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Fundraising in the Theatre: A Reflection of the WMU Theatre Guild President's Performance

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Fundraising in the Theatre: A Reflection of the WMU

Theatre Guild President's Performance

Abstract

Fundraising is an important element to the success of any nonprofit organization, but arts organizations have unique opportunities to produce exciting, engaging, and creative fundraising events that coincide with their season programming. My thesis will explore what makes a successful fundraising event and compare best practices with the practices used at Western Michigan University for the annual Theatre Guild President's Performance. I analyze the inner workings of the Theatre Guild Board of Directors and their approach to producing a special event, and interview professionals and board members to get a comprehensive overview of what defines a successful fundraising events look like to the Department of Theatre.

Introduction

In my three years of education at Western Michigan University, I have learned about the impact of art on a community and witnessed it firsthand. When I began thinking about my Honors Thesis, I knew that I wanted to stretch myself out of my comfort zone and research a topic that I was unfamiliar with. I have gotten a lot of amazing hands-on experiences in my years as a theatre student, but I have only ever read about fundraising in arts organizations. For my thesis, I didn't want to just research a topic, I wanted to get a hands-on experience with fundraising, and I know that I could get that experience by helping the Western Michigan University Theatre Guild with their annual fundraising event, President's Performance.

The mission of the Theatre Guild at WMU is to raise funds for student scholarships, and they conduct two main fundraising events per academic year. In the fall, they host a Chili Supper, which is a popular event in the community that includes a silent auction, a chili bar, and live entertainment from some of the performance majors in the theatre department. The second event occurs in late spring and is hosted by the President of the University. This event usually

includes some kind of food/refreshments, cabaret-style performances from performance majors, and a performance of one of the plays or musicals put on by the department. This event is a great way for donors to see firsthand the impact that their donation will make on the students in the Department of Theatre. When I began thinking about my thesis, I knew that researching fundraising in arts organizations and helping the Theatre Guild produce the President's Performance would be a challenge and a great learning experience overall. Throughout my research, I have read articles on fundraising, interviewed professionals in arts organizations and members of the Theatre Guild board, and through my research, I feel that I have gained a very comprehensive and impactful understanding of the importance of fundraising in the theatre, and how to ensure that a fundraising event is successful.

President's Performance: Past, Present, and Future

As is the nature of live events, the WMU Theatre Guild President's Performance has evolved and changed over the years to suit the department's capabilities and the desires of the community of donors who choose to invest in the futures of WMU theatre students. In the past, the event has taken place in the fall semester, but because the fall can be a very busy time in the Gilmore Theatre Complex for both students and faculty, the event has been moved to the spring semester, typically in the closing weekend of the final show of the season. In the past President's Performance included a sit-down dinner, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Theatre Guild had to rethink many aspects of the event. In 2021, the annual Chili Supper was hosted outdoors to prevent the spread of the Corona Virus, and the 2022 President's Performance did not include food during the event, and attendees were required to wear masks while at the event. Even though food was not included at last year's event, the 2022 President's Performance was very special because it included a special exhibit for WMU theatre alumni, Marin Mazzie, who

passed away in 2018. The exhibit allowed guests at President's Performance to see her original Bronco Identification card and Mizzie's Tony award, which was awarded to her posthumously in 2019.

Live production and performance were impacted deeply by the pandemic, and it became more important than ever for the arts to have sufficient funding. Through classes being held online and performances being canceled, the students and faculty in the department of theatre persevered and continued to hone their craft, and the Theatre Guild still raised money for student scholarships through the most difficult years our industry had ever seen. In 2021, the President's Performance made \$11,600, and in 2022 the event raised \$18,750.

