

**OPERA  
AMERICA**

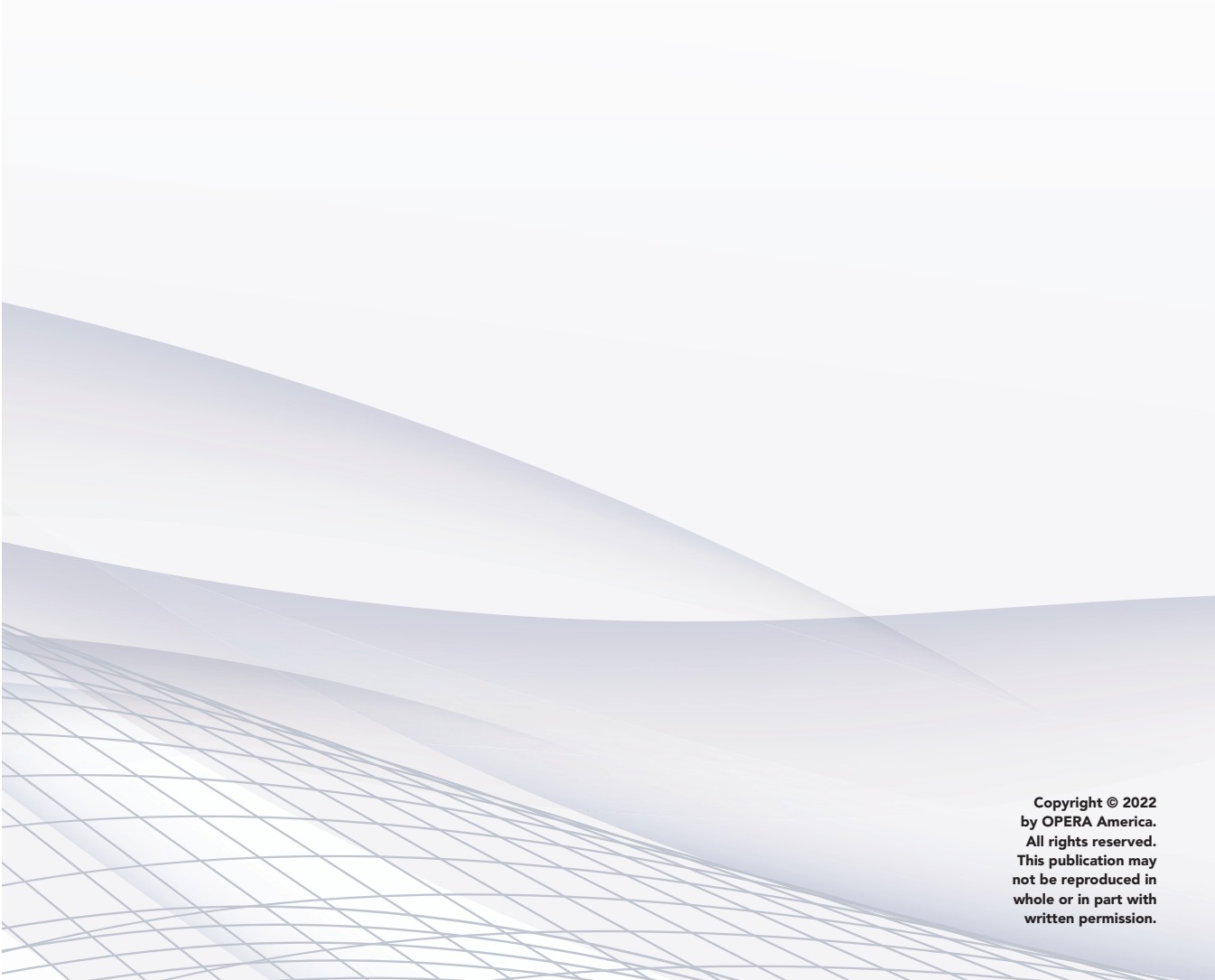
**Community-Centric  
Fundraising  
— FOR —  
Opera Companies**

**2022**

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# INTRODUCTION

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Raising money is essential to the business model of nearly all nonprofit organizations, including opera companies. But do our practices of fundraising support our commitment to enrich the world for everyone in our community? And are they sustainable with future generations of donors?

