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ADVISORY
BOARD
for the ARTS

Transforming Arts Organizations Worldwide

Revamping Fundraising Galas

July 2023

Research Questions

What changes, innovations have organizations implemented to revitalize their main fundraising galas/events?

Overall structure of galas

- Who can attend the event? Who typically does attend? Are there honorees?
- Did the pandemic lead to any changes that will remain permanent?
- Have your EDI goals/values shifted approaches to fundraising events? If so, what have been the successes/challenges/implications of these changes?
- Do you host your galas on-site or do you rent a dedicated venue?
- If you rent, do you usually rent from the same venue or try to change every year?
- Could you walk us through your main fundraising gala?
- What type of event is it? What is the typical structure?

Experiential components

- How have you integrated performance/artistic programming into the gala experience? What worked well? What didn't?
- Have you made changes to the attendee experience (i.e. mixing and mingling more than seated dinner), and why?
- Has there been an effort to make the gala more of a community event (or something outside the typical sit-down gala structure)?
- Do you have an auction at your gala? If not (or if you have removed it), how do you keep donors engaged who have enjoyed that experience in the past?

Fundraising outcomes and objectives

- What proportion of annual contributed income comes from your gala(s)?
- What percentage of your fundraising goals/ total typically comes from tables?
- Do you raise/seek additional upfront pledges before the event?
- What is your target for funds raised prior to the event?
- What are the expected contributions/ participations from board members?
- Do you have gala sponsors? How do you solicit/ select sponsors? What is the giving expectations for sponsors?
- What are the most successful or engaging fundraising activities at the event itself? (games, buy-in events, fund a dream, auction, etc.)

Resources and prices

- How would you describe the time-spend for staff? Is it where you wish it would be?
- What would you say are the biggest activities staff spend time on?
- Have you done anything to successfully reduce staff time?
- What is your volunteer or committee structure for planning the event? How satisfied are you with the level of involvement they have?
- How do you manage/update the committee?
- What is the pricing structure for the event? What benefits does each ticket tier receive?
- Have there been any changes to the pricing in recent years? What was the reaction?

Participant Organizations



New World Symphony



Common Trends and Takeaways

General gala observations

- Overall, organizations have gone back to in-person gala events, but have maintained online fundraising options like online silent auctions.
- The question about increasing access to galas seems limited and only relevant for organizations that have made more concerted efforts to diversify their board.
- Due to inflation and increased costs per person, many organizations have raised the prices for their gala especially raising the price for single tickets.
- Most gala events in terms of their structure include some artistic performance piece and can take upwards of 5 hours from start to end.
- Galas remain a critical piece of annual contributed income, hovering around 15-20% of total annual fundraising in general.
- More conventional galas with sit-down dinners tend to welcome more traditional guests like donors and board members. While other models attract more first-time visitors.

Takeaway and lessons

- Managing board expectations around fundraising is a challenge for many organizations and creating clear guidelines for participation can help.
- Day-of fundraising activities remain prevalent in most galas, but the mix of those activities varies based on goals and staff capacity. There seems to be a general push to streamline the number of day-of onsite fundraising pushes.
- Many organizations face similar challenges of re-engaging gala attendees beyond the single event - some provide gala donors with similar benefits to annual fund donors.
- Organizations are looking at ways to increase the storytelling piece of their galas as well as the social impact to further donations and goodwill.
- Most organizations host their galas onsite to reduce costs and to engage people in their venue. Smaller scale events can be held off-site.
- There are interesting opportunities to leverage community networks to help in selling tickets, tables and general fundraising- which in turn frees up time from event staff
- Working with external partners especially for day-of management is worth the investment to protect staff time for core fundraising activities.

Report Outline



**1. Key Takeaways and
Structural Considerations**



**2. Creative Examples
From the Field**



**3. Interview Snapshots
and Appendix**



1. Key Takeaways and Structural Considerations

We have organized the Key takeaways in the following themes:



Event purpose, design and structure: Understanding how the core purpose of your event determines event components and design



Event logistics and management: Assessing staff requirements and overall logistics to manage your event



Audience considerations and working with partners: Anticipating certain audience trends and working with partners to support in fundraising



Establishing Your Events' Core Purpose

Emphasis on Stewardship

While the overall objective of hosting galas is to raise funds for organizations, the actual event itself in the way it is designed can focus more on stewarding relationships with major donors and offering them opportunities for networking with other lead supporters. Stewardship focused events usually have less or no day-of fundraising activities and have secured the fundraising objective through table and ticket sales.

Colorado Ballet makes intentional changes to shift focus to awareness and prestige

- Eliminated paddle raise
- Eliminated silent auction
- Live auction remains with more mission aligned items
- Launched Wishing Tree concept to replace paddle raise revenue
- Increased table prices to raise more pre-event
- With the removal of the paddle raise could present a full-length contemporary ballet (30 mins) with our orchestra.

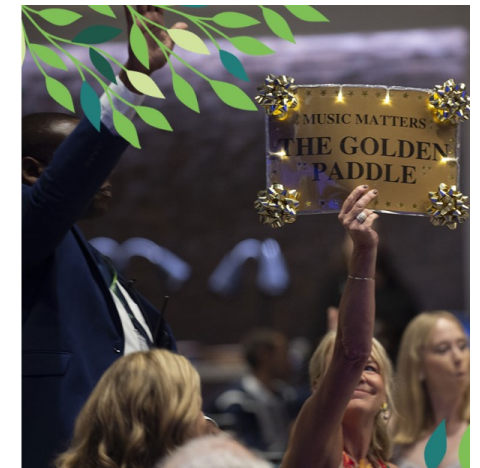


Emphasis on Raising Funds

More traditional gala events not only seek to raise funds pre-event through ticket and table sales, but also during the day-of activities. These galas tend to include dedicated moments to solicit more support, especially from table guests who may not have contributed already. There is still a focus on social mingling and networking, but also a more attention to gift solicitation and storytelling.