Although the 2022 President's Performance was well received by the attendees, the Theatre Guild needed to rethink the event for the following year to keep up with loosening Covid restrictions and University guidelines. The Guild knew that they wanted to bring food back into the event but decided not to go back to a sit-down dinner as they had done in the past. Eventually, they decided to offer heavy hors d'oeuvres and bring back the afterglow that included coffee and desserts after the performance. Overall, the elements of the event were the same as they had been in past years before the pandemic, but the execution and presentation of the elements were updated to revamp President's Performance in a post-Covid world. The Theatre Guild decided that the 2023 President's Performance would include heavy hors d'oeuvres and a cocktail hour with short performances by some of the performance majors in the department, followed by special remarks by the President of the Theatre Guild board, the Chair of the Department of Theatre, and the President of the University. Following the speeches the guests at the President's Performance would be treated to a performance of *The Play That Goes Wrong*,

and an afterglow reception with desserts and coffee where the guests could interact with the cast and crew of the production.

The WMU Theatre Guild Board decided on multiple different levels of sponsorship for donors to choose from for this year’s President’s Performance. The donation amounts ranged from \$250 to \$2,500 and included different benefits included in the table below.

Figure 1.

Sponsor Title	Donation Amount	Sponsor Benefits
Supporting Sponsor	\$250	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognized within President Montgomery’s remarks - Year-long acknowledgment among WMU Theatre’s community partners
Featured Sponsor	\$500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognized within President Montgomery’s remarks - Prominent logo placement in all event signage - Year-long acknowledgment among WMU Theatre’s community partners - Inclusion in organic social media promotion for the event
Leading Sponsor	\$1,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognized within President Montgomery’s remarks - Prominent logo placement in all event signage - Digital banner within the online program for the performance - Year-long acknowledgment among WMU Theatre’s community partners - Inclusion in organic social media promotion for the event - 2 Tickets to the President's Performance
Title Sponsor	\$1,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sponsor name included in all promotional materials in advance of the event and throughout event advertising - Recognized within President Montgomery’s remarks - Prominent logo placement in all event signage - Digital banner within the online program for the performance - Year-long acknowledgment among WMU Theatre’s community partners - Inclusion in organic social media promotion for the event - 4 Tickets to the President’s Performance Event

Presenting Sponsor	\$2,500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Presented by [Sponsor Name]” included in all promotional materials in advance of the event and throughout event advertising - “Presented by [Sponsor Name]” noted as tickets are sold through the box office. - Pre-recorded thank you message from our presenting sponsor shared within other video material accompanying our event, - Recognized within President Montgomery’s remarks - Prominent logo placement in all event signage - Digital Banner within the online program for the performance - Year-long acknowledgment among WMU Theatre’s community partners - “Presented by [Sponsor Name]” inclusion in organic social media promotion for the event - 4 Tickets to the President’s Performance Event (or any performance of WMU Theatre production)
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*All information taken from wmich.edu/theatre/presidentsperformance

When offering these different benefits to the donors, the Theatre Guild needs to be sure to deliver on the promises it makes. The board was able to ask over 100 businesses and donors to contribute funds to the event, with 25 confirmed donors by the event on April 14th.

Looking forward, the guild should continue to expand its board and try to change the average age demographic of the board members to be around 30-40 years old and diversify the board even further. The board should also determine a threshold for what will make next year’s President’s Performance successful, aside from the fundraising goal and attendance capacity. If the organization can define clear goals for the fundraising event, it will be easier to determine if the event is successful or not. The Theatre Guild should think about what worked well for this year’s event and what went poorly, try to build off of the successes, and update the elements that were not satisfactory. Keeping these things in mind will help to improve the event further for next year’s President’s Performance and will help to communicate expectations clearly with next year’s board members.

Research: Observations, Interviews, and Texts

After observing the Theatre Guild Board meetings, I have gotten a deep understanding of how this organization works and some of the different strengths and weaknesses that are present within the board. The board for the Theatre Guild runs as any other board for a nonprofit organization, but it is unique in the dynamics between the board members. Although Department of Theatre Chair Dr. Joan Herrington is not the President of the Board, she is the one who does most of the talking during board meetings for the Theatre Guild. Because the point of the Theatre Guild is to raise student scholarships for theatre students, it makes sense that Dr. Herrington would speak the most at board meetings because she is one of the only people on the board who experiences the lives of theatre students daily and has to help students who can't pay for their tuition. She interacts with theatre students every single day, and she is the one who students will go to when they can't pay for groceries or rent. Dr. Herrington speaks the most at board meetings to give the Theatre Guild Board updates on the goings on in the department, which shows are in rehearsals, how much money was earned by closed productions, and other updates regarding the everyday function of the Department of Theatre. The board President, Shari Glaser often takes the lead on approving meeting minutes, encouraging board members to make donation asks, and more board-centered functions, while Dr. Herrington takes on the department updates.