In recent years, a BIPOC-led group of fundraisers — originating in Seattle and now global in reach — has proposed a need for changing practices of philanthropy. They established [Community-Centric Fundraising](#), a movement “to evolve how fundraising is done in the nonprofit sector” through lenses of social and economic justice. The movement invites the sector to examine established fundraising conventions and aspire toward a more equitable model that promotes belonging, interdependence, and mutual support. It envisions a world in which every nonprofit puts the needs of its community first.

Community-centric fundraising has meaningful implications for the opera industry. Our field continues to fight against perceptions of opera as elitist and erudite. Opera companies have espoused messages of “opera for all” in their marketing and community engagement, yet many engrained fundraising practices undercut these intentions and perpetuate unwelcoming perceptions of the art form: intermission lounges for the privileged, recognition for the worthy, galas for the wealthy, seats at the board table for the rich.

In summer 2020, an OPERA America working group of opera fundraisers stepped forward to consider how the concepts of the Community-Centric Fundraising movement apply to practices at opera companies. The founders of the movement, who established the [10 CCF Principles](#), came from a wide variety of nonprofits. While the fundamentals of fundraising for social causes and fundraising for opera are largely the same, the OPERA America working group noted that the performing arts have unique characteristics not directly addressed by the original principles.

Consequently, our working group expounded on the established concepts of community-centric fundraising. We started by tailoring each of the original 10 principles to align more closely with the opera industry and accompanied these with definitions and thought prompts. We built upon the [CCF Aligned Actions List](#) to develop a list of action steps for opera — concrete examples of how the changes prescribed by the principles could be implemented.

This introduction to “Community-Centric Fundraising for Opera” is meant to bring fundraisers, senior staff, trustees, donors, and others together in dialogue about the movement. At the same time companies are making commitments for diversity in their hiring, casting, and programming, what changes are needed in fundraising? How can a company’s revenue engine align with, reflect, and advance its values?

This document provides a starting point. Lasting, sustainable change will not happen overnight. Not every principle will apply to every company in the same way, nor will every action item make sense in every fundraising operation. Company leaders should discuss their priorities on how to get started with community-centric fundraising.

A final note: The practices of community-centric fundraising cannot exist in isolation. They must be part of an opera company’s organizational commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. They must be supported from the top down, aligned with strategic goals that have been determined with company-wide input. That doesn’t mean that a development manager is powerless without the buy-in of their supervisor; incremental change can begin from the ranks. But to be most effective, staff and board leaders should come together in endorsing the community-centric approach. ■

# DEFINITIONS

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## What Is Community-Centric Fundraising in Opera?

Community-centric fundraising is a fundraising practice that is grounded in equity. It calls on us to bring principles of social and economic justice into our development strategies.

As nonprofit arts organizations, opera companies rely on philanthropy to fulfill their missions and realize productions, activities, and programs. For years, we have espoused a practice of “donor-centric fundraising”: We bend over backward for the donors who make (or could make) our work possible. We put them in the center of everything, giving them status and power through our communications, our board table, our programming, and our time. Donor-centric fundraising is effective at driving dollars, but it has historically come at the expense of other current and potential participants in our work.

Community-centric fundraising proposes a rebalancing of priorities. While we continue to respect donors and build strong relationships with them, it calls for us to place our community — and its many participants — in the center of our service. We relinquish exclusionary and harmful “donor-centric” fundraising practices for more welcoming and sustainable ones. In doing so, the positive impact of our work may be shared more broadly and equally.

## What Are Social and Economic Justice?

Many opera companies have committed themselves to realizing social and economic justice across all areas of service to their communities. Social justice and economic justice are related, but they are not the same.

- **Social Justice:** Social justice calls for a society in which equality across all social groups and races is attained, and where all communities have a place and equal voice at the table. It is the view that everyone deserves equal political and social rights. At our opera companies, we aspire to open the doors of access and opportunity to everyone, particularly those who have historically been unwelcomed and disenfranchised by our organizations.
- **Economic Justice:** Economic justice calls for an economy that builds the common good and benefits people rather than being entirely profit-oriented. It recognizes that the racial wealth gap has long perpetuated economic disparities and strives to create opportunities where all can thrive. At opera companies, we aspire to include all portions of our communities in the creation, production, and enjoyment of opera, regardless of their economic status.