Ravinia's Junior Board Gala engages younger donors with day-of fundraising activities

- Ticket sales ensure the overall event breaks even to over cost-per-person
- To ensure a net profit, the event must focus on more day-of fundraising activities
- Ticket prices are \$250 for standard, and \$325 for a VIP option
- Day-of fundraising activities include: silent auction, live auction, paddle raise, and raffle
- The event includes an honoree, which helps by bringing in a wider network



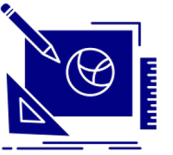
Determining Day-of Fundraising Components



Depending on the objective of the event, timing of different event components and staff capacity, there are different considerations around the kinds of on-site fundraising activities organization have maintained, added or removed.

	Paddle raise	Raffle	Live auction	Silent auction	Table solicitations
Added/Kept	Seattle Rep has maintained their paddle raise, however in their most recent gala they made the paddle raise online, thereby increasing engagement and access for audiences at home.	Instead of doing more time consuming live or silent auctions, the Missouri Symphony held a more scalable raffle with prime gifts including a chance to perform with percussionists.	Colorado Ballet maintained their live auction to push more mission-aligned opportunities. The live auction is a critical piece to ZACH Theatre financial model above their smaller paddle raise.	Ravinia’s Junior Board has maintained a variety of fundraising events day-of with their silent auctions usually raising upwards of 90K.	To push for more day of funding across both their galas, they included QR codes on tables in lieu of envelopes to encourage all guests to give.
Removed	Due to the event configuration at New World Symphony, with diners in multiple spaces- they would not be able to host a single paddle raise but would need multiple in each space. Too hard to orchestrate.	Generally speaking it seems that raffles are easier to manage, but do not raise the same funds as live or silent auctions. So depending on capacity an objectives, it may be worth considering other activities.	Across our interviews, only Colorado Ballet, Ravinia and ZACH Theatre offer live auctions. The time commitment to secure auction items and run the live auction is often cited as a barrier , despite considerable funds raised.	Marin Theatre hosted a smaller event this year, so they chose to replace the more labor-intensive silent auction with a raffle. They would consider bringing a more reduced and select-item silent auction back in future editions.	Colorado Ballet replaced more direct pledge cards on tables with their Wish Tree to solicit gifts in what felt like a more organic and spontaneous way.

Artistic Performance: Making It Worth the Time



When adding an artistic performance to a gala event, the most common concern interviewees reported was the event length — sometimes, up to 4 or 5 hours. **Guests, however, seem overall content with longer durations as long as there is a variety of programming.** The key is to balance a performance with other agenda items, including mingling, food & drink, and fundraising opportunities. Below are considerations to keep in mind to strike this balance effectively.



Format

- Depending on your artistic genre, certain choices should be made about how long the performance can be. Full opera performances are not as suitable as **condensed concerts**, for example.
- Shorter concerts may also allow you to attract bigger-name artists who might otherwise not be able to commit to a full opera run.



Artist Logistics

- A gala performance can be an opportunity for guests to experience performance in a new way — for instance, MOSY had their orchestra perform in the center of the dining room along with the tasting menu.
- It is important to check with or prepare artists for the limitations of these performances — in the above example, the food service background noise was at times challenging.



What To Skip?

- Organizations who have added or maintained artistic programs in their galas all emphasized how important it is to do so — especially to connect with their mission.
- Fundraising opportunities can be a place to cut in favor of performance — Colorado ballet decided to remove the time intensive paddle raise, which freed up time for a 30-minute contemporary ballet.

Integrating artists with community: Ravinia Festival had an exciting performance from Heather Headley at their Women's Board Gala, and went one step forward to tie the concert directly to their mission — Headley performed one song alongside students from the Ravinia education program. Finding ways to integrate your own values-driven work into artistic performances make them both a draw to attend and a reminder of what attendees' funds support.

Integrating Digital Successfully



Digitizing components of gala events can serve to facilitate certain aspects of event management such as data input and payment processing. It can also support fundraising goals by expanding accessibility and the pool of prospective donors to engage.



Creating an interactive website

To best collect “votes” for their individual star dancers, Charlotte Ballet has set up a dedicated website for their gala which features the bios for their dancing pairs, and allows people to “vote”/donate online for their selected dancer.

The website is set up as a **leadership board**, so all participants can track their fundraising progress against each other. This creates a **healthy and fun spirit of competition**.

Website ensures also all transactions are **directly pushed into their donor database**. Avoiding staff hours of manual data entry.



Maintaining virtual offers

Seattle Rep made a commitment to increasing the access to their gala. **Therefore, they maintained the hybrid model, so people could access the event either in person or at home.**

Virtual attendees not only **enjoyed livestream content and performances** but also got to participate in a **virtual paddle raise** alongside audiences in the room.

By making their paddle raise virtual, Seattle Rep was able to **broaden the scope for potential donors bidding** from home as well as onsite, thereby combining access and fundraising goals.



Using QR Codes Day-of

With an increased shift towards day-of fundraising goals for Ravinia festival introduced **QR codes last year to facilitate digital donations**. With the pandemic they were confident this tool would be easy for all users.

Ravinia has always had options to give night-of in the form of an envelope. With the added QR codes that increased access last year they **saw a tripling of how much was raised night-of, nearly \$30K**.

The only issue with increased online payments are the **associated fees lost to the organization**.



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Managing Staff Time with External Support



Gala events are timely and costly to put on. Many organizations consider the time and commitment these events require from their staff with different solutions to support their development team- whether that includes involving other departments and staff as well as external planners.



In some cases development teams do the heavy lifting... but it is important to protect their time

“Since this is such a big part of the development budget it feels like a natural part of their workflow right now. I think other departments who help feel like it’s a much bigger burden (production, marketing). It feels like it’s extra for them.”