In my meetings with Dr. Herrington, she has expressed that the Theatre Guild Board is trying to expand itself to be more diverse in age demographics. This would help to increase the pool of potential donors to the Guild as well as bring other perspectives into the mission and why it is important. There is a lot of competition for board members in Kalamazoo because it is such a community-centered and philanthropic town, and the Theatre Guild Board had to keep this in mind when searching for its new board members. Just because board members can be hard to

come by in Kalamazoo doesn't mean you should snatch up any person who expresses interest. The Theatre Guild Board members submitted a few names that could be considered for the board, and the board members explained why they thought their submission would be a good fit for the board and what they could bring to the organization. The Guild then voted on who they thought should join the board. Overall, I feel that my time observing the board and how it functions helped me to understand how a board of a nonprofit functions and how a board can impact and lead its organization. I also got a very good understanding of how things work in the Department of Theatre, and it gave me great insights into the decisions that are made for the department. On top of all of that, I was able to get a hands-on experience with researching how an arts organization can produce a fundraising event to support its mission.

Through my time researching fundraising events in arts organizations, I was able to interview Marisa Macella, the Senior Manager of Fundraising Events at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. She was able to give me great insight into what it is like to produce fundraising events for a large arts organization like the Lyric. The scale of the fundraising events at the Lyric Opera is much larger than what is being done with the Theatre Guild, but the elements are all the same. The goal is to raise money for the organization and to give the donors a way to see where the money they invest is impacting the organization. The Lyric Opera produces 4-5 fundraising events per year, but the event that is most similar to President's Performance is their Season Opening Gala. Macella went over the past versions of the event and explained how it has evolved and changed over the years and explained that it is the biggest event of the year and allows their donors to get a glimpse of what is to come for the organization and meet the performers and technicians who are benefitting from their donations. She explains that allowing

the donors to interact with the artists compels them to stay involved in the organization to see their investment grow.

I asked Macella how the Lyric measured the success of their fundraising events, and she replied that it generally means meeting their fundraising goal, hearing positive reviews from attendees, and how many people return to donate the following year. I was pleased to see that the Theatre Guild tracks how many people are returning donors from previous years. I had not previously thought of tracking returning donors as a success marker, but thinking about it, it makes a lot of sense. If a donor enjoys attending a fundraising event, that is another incentive to donate again the next year so they can come back and invest in the organization further. Going back many years, President's Performance has had many of the same donors and sponsors, so it is clear that past events have been successful in generating loyalty through the donors who choose to invest in the organization. My conversation with Macella was eye-opening to the different scales that fundraising events can take, and even though President's Performance is not nearly as big as the events that are produced by the Lyric Opera of Chicago, I was still able to get amazing insight into the basic elements of what makes a fundraising event successful.

Through my research, I was able to observe the Theatre Guild Board conduct board meetings and plan the event, but I wanted to get a more comprehensive idea of why people would want to dedicate themselves to a nonprofit organization's board. I was connected to Anne Drummond, who is a current board member of the Theatre Guild, and a former president of the board. My conversation with Drummond was incredibly eye-opening in many different ways, and I feel that only after my interview with her did I fully understand why people give to nonprofit organizations. As a person studying and working in the arts, I have understood why donating is important and seen how funding can make a difference in an artist's life, but

Drummond helped me to understand why donating is worthwhile to people. She explained to me that the culture of Kalamazoo is one of volunteerism. It is expected that if you are a part of the community, you give back to it. This is why there is so much demand for board members in this town. I did not grow up in a community like this, and so I have had a difficult time in the past understanding the appeal of joining a board or volunteering for an organization. Drummond explained that as humans, our time is finite, and we have to be able to decide where to spend our time. There are going to be organizations that support a business interest that you have, and other organizations that support a passion, and being a part of a healthy blend of both kinds of organizations is going to be very fulfilling.