Community-centric fundraising applies these concepts to how we raise money. And it is the work of fundraisers to identify, cultivate, solicit, and steward donors who support and respect a company’s commitment to social justice and economic justice. Fundraisers must work as part of the full company to provide meaningful impact for everyone in the community.

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## Who Is Our Community?

Every opera company should define its community and participants alongside its mission, vision, and values — establishing, in its core charter, its commitment to those it serves, those it wishes to serve, and those it deems part of its service.

The participants of each opera company may differ across geographies, programmatic priorities, and artistic scopes, but they include four main categories:

- 1. Recipient Participants:** Audience members, students, and beneficiaries of community engagement programming with whom the artistic work of the company is shared [“audiences”].
- 2. Practitioner Participants:** Performers, creators, directors, designers, and other artists [“artists”]; staff members and paid interns [“administrators”]; volunteers [“volunteers”]; and board members [“trustees”] who commit time and talent to produce the artistic work and realize the mission of the company.
- 3. Supporting Participants:** Ticket buyers, subscribers, and paid program enrollees [“purchasers”]; and individual donors (including board members), foundations, and other funders [“donors”] who commit money for service or philanthropically toward the artistic work and mission of the company.
- 4. Civic Participants:** Fellow arts organizations, non- and for-profit organizations serving related communities, government agencies and leaders, and other partners [“partners”] who are invested in what the opera company contributes to the local cultural landscape.

*[N.B. Bracketed terms are used as shorthand throughout the document.]*

It’s important to recognize that these categories are not discrete. For example, a board member is likely an audience member (Recipient), a trustee (Practitioner), a subscriber (Supporting), and a donor (Supporting). An operagoer may be an audience member (Recipient), a ticket-buyer (Supporting), and work at a neighborhood educational center (Civic). The four categories highlight the many ways, financially and other, that our communities are part of what we do. The work of every opera company should be driven by an intersectional awareness of the numerous participants it serves.

This intersectionality is responsible for the unique complexity of raising money in the arts: Those who give generously as donors are, more often than not, also recipients of our work. The frequent overlap of the audience member, trustee, and donor cannot skew our priorities; we must remember our commitment to serve all participants in our community and not favor the contribution of one over another.

Community-centric fundraising acknowledges an opera company’s commitment to equitable treatment across its community. It recognizes that donors, while essential to the operations and finances of an organization, cannot be elevated to the detriment of other participants the company serves and wishes to serve. Rather, they can and must be partners in forging a shared ecosystem that values and actively seeks the input of all community participants.

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## Why Does It Matter?

“We need to diversify our fill-in-the-blank” is a common refrain at opera companies. For decades it has been a call for younger audience members or more women in leadership roles; in recent years, and long overdue, it has come to include Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, Arab, and other people of color — onstage, backstage, in audiences, in offices, and at board tables. “Opera for all,” shout our marketing departments.

Achieving that, however, requires introspection and intervention. The opera industry is built on systems and practices that are inherently exclusionary and perpetuate social and economic injustice. While some practices are easier to begin to address — such as casting or hiring — others, like fundraising, seem too precarious to touch.

It makes sense: Fundraising pays the bills of every opera company. While ticket sales cover a smaller percentage each year, we lean more heavily on fundraising to fulfill our mission. So how can we risk the effectiveness of this critical function with a new “community-centric fundraising” approach? Why would we reconfigure our fundraising to advance social and economic justice when we just need money?

The first reason is a moral one. Community-centric fundraising makes us better, moral fundraisers. It helps us align our practices with our sincere desires that opera truly is for all. It forces us to review our practices and remove barriers that have historically excluded some in our community. It’s important to note, too, that this is not a political impulse; it’s about being welcoming to all who wish to participate.