~

“We’re a small team, it was essential that we have an outside event planner that we work with. We made that clear moving forward that we have to have that. Doesn’t mean that my person internally (who does many other things besides donor events) doesn’t still do a lot.”

~

“We’re a reduced staff, half what we were pre-pandemic... We don’t have an on-site development team, we work with remote/consultants.”

~

“As special events manager the month of Feb is my crazy month. With development leading up to the gala we do work on weekend- but really just that month before. Otherwise, we manage a good work life balance the rest of the year.”



External support is often critical to manage and orchestrate the day-of operations and worth the investment

“Luckily, we work with an amazing caterer they are phenomenal - know exactly what they are doing and they have the right staff.”

~

“We sometimes struggle with other teams not understanding how much work goes into it - it would be way too much for our team alone.”

~

“We outsource some of the event stuff in some ways here - like all the registration and seating we hire a company to do here.”

~

“We do have a 3rd party event planner.. He is so beneficial. He can leverage his larger network to help with catering, tent, rentals etc. He is instrumental those relationship.”

~

“Our ED was great to talk to groups and get promotion out but from planning side we had hired an event planner for day of execution and decorate tables. Also had an orchestra planner...”



Facilitating Board Engagement

The most common challenge we heard across calls — and the biggest use of staff time — was keeping board leaders accountable to their responsibilities in planning the event. While there is no one-size-fits-all solution, one organization shared a tool that helped to keep their gala chair on task.

New World Symphony's 35th Anniversary Gala Saturday, March 4, 2023

Expectations of the Gala Chair

The New World Symphony's annual Galas are among the most exciting and anticipated cultural and social events in South Florida. They are instrumental in raising significant funds and provide crucial annual support for NWS's core programs. NWS's 35th Anniversary Gala will take place on Saturday, March 4, 2023, featuring world-renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma as the guest artist.

The Grand Opening Gala on January 29, 2011, celebrated the opening of the New World Center, NWS's spectacular Frank Gehry-designed campus, and was one of the most successful cultural fundraisers in South Florida's history. This achievement would not have been possible without the incredible dedication of the event chairs, Susan D. Kronick and Edward Manno Shumsky.

The fundraising goal NWS's 35th Anniversary Gala is \$2,500,000. The current expense forecast for the event is \$621,000. If the fundraising goal is met (or exceeded) and expenses are as expected (or lower), this would result in an expense ratio of just under 25%, keeping in line with historical averages.

NWS's annual Gala is the most important fundraising event of the fiscal year for the institution, with the gross fundraising goal of \$2,500,000 representing nearly a quarter of the FY2022-23 approved annual fund budget. All NWS Trustees contribute financially to the gala in addition to numerous other prominent philanthropists and community members. As Chair of NWS's 30th Anniversary Gala, Sarah Arison made a gift of \$300,000, setting a new financial expectation for all the Gala Chairs to come.

Gala Chair Responsibilities:

- Commit to a purchase of a Diamond Benefactor Gala table (\$300,000)
- Promote the event and table sales to your circle of influence, with emphasis on the top-tier levels
- Act as the event spokesperson in the community and be available for media opportunities
- Use your influence to facilitate relationships between NWS and prospective corporate sponsors
- Work with NWS staff on the creative concepts for the evening and have an active role in the selection of event collateral, dinner menu, décor, and entertainment (*optional*)

Gala Chairs are individuals of affluence and influence in the community. They should have an affinity for classical music and a history of support for NWS's mission.

Gala Chairs should be committed to the success of the gala through their direct involvement and be able to hold others accountable in a sensitive and positive manner. Gala Chairs must be willing to take ownership of the event.

Having clear, written expectations for your gala chair helps maintain a strong sense of accountability towards specific goals and responsibilities. This can allow a chair who is equipped and excited for the role to self-select.

New World Symphony makes the stakes clear in their guidelines — one of the chair's most important roles is as fundraiser, and clearly stating the importance of the gala as a funding opportunity creates key context for why their responsibilities are so crucial.

Specific responsibilities are written out explicitly in job description style, emphasizing the professionalism of this role and the commitment it requires, both financial and time.

Ownership is a constant emphasis throughout the document — and many organizations reported that with a highly involved committee chair, the work of the development team decreases notably.

Engaging the Committee

Organizations who have full board committees dedicated to overseeing gala planning shared several tools and tactics to best communicate with these teams, including:

- Sharing **regular fundraising progress reports** that show overall gaps and gaps by specific board member
- One organization relies heavily on tools that allow for **regular (and less formal) communication** with their board, like Slack, to make sure members are kept constantly up-to-date with urgent needs.

Considering Your Event Prices



Based on event priority and fundraising goals before and during their events, organizations determine their different pricing strategies. Some also consider how to make certain areas/components of their events more accessible, with tiered pricing offers where lower priced tickets get reduced access, but can still enjoy a qualitative event.

	Charlotte Ballet	Colorado Ballet	Missouri Symphony	New World Symphony	Ravinia Festival	ZACH Theatre
Highest table/ sponsorship	Presenting sponsor \$50,000 Highest table \$17,500	\$25,000	\$7,500	\$300,000	\$50,000 (Women's Board)	\$25,000
Other table-sponsor ranges	\$12,500-\$4,000	\$5,000-\$15,000	\$5,000-\$300	\$150,000-\$25,000	\$25,000-\$8,500 women's board	\$15,000-\$7,500
Single ticket prices	\$1,150 (individual table seat) \$250-\$400 (no sit down dinner)	\$250 (YP) & \$500	\$150 single tickets \$1,500 (10 person table)	\$5,000-\$2,500	\$2,500-\$850 WB \$325-\$250 YB	\$750
Interview notes on costs changes	Did increase pricing due to general inflation and increased cost to serve. Honored some renewal corporate sponsorships at lower-level this year.	Based on benchmark study comparing other galas in town they raised their lowest table to \$5,000. Also raised single ticket from \$350 to \$500 and Young Patrons ticket from \$150 to \$250	In 2022 they celebrated their Golden Gala (50 th anniversary) but that was more of an exception. They will focus fundraising around smaller more intimate social dinner/music pairings	Prices have been steady since moved into their new space. First year in new venue tested a single ticket over \$1K and couldn't go back after that. Used to have a Young Patron tickets for \$300	With different tiered pieces guests receive distinct day-of benefits, e.g. VIP cocktail hours,	The lowest ticket price and lowest table price were up 50% compared to last year. Raised single ticket price from \$500 to \$750 and lowest table price from \$5,000 to \$7,500.