One element of fundraising that has always intimidated me is making the ask and requesting that people donate to your organization. It has always felt like an uncomfortable conversation to have with someone, and so I knew that someone like Drummond who had a lot of experience being on boards of nonprofit organizations would help me to feel less awkward when discussing money and fundraising. Drummond explained that she is not afraid to lead by example. She will make an ask with a less experienced board member by her side so that they can see how to seamlessly ask for donations without making things uncomfortable. She prefers to shoulder into the difficult conversations and let the rest come naturally. Drummond also explained that there are many different kinds of asks that someone can make. We can ask our close friends and family, who we know will easily give money and who we can call on no matter what. We can ask someone we do not know, like a business owner. These people are used to getting asked for money all the time, so all you have to do is make the case for why they should be donating to your organization. These kinds of asks are usually the easiest asks you can make. The hardest ask is to make an ask to someone that you do not know very well. People who know

your name but do not care deeply about you. For these asks, you need to make it personal and friendly, but also make a good case for your organization. Drummond suggests that board members set a goal to make 2 very easy asks to friends or family, 2 medium easy asks to people you don't know, and 2 asks that are more difficult. Drummond emphasizes the importance of standing by your organization no matter what and explained that when the person making the ask for donations clearly has a passion for supporting the organization, the potential donor is going to be more likely to want to donate to a cause that people care about.

My conversation with Anne Drummond gave me an interesting perspective from someone who has served on the board of the Theatre Guild for many years. Her experience with the Theatre Guild helped me to understand why people donate to President's Performance and why the event has been successful in the past. Drummond was very passionate about explaining that when a donor gives money to the Theatre Guild, their donation expands exponentially. It is not like when you give to another organization and your donation is spent and is gone after a few months. When someone gives to the Theatre Guild, their donation is invested in the education and career of young artists, who will go on to impact thousands of lives through their craft. When donors see that Dr. Montgomery is putting his name on the event, it shows that he is invested in the lives of the students of the department and that the university cares about what we care about. Drummond emphasizes that this adds credibility to the ask for donations. President's Performance allows donors to witness the work they are investing in firsthand. Guests of donors can see the work that students are doing and can be moved to donate themselves after seeing the impact that their donation can make. This is the person-to-person way that the guild can introduce its work. President's Performance also solidifies the purpose of the organization tangibly. Drummond explains that the donor would have spent that money anyway elsewhere,

but they spent it on the Theatre Guild and got a nice evening out of it, and we can show them how we will be putting that money to good use. Drummond also emphasizes that a donor's gift is not static, and the funds grow over time. If we can introduce the investment in people over things, that makes our organization all the more meaningful to the community and the students it serves. My conversation with Anne was very eye-opening, and it made me more aware of the impact that a board member can have on an organization, and how their passion for the organization can make a difference in someone deciding to donate to an organization.

The most important thing an event planner can do before planning any event is set goals. The goals should be supportive of the mission of the organization and should be agreed upon by the board before beginning the planning process. John S. Wilson suggests thinking strategically in setting long and short-term goals in his journal *Fundraising: Special events: defining goals, planning and measuring success*. "Long and short-term goals set for the event should be used to evaluate its success. Determining the success of the event should include both quantitative measures, such as the number of people in the audience and profit after expenses, and qualitative measures, which include general response after the event; measuring the level of excitement in the room, before and after comments by "key" people at the event; and determining if people are looking forward to the next event." The Theatre Guild set a few quantitative goals for the 2023 President's Performance, including a fundraising goal of \$20,000 and an attendance goal of 150 guests. It can be more difficult to measure qualitative goals because feelings are not tangible. It may be helpful to have board members report back on what they perceived guests' enjoyment levels to be at the event, or to send out a survey after the event to hear what attendees liked about the event, and what they might like to see improved for next year. This will help the Theatre

Guild set new goals for next year's President's Performance by building off of feedback from the guests to create an even better experience for donors next year.