When you are more welcoming, you raise more money. In 2020, On Site Opera (New York City) focused their end-of-year campaign less on fundraising and more on friend-raising. They decentered the financial expectation and invited people to give in whatever way was meaningful to them: by following them on social media, by recording a video about the company, or by sending a postcard about the company to a friend, among others. All were valuable ways to “contribute” to the campaign. And in the end, the company received a higher volume of cash donations than normal, in addition to all the new friends they gained.

The second reason is sustainability. The donors that currently support opera will not be around forever, and research shows that new generations of donors are looking to have greater civic impact with their philanthropy. Adapting to the principles of community-centric fundraising may have short-term costs, but there will be long-term benefits. We may have to say goodbye to some donors now, but we will begin to welcome a next class of donors who see their gifts as going to something greater than art on a stage, alone.

Fort Worth Opera began a transition in late 2020 under its newly appointed general director, Afton Battle, toward centering diversity and being representative of its community through its programming and operations. Battle’s vision for transforming the company led to friction with several board members, and three ultimately resigned. For Battle, this was progress: “I saw it as our garden turning itself over and blooming. [...] If people don’t want to come along, that’s OK: I invite them to get off at the next stop. I can’t carry the weight of resistance. And newcomers are gravitating to us. We’ve gotten hit after hit — inquiries of folks wanting to be part of the opera revolution, which is about being in the service of your community in the 21st century.”

This turnover and rejuvenation are not just happening in Fort Worth. Small companies like White Snake Projects (Boston) and large companies like Minnesota Opera have seen similar results. They have committed their companies to social and economic justice, espoused principles of community-centric fundraising, and derived new audiences and donors because of it.

Change is never easy, but it’s working. We should have great optimism for what community-centric fundraising will help us achieve in the longer term, both in terms of financial support and inclusivity. ■

# PRINCIPLES

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These 10 principles are adapted from the original [CCF Principles](#) to enhance their relevance to opera companies. Just like the originals, these principles may not all apply equally at every opera company. They are aspirational and evolving and will require participants at each company to discuss how they can apply these principles to move toward social and economic justice in their company and community.

**1. We ground fundraising for our opera company in anti-racism, equity, economic justice, and social justice.**

Participants at opera companies recognize that donors (and those who serve as trustees) rarely reflect the diversity of their communities. In creating change, we must move fundraising conversations beyond “diversifying donors” and “tapping into marginalized communities.” We must engage them in sometimes uncomfortable discussions and programming about systemic racism and wealth disparities. All participants must understand how they contribute to the current system and how they can contribute to more equitable and inclusive fundraising practices.

**2. We understand our opera company’s mission within the context of our collective community.**

The passion of opera practitioners has historically placed the creation of the art form above all other considerations in an opera company’s mission. However, it is the community that gives meaning to an opera company’s purpose: by attending, participating, supporting, co-creating, endorsing, and priding itself on how the company contributes to the greater good. We must see ourselves as part of that larger ecosystem. We must avoid fundraising practices that benefit our company while ignoring or negatively affecting our community. We must be mutually supportive and work collectively to build a just society.

**3. We are generous with and mutually supportive of other organizations, both within the opera sector and within our community.**

No single opera company can satisfy the appetite of all participants of opera; no single arts organization can

satisfy the appetite of all participants of culture; no single nonprofit organization can satisfy the needs of all participants in its municipality. We must treat peer companies and nonprofit organizations in our cities and sector not as competitors for dollars, but as critical partners with the common mission of strengthening the community and the art form.

**4. We value all who engage in strengthening the community equally, whether artist, administrator, donor, volunteer, trustee, purchaser, or audience member.**

Opera companies currently respect, thank, recognize, convene, and build relationships with their donors, particularly those who give significantly. We must employ those same practices with all participants. We must recognize that every individual in our community has the potential to progress on a continuum from audience member to donor or can contribute to our success by other means. We must appreciate all participants in an equal manner, for the progress of a more equitable art form.

**5. We value contributions of time, talent, and connections to our opera company as much as gifts of money.**

Opera companies cannot operate without their supporting participants, and notably donors, whose generosity pays for the performances and activities that define their work. Yet, we must understand that not all members of our community can contribute financially to our work. We must appreciate those who contribute time, talent, and connections to communities not currently represented within our organizations as much as we appreciate those who contribute money.