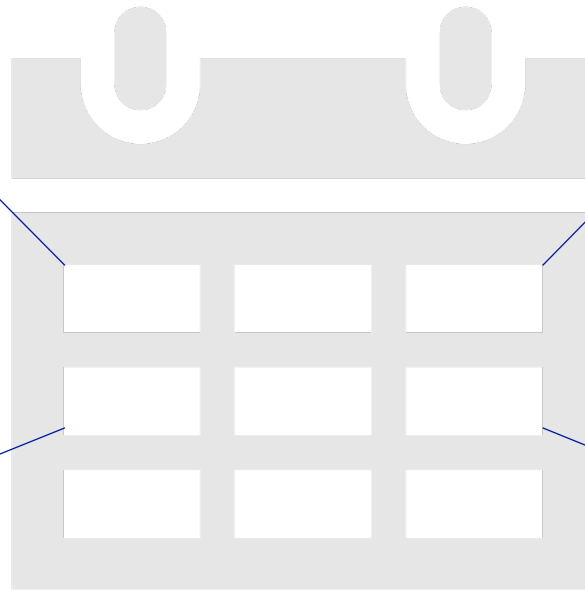
When Scheduling, Consistency Is Key



To ensure regular attendance from key board members and donors, a gala should have a consistent date — even if this means sacrificing some seasonal tie-ins or guest artist opportunities. Several organizations shared the decisions they made when deciding on the date for their gala.



Colorado Ballet previously themed their gala around one of their ballet productions. This meant that the **gala date would change depending on the season, making it challenging to find a consistent audience.** Their gala is now tied to their April Masterworks mixed rep program, so it will always be in the spring.



ZACH Theatre schedules their gala on the **same weekend every year.** In doing so, they ensure that the entire organization has awareness and a regular cadence of work. Additionally, board members and frequent guests can **more easily plan their calendars ahead.** Staff is however considering a more flexible calendar for future editions to better fit internal calendar.



MOSY includes guest artists in their gala — and acknowledge it can be tempting to schedule the gala around the artist's availability. However, they recommend **fixing a date first, and then finding artists whose schedules work.** This allows for greater consistency and control to avoid guest conflicts.



Ravinia Festival changed the timing of their Junior Board “Music Matters” event from September to May, **placing it ahead of their festival season.** This opened up an impactful stream of **potential silent auction items** that tie into VIP experiences at the festival.

Leveraging Your Venue When you Can



The majority of organizations interviewed use their own venue for the event, with an overwhelming amount of positive aspects to hosting on-site, versus challenges.



Benefits to Hosting On-Site

- **Having greater access during planning:** the New World Symphony shared that in the week leading up to their gala, having the ability to easily walk into the event space to check on set-up progress was a major advantage, as it allowed for greater control over details.
- **Engaging board committees:** in the days leading up to an on-site gala, bringing board members through the space can help them feel more connected to the planning process — having flexibility to do so on their time, versus an external venue's, is key.
- **Celebrating your organization:** being on-site provides a range of opportunities to connect guests more deeply to your institution. Ravinia's Women's Board Gala's iconic tent creates buzz around the event and highlights the campus. When Marin Theatre Company hosted their on-site gala, they received amazing feedback about the ability to take backstage tours during the evening.



Caution To Consider When Hosting

- **Space limitations:** some organizations dealt with smaller spaces for the seated dinner portion of the gala, requiring them to have two dining rooms — but reported that this challenge was still worth the advantages of holding the event at home.

When To Go Off-Site

In certain circumstances, an external venue can be the more appropriate choice — especially for smaller gala events. For example:

- The Missouri Symphony rented a popular wedding venue for their dinner-based musical tasting menu event — though one lesson learned was to find a space with as many items embedded in the rental price as possible
- Marin Theatre Company is considering partnering with a local venue for a concert-style fundraiser, which would be on-site at the partner location.



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New Audience Trends and Anticipating Last Minute Purchases



While most organizations rely on a majority if not all of their fundraising goals to come from tickets and table sales, there has been some noted trends that sales in general have been happening more last minute and closer to event dates. This has added a level of complexity to project event planning and suggests a need to be more flexible and open to later commitments.

Case example: Lessons from The Missouri Symphony Orchestra

Challenge of predicting last minute buyers that seems a growing trend

“Could be a post-covid thing... we are ‘battling the couch.’”

“In our communication we were very clear about our closing date, however we weren’t selling as many tickets or sponsorships as early as quickly or as heavily as we hoped.”

“But that was our first year, so this edition was a lot of waiting and learning.”

Risk of under-cutting your own sales if you worry about slow sales

“Because we were worried as tickets were not selling as early as we hoped- we weren’t really sure what the final outcome would be...”

“I had capped us at 150 for the dinner because for catering their deadline was 2 weeks before the event in order to prepare.”

“But we got a lot of people the week before the event, so we could’ve sold more...”

Knowing audiences trends can help make future predictions

“It was a bummer to have that slight schedule issue with catering where we had to give them figures before audiences were finishing buying tickets.”