Nonprofit organizations with all kinds of focuses will put on fundraising events to support their mission. Fundraising events are a normal occurrence in the nonprofit world. The struggle with being an arts organization, and specifically a theatre organization is that people will expect a show. Lindsey Wilson emphasizes this in her article *How to Stage a Must-Go Gala* (2018). Wilson urges theatre companies to take advantage of the unique spaces at their disposal to create an immersive experience for event guests by hosting galas or events in scene shops or rehearsal spaces. I think that the WMU Theatre Guild plays into this very well by hosting President's Performance in many different spaces around the Gilmore Theatre Complex. Hors d'oeuvres and cocktail hour were hosted in the Williams Theatre, the performance of *The Play That Goes Wrong* was presented in Shaw Theatre, and the afterglow was in the atrium of the building. This gave guests a great overview of the spaces that are used every day by students and faculty. The facilities that were used for President's Performance were more interesting than a hotel ballroom or conference room, and that gives donors something to remember when they consider donating in the future. As a theatre organization, it is our job to give people an experience to remember, and this is not limited to our mainstage productions. Our fundraising events should be interesting in many ways and should showcase the strengths of the department.

Arts organizations have always had to compete with many other forms of entertainment, but this has become even more true in the streaming era. Michael Kaiser explains the common struggles that many arts organizations have when it comes to contributed revenue in chapter 6 of his book *The Cycle: A Practical Approach to Managing Arts Organizations* (2013). "Recently, the pressure to raise larger sums has increased since competition from other forms of

entertainment has depressed ticket prices and sales, and attempts to engage audience members unable to pay full price – younger audiences, especially – have increased.” (Kaiser 107). Ever since the pandemic started, and more and more streaming services became widely available online, theatres have struggled with getting people to come to see live entertainment because it is easier to stay at home to watch a show than it is to leave your house to go to your local theatre. Like most arts organizations, the WMU Department of Theatre has faced dwindling audience attendance for its productions after the pandemic. But at the Gilmore Theatre Complex, the artists who are on stage and who have worked tirelessly on sets, lighting, and sound design are all students. They are students who have had to adapt their craft around Covid guidelines, and who need audiences to support their work and their education. This is why raising money for theatre students to stay in school is so important. It is imperative that the Theatre Guild serves its mission and effectively supports the students at WMU. Kaiser explains that productive fundraising will match a project with a donor that supports the goals of that specific donor and that this will help asking for donations feel less uncomfortable because the relationship between the donor and the project becomes a partnership instead of a transaction. This ties back to what I learned from my interview with Anne Drummond, and how she approaches making the ask to a donor. She is sure to emphasize the fact that the contribution the donor is making does not disappear after it is spent, but it continues to grow and give back because it is not just an investment in an organization, but an investment in the lives and futures of talented students who will go on to touch other lives with their art. Events like President’s Performance allow for the Theatre Guild to connect donors with the mission of the organization, and to connect students to people who are invested in their future. Donors get to see their investment pay off in real-time by seeing the work of the students they support come to life before them during this event. This is

why President's Performance has been successful in the past, and why it continues to be a prominent feature in the season planning of the Department of Theatre.

Reflection of the Event

The setup for President's Performance began the day before the actual event and continued up until the guests arrived. Guests started to arrive and pick up their tickets at around 6 pm before heading up the stairs to Williams Theatre where their hors d'oeuvres and drinks were waiting for them. During the cocktail hour, student performers were able to provide entertainment to the guests. At around 7 pm the Theatre Guild board President, Shari Glaser kicked off the night with a speech thanking everyone who had helped to set the event up. Dr. Herrington followed with a very touching and passionate speech about why donating to the Guild is worthwhile and what it does for the students in the Department of Theatre. Everyone in the room was hanging on to every word Dr. Herrington said, and it was incredible to hear, see, and feel the guests becoming more invested in the mission of the organization. President Montgomery finished up the speeches by thanking the sponsors and donors that helped to make President's Performance possible. After the speeches, the guests made their way to Shaw Theatre to get seated for the performance of *The Play That Goes Wrong*.