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**6. We treat donors to our opera company as partners in our commitment to serving our community and achieving social and economic justice.**

Donors frequently enjoy the best of what an opera company has to offer — performances, artist access, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and more — while being shielded from challenging discussions about the company's values and community purpose. We must make sure our donors understand our goals and commitments and what their role is in helping us achieve them. We must have honest, transparent, and respectful conversations about our responsibilities to our full community, even if we end up pushing some donors and their support away.

**7. We foster a sense of belonging at our opera company, not othering.**

Opera welcomes passionate artists, administrators, students, and audiences who believe in the power of the art form. However, fundraising practices often undermine our best intentions to make all members of our community feel they belong. We must discontinue exclusionary behaviors that further perceptions of elitism and hyper-intellectualism among prospective audiences. We must recognize and remedy harmful, self-serving attitudes and behaviors rooted in saviorism — the notion that artists, students, and community engagement participants must be culturally or socially enlightened by opera. We must create space in and around our fundraising practices for everyone within our community, regardless of economic or social background, so that we are working together to create a shared artistic experience.

**8. We invite donors to be part of our commitment to change by promoting the understanding that everyone in our community benefits from the work of social and economic justice.**

The actions our opera company takes now to ensure access and participation throughout our community by those who have historically been unable or unwelcomed fortify the civic value of our institutions. We must show our donors that a company's commitment to nourishing the community will increase involvement with our art form and lead to a sustainable future for

opera. We must demonstrate through words and action that we are not removing chairs from the table, but enlarging the table and adding new voices alongside those of our donors.

**9. We see our opera company's work in social and economic justice as holistic and transformative, not transactional.**

Donors enjoy making gifts to support the art we produce, the artists we hire, or the programs we offer. Yet, partitioning funds around specific initiatives often separates the art form from the work of social and economic justice. We must craft compelling cases for support that motivate donors to fund our missions holistically, with a level of trust and investment in the company's role as a community asset. We must help donors avoid transactional thinking whenever possible and recognize the long-term impact they can have by affording our company greater flexibility and freedom to realize our missions and visions.

**10. We recognize that our fundraising practices are rooted in a history of economic and social injustice and commit ourselves to making steps toward justice.**

The fundraising practices that our opera company employs today, often to great effect, are built on a foundation of inequity, elitism, and systemic and institutional racism. In our commitment to our community, we must grapple with and address the root causes. We must remember that we are not limited to our current donors but can find donors to support every purpose as long as that purpose is well-defined, sincerely adhered to, and proven to the communities it is designed to serve. ■



# DISCUSSION TOPICS

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It is important to take time to understand the principles of community-centric fundraising before jumping to action. The discussion questions posed here can help fundraisers, company leaders, trustees, and other participants understand the implications of the principles on your company.

## **1. We ground fundraising for our opera company in anti-racism, equity, economic justice, and social justice.**

- Who needs to lead (or be able to lead) these discussions?
- Who needs to be part of these discussions?
- How do we invite those who are reluctant into these discussions?
- What questions do we need to ask as part of the discussions?
- In what settings might these discussions take place?
- How can we make clear that our motivations are not political, but ethical and moral?
- How can White fundraisers use their privilege to dismantle current systems?

## **2. We understand our opera company's mission within the context of our collective community.**

- What fundraising practices benefit our companies while negatively affecting our communities? What alternatives do we have?
- Who determines what negatively affects our communities? Are we working with our community?
- How do we ensure the “table” is big enough for everyone to have a seat at it?
- Do we risk the solvency of our own company in order to benefit the community?

## **3. We are generous with and mutually supportive of our opera company's fellow organizations, both within the opera sector and within our community.**

- What do other organizations in our communities need from us? Have we asked?

- What must we stop doing to ensure that all of our partners have the potential to thrive?
- How can we communicate and encourage the reciprocity of this behavior from our peer organizations?

## **4. We value all who engage in strengthening the community equally, whether artist, administrator, donor, volunteer, trustee, purchaser, or audience member.**

- What can we do to appreciate each participant equitably?
- What practices should be rethought because they prize donorship over all else?
- How can we appreciate other participants while still showing appreciation to donors?
- How can donors be part of showing appreciation to other participants?