“This is something we will need to anticipate next year when we make our predictions.”

Gathering Audience Feedback



Gala 2023 Survey

Please take a moment to complete the survey below as we begin to plan for next year's Gala.

Kindly submit your response by Friday, October 21.

allyson.arnone@advisoryboardarts.com [Switch account](#)



* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email

Gathering direct feedback from your past and potential gala attendees is a valuable exercise to understand where you can make more drastic changes – adjustments that may feel risky without audience listening.

Ravinia Festival fielded a survey to their past gala participants that asked them to share:

- Overall importance of the gala
- Preferences for performance type (classical, pops, etc.)
- Preferences for gala timing (month, day of week)
- Openness to moving the gala from the signature tent location
- Gala attire preferences
- Appetite for on-site fundraising
- Sentiments towards ticket cost

Understanding these preferences allowed the Festival team to confidently make changes to the time of year they held their gala and to the amount of fundraising they did on-site (including adding a paddle raise).

Creative Ways to Leverage Community Networks



Beyond working with donors and board members to connect with their networks for the purpose of fundraising and ticket sales, organizations shared how they leveraged other local community networks to push attendance and fundraising goals.



Connecting with local charities for social impact

Charlotte Ballet's unique fundraising model where proceeds are split between the Ballet and local charities helps to position the Ballet within the community and creates goodwill with diverse audiences. By allowing star dancers to select charities of their choice to support on top of raising funds for the ballet, the gala explicitly promotes broader social impact for the city- which helps boost fundraising overall.



Activating leaders for more direct fundraising

Charlotte Ballet's gala dance competition with 6-7 community leaders in different sectors, enables the Ballet to tap into many different social and professional networks during a single event. The selected star dancers raise funds directly soliciting their colleagues, family and friends. A great portion of funds raised are therefore activated outside of the Ballet's own internal development team, going beyond existing donors.



Leveraging partner social networks for promotions and changed perceptions

Through the model of their food and music pairing evening, the Missouri Symphony was able to tap into the social networks of the partner chef. This mutually beneficial cross-promotion helped create buzz for the event as well as connect the symphony with local businesses. The partnership also helped place the symphony and classical music in a new lens with many first-time visitors.

Engaging Attendees Beyond the Single Event



Across a few of our interviews, organizations discussed how their gala attendees are not their typical audiences. In some cases they are neither board members or regular donors or attendees, so there is a desire to capture their interest and engage them beyond the gala event. This has proven a challenge overall, with some ideas on how to re-engage.



New World Symphony

New World Symphony offers a variety of season benefits to their gala donors

Benefits for gala donors mirror the benefits for annual fund donors. Benefits managed by their advancement team after the event.

High value hospitality benefits:

- Post-concert dinner invitations with artists and Fellows
- Post-concert reception invitations artists and Fellows
- Top donor dinner/ event invitations
- Lunch with President and Fellows
- Concierge service for NWS concerts and events
- Opportunity to host a private chamber concert in donor's home
- Concert tickets



MOSY uses marketing to reconnect post-event

Leverages their step and repeat to collect attendee emails and share photos from the event with their thank you emails. This creates more connection and they invite people to report their photos as well.



Charlotte Ballet increases awareness and encourages event attendance

Charlotte Ballet tries to recapture sponsors and people who attended the gala with discount tickets to performances. While this conversion to regular performance attendees may be difficult, the model of the gala with the dance competition is such that it increases awareness with all new potential audiences who might never have attended a Ballet performance on their own. This alone is a great opportunity for the Ballet.

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Charlotte Ballet's Star Dancers Boost Fundraising

Goal of new format

In 2013 Charlotte Ballet completely revised their gala fundraising format. From a more traditional sit-down dinner they designed a new concept around the famous show "Dancing with Stars". *Dancing with the Stars of Charlotte* invites a healthy spirit of competition to raise funds on behalf of local leaders participating in the dance competition. The event supports increasing awareness around the ballet and positions the ballet within the community in support/ collaboration with other local non-profits.

Description of Events

The dancers

- 6-7 community members paired with dance professionals
- Selection of star dancers is very strategic- leveraging different networks
- Dancers from different sectors as well- helps generate the healthy competition spirit
- Winners of previous year invited to co-chair next edition
- The winners are very instrumental in choosing the next cohort of dancers
- Commit 2 months of rehearsals

The fundraising model

- Dancers solicit support from their networks to "vote" for their favorite dancing couple
- Each \$ vote is a \$ contributed
- Dancers select a charity to split their contributions with
- They are not just dancing for the ballet but other projects and local organizations as well – social impact piece to the event
- On top of competition votes, dancers also help sell ticket and tables from their networks
- Very active community involvement in fundraising process alleviates time for Ballet staff

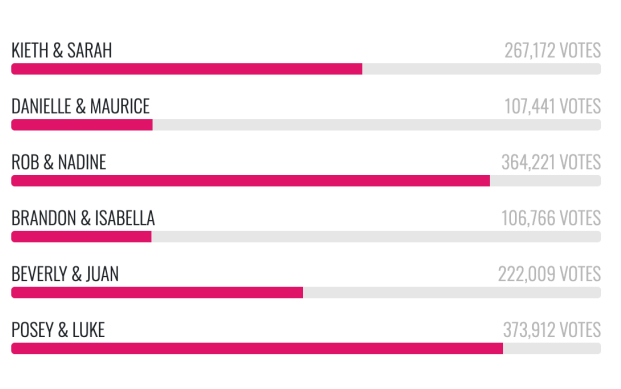


\$373,912
POSEY & LUKE
Posey Mealy, Community Leader, is dancing with Charlotte Ballet's Luke Csordas to benefit Crossnore Communities for Children.

