

Museum Results

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from Alexander Haas

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TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONS THAT TRANSFORM LIVES

First Things First



February 28, 2019
www.fundraisingcounsel.com



from the desk of
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Museums & Performing Arts

Embrace Diversity In Today's Cultural Fundraising World

Among the most pressing and relevant issues faced by museums and performing arts organizations today is the diversification of their leadership, staff and audiences. This has long been an important topic in the field, but the dialogue around these issues has taken on new significance in recent years. While attention is most often paid to societal or moral considerations around diversity, intentionally representing and serving more inclusive communities can also yield other important benefits over the long term.

Public and private funding organizations, board members, and donors are increasingly requiring that institutions' leadership and audiences reflect the communities they serve as a condition for funding. Civic cultural plans adopted in recent years throughout the country - from [New York](#) to [Dallas](#), from [Boston](#) to [Oakland](#) - celebrate diversity and inclusion and suggest that future funding decisions will be evaluated in the context of organization's commitment to these values. A recent [report by the Mellon Foundation](#) indicates that concentrated efforts have led to improvements in the diversification of upper-level staff members in art museums over the past several years, but that there is still work to be done. Likewise, a [new program launched by the American Alliance of Museums](#) funded by the Ford, Mellon and Walton Family foundations shows that issues of diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion on boards will continue to be a focus among major funders of the arts in coming years.

As your organization contemplates issues such as these, several suggestions may be helpful to consider:

Authenticity is Key

There is a natural tendency during challenging budget times - or when ambitious development officers are determined to do whatever it takes to reach their goals - to paint an artificial picture of an institution's priorities or achievements to meet a donor's or funding organization's objectives in an attempt to secure a gift or grant.

This can be especially true when discussing issues of diversity and inclusion in the absence of a board-approved institutional plan. Remember that those who have given to your organization in the past already know your institution's culture and personality well, perhaps better than you realize, and those with whom you want a long-term funding relationship will quickly realize that the organization may not be as genuinely committed to addressing these values as portrayed. Without sugar-coating the situation, be straightforward in admitting what work has been accomplished and is still yet to be done. This will help preserve or build lasting donor relationships over the long run.

Establish Ambitious but Attainable Goals

Donors know that tackling issues of institutional culture takes time, especially those as deep-seeded as diversity, inclusion and equity. The first step in creating measurable change is establishing agreed-upon goals that demonstrate real commitment and that can be built upon over a specified period. If your organization is working toward being more representative of its community through its leadership, staff, and audience, it's important that everyone involved understands and agrees which metrics are going to be used in setting these goals, whether they are based on regional data, data for the city in which the organization operates, data obtained from peers, national benchmark data for other institutions of similar type, etc. What's most important to donors and funders is that a plan for authentic, tangible change is articulated that can actually be achieved. As a friend has often reminded me, "inch by inch is a cinch, but yard by yard is hard." Understand that, while you might be able to achieve measurable goals along the way, when fully embraced as an institutional value, diversification is a process that will likely never be fully realized.

Leadership Begins at the Top

Perhaps the most important thing for development officers and CEOs to remember is that, no matter how committed you, a group of staff or the senior leadership of an arts institution may be to issues of diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion, sustained cultural change requires the commitment of the board to be most effective. This endorsement, whether in the form of an action plan - or even just a written statement - demonstrates to your potential donors and funders that these are issues of institutional priority and not just a means to seeking their gift or grant.

Embracing diversity is among the most important concerns facing museums and arts organizations in today's fundraising environment. Authentic, intentional organizational change can both create a stronger, more inclusive society while also providing the opportunity for your institution to establish deep, meaningful relationships with like-minded donors and funders. And in such a world, everyone wins - most especially those who experience the joy and personal transformation your organization makes possible.

Fundraising Veteran Carl G. Hamm Joins Alexander Haas

Carl G. Hamm was named Managing Partner for Museums and Performing Arts at Alexander Haas. He has nearly 30 years of senior management experience in the nonprofit sector, the majority of which is in senior development roles in the museum field.

"Carl has a history of exceptional fundraising performance and will be a valuable asset to our firm, as well as to our museum and fine arts clients," said David H. King, President and CEO of Alexander Haas.



Prior to joining Alexander Haas, Hamm served as Deputy Director for Development and External Affairs for the **Saint Louis Art Museum**. Hamm also has a career history serving as senior Vice President for Development & Marketing for the **Fort Worth Museum of Science and History** and as Associate Director of Development for the **Dallas Museum of Art**.

[Read more about Carl Hamm here...](#)

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