## **5. We value contributions of time, talent, and connections to our opera company as much as gifts of money.**

- What practices would we need to change to recognize non-monetary gifts equally to money?
- What implications would this have on how we recruit board members?
- How could a board member's role as trustee be decoupled from their role as donor?
- How do we ensure that the contributions of other participants, including staff, artists, and partners, are equally valued?

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**6. We treat donors to our opera company as partners in our commitment to serving our community and achieving social and economic justice.**

- How might we practice having more difficult conversations?
- How can we prepare donors to engage in these conversations?
- What are some common scenarios when we might need or want to push back on a donor?
- How do we let go of donors who don't agree with our choices, regardless of what they contribute?

**7. We foster a sense of belonging at our opera company, not othering.**

- What fundraising practices further perceptions of elitism? Of hyper-intellectualism?
- How can those practices be reinvented?
- Does our deployment of artists in fundraising make them feel they belong?
- How can our marketing, community engagement, and artistic colleagues help in this regard?

**8. We invite donors to be part of our commitment to change by promoting the understanding that everyone in our community benefits from the work of social and economic justice.**

- How can we demonstrate and communicate the benefits of diversifying input to our donors?
- How can we encourage donors to join us in this change and to examine their own privilege?
- Who in our community can help us in changing the expectations donors have?

**9. We see our opera company's work in social and economic justice as holistic and transformative, not transactional.**

- How do we convey that the company's commitment to social and economic justice is not a peripheral initiative but rather central to the company's goals?
- How do we recognize when accepting restricted funds from a donor may conflict with goals of justice and service to the full community?
- What implications does this have for how we write appeal letters? Or apply to or report to foundations?

**10. We recognize that our fundraising practices are rooted in a history of economic and social injustice and commit ourselves to making steps toward justice.**

- Under what circumstances would we turn down a gift from a donor whose values are damaging to our company or community?
- How do we define the boundaries of those values?
- How do we begin conversations about the power associated with money within our company? I.e., who makes the decisions? Is there a minimum gift required to participate in the decision-making process? ■

# ACTION STEPS

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Community-centric fundraising will not manifest overnight. So how do you get started? The following list, long and incomplete, offers a variety of ideas and approaches — ranging from line edits in your thank-you notes to redefining board member expectations.

Not every action will make sense for your company. Some companies may be ready to jump in and make swift changes. Others may find it more prudent to start from a point of examination: E.g., does this event make us appear elitist? Should we accept this gift from a donor who doesn't agree with us?

The action items in this list are focused on fundraising. That does not ignore the important organizational work that should precede this activity: anti-bias, anti-racism, diversity, and equity training; establishment of organizational values; revising mission statements; defining key community participants; charting strategic goals for equity, diversity, and inclusion; and more. That work lays the foundation and establishes buy-in for community-centric fundraising. It provides a roadmap for fundraisers to contribute to the changes our companies wish to see.

## Internal Practices

- Establish the values of your development department and the possible circumstances in which the department's values may conflict with a donor's. Discuss what could be done in these scenarios and how to navigate through them.
- Create a statement of values to accompany your gift acceptance policy and use that as a guide when accepting or declining gifts that conflict with company priorities.
- Define what donor behaviors your company deems incompatible with your organizational values.
- Develop departmental talking points that can be used to respond to common skepticism around community-centric fundraising and your company's commitment to social and economic justice.
- Define the four groups of participants for your community (see p. 4). Discuss how much of your time and resources are spent cultivating each group and what would happen if that shifted more evenly.
- Provide your fundraisers with anti-racism training.
- Give your fundraisers permission to raise the question internally, "Should we accept this gift?"
- Encourage your colleagues and team members to report back to you when they encounter donors who don't understand or push back against your company's commitments.
- Conduct quarterly check-ins with your development staff to establish goals and assess progress toward inclusive and equitable practices.
- Establish an internal trigger that any staff member can pull in conversation when donors are given disproportionate weight, attention, or influence (e.g., "I call TMD! Too much donor!").
- Teach the principles of donor stewardship to others at your organization so that everyone aligns in how they treat and interact with company participants.
- Encourage your colleagues and team members to participate in OPERA America programs, especially those exploring topics of equity and inclusivity.
- Divest your company's endowment from stocks that conflict with your institutional values.