[READ BIO](#)

Results, Costs, and Profits

- ✓ They raised \$1.4M this year, with the lead dancer raising \$372K.
- ✓ The ballet splits the proceeds with pre-selected charities, thereby creating goodwill and connection in the city.
- ✓ This year the ballet raised 633K net for itself, and 503K for other charities (previous gala structure netted 200K)
- ✓ Already expressed interest in participating in 2024- showing the model is still working and creating excitement



Colorado Ballet's Giving Tree Reframes On-Site Fundraising

Goal of new format

Description of Events

Results, Costs, and Profits

In Denver, there is a culture of fundraising at gala events, and Colorado Ballet previously included several types of fundraising opportunities at their event. These included a silent auction (first in-person, then moved online), wine sale, live auction, and paddle raise. To **streamline the on-site fundraising opportunities**, the organization decided to end the paddle raise and instead work on **securing pre-gala commitments through a new format: the wish tree**.

Building the Tree

- The Ballet worked with Handsome Little Devils, a production company that previously contributed set pieces to their *Nutcracker*, to commission the construction of the tree.
- The tree was built in such a way that the theme can be changed annually to coordinate with the gala.
- A “teaser” video of the tree’s construction was posted on the Ballet’s website to create buzz and excitement for the gala.
- At the event, the tree was installed prominently as a conversation piece in the theater foyer just after the step and repeat.

Fundraising Opportunities

- The Ballet first created opportunities for board members and high-level donors to provide significant funding towards the tree in advance of the gala — one board member created a board-only matching opportunity for her \$50K gift to the tree.
- At the gala, attendees could donate directly to the wish tree. If they did so, they would receive a special LED bracelet — creating a sense of “missing out” for those who did not contribute.

- ✓ The **Ballet surpassed their \$200,000 fundraising goal** for the wish tree in its first year
- ✓ The fully-constructed tree, a one-time cost that they can leverage as a **signature element of their gala for years to come**



The Missouri Symphony Leverages All the Senses

Goal/ Shifts made

As an organization the MOSY had never had a large traditional gala event despite being around for over 50 years. After celebrating their 50th anniversary with a gala event, the board wanted to continue leveraging the potential of fundraising events, feeling they had been missing out on those stewardship opportunities. **With the appointment of Wende Wagner as Director of Philanthropy, there was an institutional shift to dedicate resources to fundraising and host annual events to support the organization.** Wanted to create a scalable event the leveraged their music and was immersive and different from other galas in the areas.

Description of Events

Early iteration- MOSY on the Rock

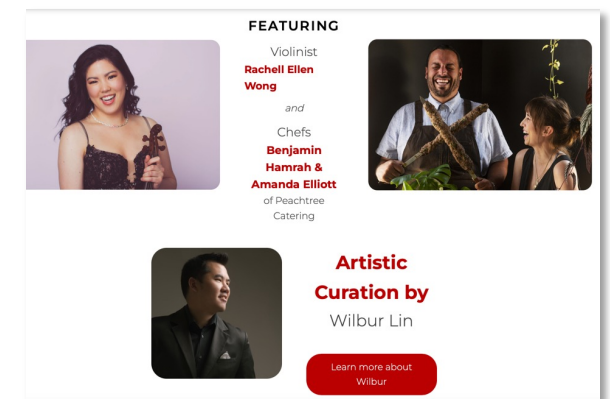
- MOSY on the Rocks, hosted St. Valentines day 2022
- Bartender paired a piece of music with a cocktail, cheese also provided
- 100\$ ticket and everything was included
- Intimate event- 15-20 couple capacity
- Artistic director talked about music piece and recordings shared during the tasting
- End of night could pick their favorite cocktail from the flight, and get the full glass

Expanded offer- MOSY Sound Bites

- Focused on the idea that culinary experiences being people together
- The artistic director choose Vivaldi 4 seasons with the chef - 4 course meal for each season
- Orchestra played a few pieces inspired by spring or Vivaldi and then the guest performer played Vivaldi at the end of each course
- Opened to anybody who wanted to come
- Anyone willing to pay the ticket prices
- Most attendees to file to MOSY
- No auctions, but day-of raffles

Results, Costs, and Profits

- ✓ Successful sold-out event. Already 3 tables pledged for next year- great sign of encouragement and success/ appeal of this event.
- ✓ For next addition lessons learned around last-minute purchases, could've increased their capacity.
- ✓ The raffles and fund the need push raised additional 15K day of.



Marin Theatre Company Goes For Smaller Events

Goal of new format

Description of Events

Results, Costs, and Profits

During a period of leadership changes and updating their values post-pandemic, Marin Theatre Company realized that the typical gala structure was no longer sustainable for their team or aligned with their vision. Instead, they hosted a **smaller “pivot event,”** inviting donors and friends to a **backstage tour of their shop and design process.** This new approach has inspired the team to seek out future **smaller events to celebrate the company.**

A Glimpse into the Process

- The “pivot event” was held at the theater and included a behind-the-scenes tour of the shop. The MTC team created a display of props and costumes that walked guests through the process from design to completion.
- Guests also got to tour the stage to see the actor’s perspective of the hall.
- Alongside the backstage tours, guests enjoyed an intimate cocktail hour and dinner in the lobby.
- Instead of a silent auction, on-site fundraising was limited to a raffle to match the smaller scale of the party.

Ideas of Future Opportunities

- The positive feedback from the on-site behind-the-scenes event led the MTC team to brainstorm other ways they can engage their community on a smaller scale, including:
 - Partnering with a local concert hall for a cabaret fundraiser concert with a headlining artist to attract attendance
 - Hosting a drag brunch alongside a show that deals with themes that speak to drag
 - Tying larger events to moments for the broader community, like the county’s annual local block party.

- ✓ One of the primary benefits of the pivot was how deeply it engaged the current donor base after a time when they could not attend live shows — MTC received **positive feedback about the tour** and their **donors appreciated the smaller scale.**
- ✓ The smaller event still attracted new audiences, and around **10-15% of attendees were newer to the organization** — including some local students who were hoping to learn from theater professionals.