While the guests were enjoying the performance, the arts administration students began tearing down the setup in Williams Theatre to clean up the room and then began setting tables and food up in the atrium for the afterglow. The afterglow was a nice way to close out the evening by allowing the attendees to meet the cast and crew of *The Play That Goes Wrong* and allowed them to enjoy more time in our spaces before heading home. The guests were treated to many delicious desserts and refreshments, and they were able to discuss their thoughts on the performance with their friends and with the people who made the performance happen. The

afterglow was a great way for the guests to relax and mingle with more students who were actively impacted by their donations.

As a whole, I think that the event went very well. While walking around the event and seeing all of the Theatre Guild's hard work come to fruition, I could see that the guests were having a great time. The attendees were enjoying the food and drinks that had been provided, and it was clear that they loved hearing the students perform. Every donor that I spoke to was raving about the performance of *The Play That Goes Wrong*, and nearly all of the desserts that were set out were gone by the end of the night. As I observed the guests talking to each other and the Theatre Guild Board members, the overwhelming conclusion was that everyone had a wonderful time. They enjoyed the food, they enjoyed the speeches, they enjoyed the performances, and overall, they enjoyed the opportunity to support students.

When producing a live event, there is almost always going to be something that does not go to plan. Even if the person planning the event is a perfectionist, there is always something that will not work out exactly as it should. For President's Performance 2023, there were a few minor things that ended up being different than anticipated, but the preparation team worked around these obstacles and made things work. One of the elements of the event that was difficult to complete was the printing of the tickets for the event. Technology has helped our lives in many ways, but it can still malfunction and cause stress. This is precisely what the box office's ticket printers did on the day of the event. The ticket printers had worked perfectly fine the night before for the performance of *The Play That Goes Wrong*, but when staff came in the next day to begin seating guests and printing tickets for President's Performance, we found that the printers were not working. We worked all day to get them up and running again, and we were only able to get them working at around 4:30, an hour and a half before the event began! In the past, event

organizers have typically waited until the day of the event to select seats for guests at President's Performance, but I would personally recommend printing tickets a few days before the event to prevent any technology mishaps from impacting the flow of the day. This will allow for easier organization of the tickets to prevent any duplicate tickets from being printed and give the staff the ability to make more intentional seating choices. This will also open more staff members up to help with other setup needs as opposed to having one person tied down and printing tickets all day before the event.

Another element of the event that did not go as planned was the music for the afterglow in the atrium. As we began setting up tables and desserts in the atrium, we discovered that the sound system we typically use was not functioning in the way we liked. The sound was working, but it was very muffled and did not sound how we wanted it to. We eventually found a small, portable speaker that we used to play music during the afterglow, and that ended up sounding better and adding to the overall ambiance of the night. The coffee percolator also ended up not working the way that we wanted it to. It took a long time to set up, and it took a long time to begin working. When it did start to work, the quality of the coffee was not something we felt we could serve to our guests, and so we ultimately decided to go without coffee at the afterglow. In hindsight, I wish we had decided to go without coffee earlier because then we would have been able to put the percolator away and fill that table with more desserts instead of having the coffee mugs and percolator out and having to have someone stand in front of it to prevent guests from getting coffee.

At the end of the day, the things that did not run as smoothly as we wanted were not things that the guests noticed, and they did not negatively impact the overall experience of the event. As event planners, we are naturally going to want everything to go exactly as planned, but

that is not possible with live events. The ticket printers, the music, and the coffee may have caused a great deal of stress to the people working the event, but the guests were happy to be there regardless of if there was coffee or not. We were able to work around the obstacles that were thrown at us, and none of the guests even knew that things had gone sideways behind the scenes. We worked together as a team to find solutions to these problems, and we were able to create an experience for our guests regardless of the mishaps.