## Donor Engagement

- Share company statements about local or national incidents of racial injustice with your donors.
- Ask donors what questions they have about the company's pledges to anti-racism and diversity when meeting one-on-one.
- Ask donors their advice on how to convey these concepts to others.

- Invite your donors to talk about and reflect on the concepts and goals of community-centric fundraising in one-on-one or small group settings.
- Gain the buy-in of two or three longtime, high-level traditional donors to help you advocate for community-centric fundraising.
- Stop thinking that you are not in the business of changing the minds of your donors and how they use their money. You are and you should.
- Program an inspiring donor talk or gala speaker who may encourage donors to think differently.
- Open a conversation with a donor about how they came to have their resources and what they hope to improve about their community through philanthropy. Talk about how they might have that impact more broadly, not just at the opera.
- Emphasize the importance of inclusivity to the next generation of audiences and philanthropists when speaking with your current donors. Talk about how incorporating justice and equity will help you achieve diversity and sustainability.
- Be honest with donors that overhead is just as important to your company as the productions you mount. Donors are supporting a way of life for artists and staff, and that includes the overhead to do their jobs.

## Board Engagement

- Separate in your thinking the responsibilities of board member (governance) and major donor (giving): A valuable trustee may not be a significant contributor of money.
- Start by sharing the concepts and goals of community-centric fundraising with the Development Committee of your Board of Directors.
- Employ appreciative inquiry to help board members and donors understand what they want for the organization and the changes that might be necessary to get there.
- Recruit new members of your Development Committee, whether board members or non-board members, to create a more diverse group with deeper and wider roots in the community.
- Recruit new board members in cohorts so they can bring united force to changes on your board.
- Limit the time spent on reporting fundraising at board

meetings to ensure board members have sufficient time to talk about the company's relationship with the community,

- Engage board members in discussion of their board expectations, beyond just board giving.
- Eliminate blanket minimum giving requirements for board members. Instead meet with each board member, each year, to create personalized giving and service plans that optimize their impact and contributions.
- Highlight and thank board members at the beginning of every meeting for their contributions other than money.
- Invite and pay members of your audience and desired audience to have a panel discussion at a board meeting about the barriers they face and/or perceive.
- Host a roundtable of your fundraisers and other staff, especially those of color, to allow them to share their experience working at the company: How have donors made them feel? Where do they feel vulnerable or uncomfortable?

## Communications

- With every public communication or event, ask yourself and your team: "Does this make our company appear more elitist or less?"
- Deemphasize the aspects of your fundraising that may be perceived as elitist, including black-tie events. Emphasize in all communications what you do to be inclusive of your community.
- Stop using words like "gala" that come with built-in connotations of privilege and elitism.
- Avoid assigning greater value or importance to mainstage productions over community programs.
- When you share stories of artists, students, or staff, use their voices and words with their permission. Be sure to compensate them for the experiences they are allowing you to use.
- Don't use the artistic creations or collective traumas of your community for fundraising purposes that only benefit your company without consent.
- When presenting your company's mission to donors and funders, emphasize your company's commitment to its community, even if the exact mission statement doesn't convey all of it.

- Don't promote donor saviorism in acknowledgments and thank-yous by hyperbolically telling donors they are single-handedly changing the world. Recognize donors sensibly and authentically; e.g., for "joining a group that supports XYZ."
- Be conscious of when "you" in a solicitation promotes donor saviorism, and use "we" instead to promote collective action.
- Shift language in your donor communications to be more community- and mission-focused.
- Invite a board member or donor to deliver a land acknowledgment at an event to establish that it's not just staff who care about it.
- Invite willing board members and donors to attend performances in casual clothing to relax expectations and normalize a welcoming environment.
- If you allow food in your theater, give a small food item (e.g., chocolates) to all donors, subscribers, and volunteers when entering the house to normalize eating during performances.
- Include clear statements on all pledge forms, gift acceptance policies, and other forms of gift notification that all funds, even those given to specific productions or projects, contribute to your company's goals of social and economic justice.
- Use language that helps donors see their contributions as part of the entire company operation.