Report Outline



**1. Key Takeaways and
structure considerations**



**2. Creative Examples
From the field**



**3. Interview Snapshots
and Appendix**

Participant Benchmarks- General Finances (Comparison FY19-20 IRS990 Forms)

For the purpose of benchmarking organizations against more standardized documents, we have referred back to IRS990 forms for 2019-2020 when possible. Until 990 forms catch up with more current budgets, we felt this was a better practice for comparison, despite some outdated figures.

	Charlotte Ballet	Colorado Ballet	Marin Theatre Company	Missouri Symphony	New World Symphony	Ravinia Festival	ZACH Theatre
Information source	IRS990 2019-2020	IRS990 2019-2020	IRS990 2019-2020	IRS990 2019	IRS990 2019-2020	IRS990 2018-2019*	IRS 2019-2020
Annual operating budget	\$7,262,299	\$9,393,810	\$3,603,454	\$586,855	\$20,963,403	\$49,567,128	\$7,539,671
Total revenue	\$7,089,238	\$9,808,216	\$2,901,101	\$751,825	\$26,085,222	\$46,893,017	\$6,929,912
Total contributed income	\$3,800,526	\$3,327,496	\$1,829,522	\$323,585	\$23,479,661	\$14,604,686	\$2,950,579
General fundraising expenses	\$473,756	\$618,716	\$378,136	/	\$2,971,837	\$2,520,895	\$578,817

*Most recent publicly available 990 form for Ravinia Festival

Appendix- Charlotte Ballet- Dancing with the Stars



Tickets & Tables

- Corporate sponsor tables 8 or 12 people
- Arabesque individual table seat - \$1,150 (full access to all event components)
- Gold ticket- \$400 (entrance into taste of Charlotte, performance and after party)
- Silver ticket- \$250 (entrance to performance and after party only)



Event Details

- Dancers arrive on a red carpet and greet their guests / step and repeat photo opportunities
- Taste of Charlotte standing food stations and cocktails
- Sponsors go for to a seated dinner
- Dance competition with local community members (aka Star Dancers)
- Company performance
- After winner announced- dance floor opens for party
- From 5:30pm to 12:00am



Venue

- Gala is held offsite at the Knight Theater
- utilizing the Bechtler Museum lobby and outdoor tents for additional space



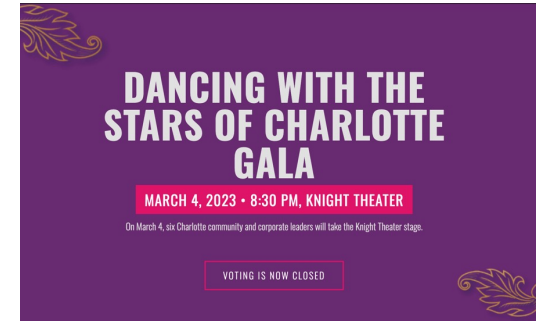
Guests & \$ Raised

- Eclectic crowd
- Mainly Star Dancers networks, colleagues, families, friends etc.
- Harder to get guests to come back to ballet after single event
- 2023 raised total \$1.44M, of which \$633K for the Ballet and \$503K to other charities



Staffing

- Coordination with company dancers and artistic and production for the competition piece of event
- Development- main time spend is on reporting to Star Dancers- checking on their amounts raised and stewarding their experience and involvement
- Do work with external planners for event details, tent, rentals etc.



LEADERS AT A GLANCE

Check out the fundraising competition live via the Star Dancer leaderboard. Support your favorite Star Pair and cast your vote today by purchasing tickets or making a donation. All ticket sales and donations received are split 50/50 with Charlotte Ballet and the Star Dancer's chosen charity. \$1=1 Vote! On March 4, the People's Choice Award will be presented to the Star Pair with the most funds raised. Judges' Choice Award is presented to the Star Pair the judges determine had the best moves.

TOTAL: \$1,441,521



Appendix: Colorado Ballet-The One Gala



Tickets & Tables

- Diamond table 10 guests- \$25,000
- Platinum table 10 guests- \$15,000
- Gold table 10 guests- \$10,000
- Silver table 10 guests- \$5,000
- Single ticket- \$500
- Backstage Barre (YP) ticket- \$250
- Prices have gone up this year- focus on pre-event fundraising



Event Details

- Seated dinner
- From 5:30pm-11:00pm
- Eliminated paddle raise
- Eliminated silent auction
- NEW Wish Tree centre piece to solicit gifts
- Wish Tree also had an online component for virtual donations. The tree was live on line three days prior to the event and closed three days after the event.



Venue

- Onsite at the Opera House where the ballet performs
- Only issue is no space onsite suitable for full 500 person dinner/ so dinner is split in different areas



Guests & \$ Raised

- Mix is starting to change
- Donors, board members and their networks
- No gala honorees
- Ambitious goal of \$500K (\$70K more than last year). Total raised was over \$522K.



Staffing

- Coordination with company dancers and artistic and production for the performance piece
- Big staff time spent on designing invitations, working with gala committee and the Wishing Tree
- Worked with external planners on logistics, rentals etc.



