can present your case in the best possible light.

5. Provide information about your organization.

Prepare a well written summary of your project and outline the intended budget. Emphasize what your work will achieve and touch on some of your organization's past accomplishments.

6. Follow up your pitch with a formal proposal

This will make you look more professional and will give the company a better understanding of your project.

7. Acknowledge financial contributions promptly.

If your request has been rejected, try to find out why. After all, your rejection may be the result of a temporary situation and the company may be willing to consider sponsoring your project in the future.

8. Keep sponsors informed about your project.

Send newsletters, annual reports, and invite corporate contributors to the programs they have sponsored.

9. Give public credit to corporate donors for the programs they have supported.

Raising funds is never easy but with perseverance and a clearly thought-out strategy, groups can persuade business to support the arts. ☺

'Selling Yourself: Fundraising and the Arts' is based on the articles 'Why Businesses Give to the Arts' and 'Nine Steps to Corporate Fundraising' first published in the 'Nevada Arts News', the newsletter of the Nevada State Council on the Arts.

Why Businesses Give to the Arts

Corporations, even small ones, expect a return on their investment. Giving to the arts:

- enhances the public image for the company
- increases the company's visibility to important constituencies
- heightens the quality of life in the company's community
- provides an economic boost to the community
- attracts new employees to the community