## Special Events

- Ensure your company offers meaningful, equitably resourced events throughout the year for all members of your audience, even if some of them may be intended as fundraising events for donors. Not all events have to be for everyone, but there should be equitable event opportunities.
- Leverage virtual opportunities to welcome guests to events at low or no cost.
- When you do large-dollar fundraising events, make them about creating something that can be shared with others who can't participate in the event, rather than just about a lavish event.

- Consider changes to your special events (e.g., removing seated meals, changing venues) so that ticket prices can be reduced and made more accessible.
- Pay artists for the ways they contribute to your fundraising. For example, if they attend your fundraising event, pay them an honorarium for their time and effort in engaging your guests.
- Bring together donors with other types of participants at events and look for common interests that forge bonds between them. Consider an ice-breaker prompt at tables of people who don't know each other.

## Donor Benefits

- Reevaluate your donor benefits: What benefits further perceptions of elitism and othering? What benefits are actually effective? Are your benefits necessary or supportive of your values?
- Rethink your donor listings: Consider listing alphabetically; by number of years of subscribing; by number of years of donating; etc. Consider whether your donor listings should continue to be in your program book — or whether they should only appear in your annual report to donors.
- Cultivate a culture of philanthropy that doesn't rely on a transactional benefits structure.
- Avoid promoting tax-deductibility of donations as a primary reason for giving.
- Don't treat your artists as purchasable goods by attaching price tags that value some more than others when soliciting underwriting from donors.
- Don't glorify donors proportionally to the size of their gift (e.g., in size of photo in the program).
- Find ways to personally steward donors of all sizes, not just those at the top end.

## Participant Recognition

- Express gratitude whether a person buys a ticket, brings a friend, makes a gift, raves about you on social media, or contributes to your work in any number of ways.
- Define equivalencies between the contributions of extensive volunteers, long-term subscribers, and donors as new ways of determining eligibility for invitations to special celebrations and benefits.

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- When rolling out priority access for ticketed events, rethink who you prioritize and why.
  - Create new pre-and post-show experiences that are inclusive of all audience members.
  - Encourage donors and board members to serve as greeters before/after performances and at intermissions, rather than squirreling them away in lounges.
  - Challenge yourself and company leaders to speak to at least five new people at every performance.
  - Organize an appreciation event or day for volunteers, subscribers, or other participant groups beyond donors.
  - Build stewardship plans for all participant groups.
  - Thank all participants in impact reports, including staff, volunteers, audience members, and community partners.
  - Ask board members and donors to send thank-you notes to staff, volunteers, and artists.
  - Rethink the ways you publicly thank people (e.g., supertitle recognition, sponsor credits, etc.) to include other participant groups.
  - Create a tracking system for time, talent, and connections.
  - Organize monthly/quarterly meetups with other development professionals in your community.
  - Share grant opportunities or inside knowledge with community partners and emerging arts groups in your community. Make introductions to funders.
  - Mentor fundraisers from smaller, less-resourced organizations. Offer grantwriting assistance or coaching.
  - Ask your donors what other organizations they support. Ask them to support your partners.
  - Invite your donors to attend events at your community partners.
  - If you're partnering with a community service organization, invite donors to be part of your community service day.
  - Encourage fundraisers to participate in community organizations as volunteers or members as part of their professional development. Consider paying for their membership. ■

## Community Partners

- Dedicate space in your newsletter, especially your donor newsletter, to highlighting the work of your community partners.
- Include your company's community partners in your storytelling about your organization. Help donors understand how your company relates to both the arts and local community ecosystem.
- Talk to your company's community partners to coordinate fundraising and event schedules so that you can cross-promote and support one another.
- Leverage #GivingTuesday or other opportunities during the year to highlight your community partners and uplift their fundraising messages, rather than your own.

# CREDITS

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[communitycentricfundraising.org](http://communitycentricfundraising.org)



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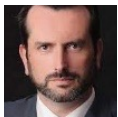
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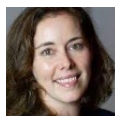
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