Marin Theatre Company- Backstage Fundraiser



Tickets & Tables

- *N/A – pricing not shared*



Event Details

- Behind-the-scenes tour with props and costumes displayed with explanations about the process
- Also opened up their shop and created a pathway for folks to walk through
- Dinner and cocktail hour
- Raffle instead of a big silent auction
- Model – more of a “friendraising” than traditional; fundraising gala – doing two smaller events in spring and fall
- Looking at doing a possible drag show or drag brunch for next event in Fall/ connected to final season show



Venue

- Onsite at theatre for first backstage fundraising event
- Second event looking to do it off-site



Guests & \$ Raised

- Ended up being a mix - had some loyal donors , a fair amount of folks who brought friends along.
- Theater students who were interested in meeting the folks there, our staff + guests networking
- Estimated 85-90% loyal folks and then 10-15% new people



Staffing

- No on-site development team/ reduced staff
- Work with remote consultants
- Now board seems energize by new model- to get re-involved
- Considering a headliner as a way for board to activate their networks more easily



The Missouri Symphony- Sound Bites



Tickets & Tables

- \$150 single tickets
- \$1,500 table 10 guests
- Sponsorships with full table and visibility \$7,500-\$4,000
- Sponsorships with table tickets and visibility \$3,000-\$500



Event Details

- 5:30pm (1 hour before program) Cocktail reception
- 6:30pm program begins
- Dinner with music and goof pairing / performed by Orchestra
- Guest artist performance
- 2 Raffles
- 3 “fund the need” pledges in-between courses



Venue

- Rented venue 15min out of town/ popular wedding venue
- Issues sound was a little loud for the musicians
- Not an all inclusive venue/ so also added cost



Guests & \$ Raised

- Nice mix of people/ a lot of new to file to the MOSY
- Donors were invited- but accessible price made it, so the attendees were very mixed
- 3 corporate tables sold this year
- \$15,000 in donations/raffle



Staffing

- Limited staff- mainly managed by new Director of Philanthropy
- Marketing Director helped with the invitation/ graphic look
- Board support- lucky they have a board with event planning experience
- Need more volunteers for future editions

MOSY
THE MISSOURI SYMPHONY

RACHELL ELLEN WONG
VIOLINIST

Rachell is a rising star on both the historical performance and modern violin stages. She has performed in numerous countries spanning five continents. Rachell made her first public appearance with Philharmonia Northwest at Age 11 and has since performed as a soloist with orchestras such as Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional de Panamá and the Seattle Symphony. She is also the co-founder of Twelfth Night, an ensemble structured to navigate all genres and instrumentation with ease, from the early baroque to the contemporary.



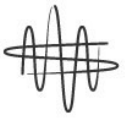
MOSY
THE MISSOURI SYMPHONY

SOUND BITES
AN IMMERSIVE CULINARY EXPERIENCE

Inspired by Vivaldi's Four Seasons

REGISTRATION CLOSES TODAY!

New World Symphony- 35th Anniversary Gala



New World Symphony



Tickets & Tables

- Diamond Benefactor \$300,000 (table for 10 incl.)
- Pearl Benefactor \$150,000 (table for 10 incl.)
- Platinum Benefactor \$100,000 (table for 10 incl.)
- Gold Benefactor \$50,000 (table for 10 incl.)
- Silver Benefactor \$25,000 (table for 10 incl.)
- Single tickets \$5,000 and \$2,500 options



Event Details

- 6:00pm cocktails and hors d'oeuvres
- 7:30pm performance
- 8:30pm dinner
- Around 5 hours total commitment for event duration
- No day-of fundraising activities- except for table gift invitations/pledge cards



Venue

- Host gala at our home every year – new venue opened 2011
- All areas accessible to all guests- too hard to create space limitations



Guests & \$ Raised

- Trustees and regulars and sometimes donors who have never come to a gala before
- Guests of our table hosts are often people we'd never met before
- Got rid of young patron ticket- wasn't selling well so audience was not as young as previous years
- Total raised \$2.68 M and netted revenue over \$2M








Staffing

- House caterer does the production for the event
- 2 FTE staff members on development team who do all our events, gala is our most important. Lots of work for them in the lead-up and then an all hands on deck for advancement to help at the event
- Also work with external events team



Ravinia- Women's and Associate Boards Events



 <p>Tickets & Tables</p>	<p>Women's Board- Gala</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single tickets \$850-\$2,500 • Tables for 10 \$7,000-\$50,000 	<p>Associate Board- Music Matters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$250 standard single ticket • \$325 VIP ticket
 <p>Event Details</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4:30pm Cocktail reception • 6:00pm Concert (90min) • Dinner post concert • Sips and sweets post dinner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starts at 5:00pm • Cocktails with silent auction • Paddle raise • Dinner • Live music and dancing
 <p>Venue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On site bespoke tent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to be held in downtown Chicago • But moved to Ravinia to focus on their own assets • Make event more scalable - in the pavilion
 <p>Guests & \$ Raised</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older audience- donors, board members and their networks • Grosses around \$1M, nets around \$500/\$600K 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger board members and their networks • Typically gross \$650K and net \$300K
 <p>Staffing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall feeling that they are relying/ able to rely less on board involvement/ selling tickets and tables • Some issues as well with EDI piece, and actual board capacity to purchases tickets and tables • Heavier lift ft internal staff to fundraise 	



Appendix- ZACH Theatre's Red Hot & Soul Masquerade



Tickets & Tables

- Versace Presenting sponsor \$25K, 12 person table
- Valentino Producing sponsor \$15K, 12 person table
- Gucci Supporting sponsors 10K , 10 person table
- D&G Table host \$7.5K, 10 guests
- Design Duo sponsor \$2.5K (two tickets)
- Individual ticket \$750



Event Details

- Starts at 6pm
- Cocktail party/ reception
- Sit down dinner
- Performance
- Live auction
- After party



Venue

- All on-site at theatre
- Historically done it outdoors with a tent
- This year we're moving it back inside on-stage



Guests & \$ Raised

- Attendees are typically members/donors.
- Historically this has been very board-driven, board members are expected to buy tables and host their friends.
- \$620K gross fundraising for the 2023 gala



Staffing

- Mainly managed by development staff- part of their budget and expected workflow
- Other departments who help feel like it's a much bigger burden (production, marketing).
- Outsource some of the event components such as registration, slide-show creation/execution, design of the space, etc.

