

CASE STUDY: COMPANY B / BELVOIR STREET THEATRE

Company B is currently involved in raising funds for the redevelopment of the Belvoir Street Theatre. Government contributions account for \$5.5 million of the \$9 million project, with the remainder having to be sourced in other ways.

When the company initially considered a fundraising campaign with a \$2 million target, Louise Herron, Chair of Company B's Board, was concerned that this would still leave too big a gap towards the total project budget. After taking some professional advice on fundraising, and learning from the experience of others who have raised money for arts companies, she set to work leading the fundraising effort for this Company B project. In only nine months, they raised \$2.5 million and the project is on track to achieve a target of close to \$3 million.

It is a classic text book case study. The leadership gifts of \$250,000 each represent 10% of the total raised (excluding the Government funding). Four of those top gifts have been received; they will make up somewhere between one third and 40% of the total, depending on overall amount raised by the time the campaign closes. It is a clear illustration of the critical importance of lead gifts for the achievement of the overall target.

Following external advice, the fundraising plan included a goal of \$350,000 that had to be donated by members of the Board. When campaign progress was being reviewed and it became clear that the Board contribution had fallen a little short of the goal, the matter was discussed at a Board meeting. Members agreed to further gifts until their target was reached.

About \$300,000 of gifts between \$150,000 and \$50,000 came from philanthropists who had very little prior connection with the company but who one or more board members knew.

The majority of other gifts are \$25,000 commitments. These donations were mainly solicited via a personal call or meeting, most of them made by Louise Herron herself.

Louise Herron firmly believes that personal connections are the key to success. Prior to this campaign, Company B had a limited number of regular donors, with virtually none donating about \$5,000 per year so it was necessary to tap into another spectrum of contributors. The project relied heavily on the networks of key people in its leadership group giving, asking, and providing introductions to others with the ability and a possible interest in helping with this project.

Perhaps the most surprising thing has been the response from donors, many of whom are genuinely excited about being able to help and pleased that they have been asked. Their feedback to Ms Herron suggests that donors often consider an invitation to give to a worth-while cause as an opportunity and enjoy the involvement in a project such as this.

Of course there are different views about what constitutes a worth-while project. In the course of conversations about the need for support for the Belvoir Street Theatre redevelopment, it appeared that there were some potential supporters who had an interest in Company B and its work and were inclined to make a gift, but were not interested in donating to a building project. Where others might have been disappointed at not getting commitments from these prospects for the theatre redevelopment campaign, Louise Herron sensed an opportunity for a different approach to tap into the evident goodwill among that group of people.

Company B needed support for a production, *Life Times Three*, featuring 3 aboriginal artists that did not have a sponsor. Over three days, including a weekend, calls were made to 32 individuals, of whom 30 agreed to give \$2,000 each. These donors were able to support something of interest to them, and the company received \$60,000 that enabled it to mount a production that was very well received and is now expected to go on tour.

The Company B experience suggests that the critical success factor in fundraising is leadership. Someone among the leadership team needs to focus on fundraising and dedicate time and energy to asking for gifts, as well as demonstrate commitment by example through a generous

donation to the campaign. With some professional support from a development office, and assistance from board members and the Company's senior executive in offering leads about prospective supporters, almost anything becomes possible. "It is definitely a team effort", says Louise Herron, with some self-deprecation.

A shared vision among members of any organisation seeking to raise funds is important, as is team work in the preparation of gift solicitations and the on-going management of benefactor relationships. Yet at the critical moment in a conversation with a prospective supporter, one person needs to step up and take responsibility for asking for the gift – and the more senior, the better. Louise Herron has a good team working with her at and for Company B. She is also a naturally gifted fundraiser whose practical leadership from the front continues to be instrumental in the over-achievement of goals on this project.

Acknowledgment:

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