

CASE STUDY: MUSICA VIVA

Musica Viva presents chamber music by leading ensembles from around the world to audiences primarily in Australia. The company does not itself employ musicians, own instruments or maintain a performance infrastructure. The support it receives from donors and sponsors assists with outreach and education programs particularly in schools; with touring; support for the career development of musicians, and commissioning of new work. Musica Viva is thus at the forefront of developing audiences, performers and repertoire for chamber music in Australia.

When Mary Jo Capps joined Musica Viva more than five years ago as General Manager, the company was ready to reconsider some of its income strategies.

Musica Viva had started with a group of committed individuals and had always been able to rely on their contributions, not only or specifically in terms of money, to continue and grow. Those people were the obvious audience to engage in a relationship for practical financial support through a philanthropy program. A major gift program previously launched by the company had not been an unqualified success. To some extent, a fresh approach to individual giving meant facing up to the fact that a number of relationships with donors and potential donors had been damaged by earlier requests for gifts that had not been well prepared or were made prematurely.

The company's first step towards creating a different kind of individual giving program was to dedicate resources to the effort. Musica Viva created a staff position and invested in a database to allow some analysis for targeting and planning prospect cultivation and gift calls and tracking results. Another important step was to start a dialogue with prospective donors via surveys and consultations about their relationship with and perception of Musica Viva, and areas they would be interested in supporting. The program today includes a direct-mail annual appeal and fundraising events organized on a state-by-state basis, as well as major gifts from individuals.

In the past, individual giving accounted for about 10% of non-box office funds raised by the company. Today, its relative importance has increased to approximately 25%. While corporate sponsorship remains important and still brings in larger distinct sums, the growth potential of the individual giving program is significant.

A major gift from an individual, a couple or a group of people can make a real difference for donors and the company. There are several examples of new works of chamber music that have been commissioned as a result of donations. It is usually an emotional and a very rewarding experience for benefactors to witness the premiere of a new work that they know would not have been created without their support:

"We all had the most terrific evening – thank you!!! The concert was spectacularly good; it's a long, long time since I've heard a quartet as good as the Takács. The Bartok was a revelation and Carl's work outstanding and delightful. Thank you very much for your part in organizing all this. Participating in the commissioning and realisation of Carl's new work is one of the most rewarding things we've ever done." Musica Viva donor, December 2004

Directing donations towards the appropriate purpose is a matter of striking the balance between the company's needs and the donor's interest. It is not always possible to reconcile the two. When it proves impossible, there is only one thing to do: the company cannot accept the gift. Mary Jo Capps recalls one instance where Musica Viva returned a \$10,000 gift as it was not able to commission the kind of work the donor had in mind. "We spent quite a bit of time on this and tried several different approaches, but in the end could not make this work. It was far better for our relationship with this donor to be honest about it and return the gift. On-going unsuccessful attempts on our part to put his money to some use would have only damaged our credibility. I'm pleased to say we have a continuing good relationship with this supporter."

Ms Capps estimates that she spends about 20% of her time on establishing and maintaining relationships with key supporters that are the foundation of success in philanthropy, and where appropriate also asks for gifts. She admits that this is not only because it is part of the CEO role, but also because she enjoys the involvement with benefactors. Fundraising program manager

Hannah Penman observes that for their part, donors clearly appreciate the personal attention they receive:

"... a quick thank you for this morning to you, Musica Viva, World According to James and the kids and teachers. It was sensational. For reasons I am baffled by I found it a quite amazingly moving experience. I really will remember this morning for a very long time."
From a donor after a visit to a Musica Viva In Schools performance, November 2004.

It all comes back to the fundraising truism that "money is not the basis of a relationship; it is the expression of a relationship", and managing relationships well is the key to philanthropic success.

Acknowledgment:

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Reference:

To find out more about Musica Viva's fundraising program, see <http://www.mva.org.au/2004/donations/>

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