Research and the Event

Prior to completing all of my research and interviews, I thought that the way to measure a successful fundraising event was by looking at how much money was raised. While it is obviously important to raise funds at a fundraiser, I have found that through all of my readings, interviews, and experiences that the best way to measure the success of a fundraising event is to see how your event actively impacts the people who attend it. Every person that I interviewed expressed the importance of connecting with the people you are asking for money. Producing an event that allows the donors to interact with each other and the art their funds are supporting gives the donor a unique experience that they are going to remember. An organization needs to generate commitment for its mission during special events, and I think that the 2023 Theatre Guild President's Performance was successful in doing that.

Even if some of the attendees were attending the event as the guest of a donor, the experience of being in the space and interacting with the students, and hearing passionate speeches from Dr. Montgomery and Dr. Herrington helped to inspire the guests to invest in the organization and the futures of the students in the program. Dr. Montgomery mentioned the recent successes of one of the senior Musical Theatre Performance majors after their class trip to New York City. He used this as an example to showcase what the money raised at President's

Performance can do for a student and the bright futures of the students in the Department of Theatre. During Dr. Herrington's speech, the room was silent. Her speech highlighted the struggles of the students she is around every day, and how hard theatre students work just to get by. She spoke about students who work the night shift to be able to pay for rent and groceries, and who spend hours in rehearsal perfecting their artistry. She talked about the students who turn to her when they face the reality of having to drop out of school because they can't pay their next tuition bill. These are very real problems that students in the Department of Theatre face every semester, and you could feel every single guest hanging off of every word she spoke. Dr. Herrington's speech made everyone in the room understand that the money that is donated to the WMU Theatre Guild is supporting young artists, and is investing in that student's future.

You can't measure success without first setting a goal. This year, the Theatre Guild's fundraising goal for President's Performance was \$20,000. Donating money is a choice, and the Theatre Guild board did an amazing job of convincing sponsors that donating their money to the Theatre Guild was the right choice to make. The board was able to convince people that their investment in the organization would mean more than money in the bank. By the day of the event, the Theatre Guild had met its fundraising goal and raised \$21,250. This is just the money that was raised before the event occurred! On top of that, ticket sales for the event made over \$10,000. Ticket sales for President's Performance earned \$11,685. After balancing financial statements with the WMU Theatre Box Office, the amount earned for the Theatre Guild comes out to be \$9,990. Combined with the sponsorship earnings, the total amount of money earned for the 2023 President's Performance is \$31,240. This is well over the fundraising goal and will help many theatre students in the coming academic year. Another goal that was set by the Theatre Guild was to have at least 150 guests attend President's Performance. The final number of guests

who reserved tickets for the event was 156. Once again, the Theatre Guild was able to meet and exceed its goal. As I stated earlier, it is much easier to measure quantitative goals. Qualitative goals are usually unmeasurable, but that does not mean that organizations should not try to collect data on them. For next year, I think it would be helpful if the Theatre Guild board agreed upon qualitative goals for President's Performance to measure what the guests enjoyed and what the guests would have liked to have been different, so the Guild can continue to improve the event in future years and ensure that President's Performance is an event that the donors and guests will enjoy. Some qualitative goals that might be helpful to set would include the following: a 75% positive event review from event attendees via a post-event survey, a 50% response rate on the post-event survey, and asking the top 5 sponsors of the event how they feel about attending President's Performance before and after. I feel that these objectives will help the Theatre Guild board measure the success of the event from the guest's perspective and not just from how much money is raised. If the Theatre Guild can set both tangible and intangible goals for President's Performance in the future, it will be easier to measure the success of the event and improve it for future years.

When I began my research in January, I set out to find what the best practices for producing a fundraising event were so I could compare them to the practices of the WMU Theatre Guild. After months of research, I believe there is only one best practice that can be applied to any theatre organization that wants to produce a successful fundraising event: make people care. Even if you do not meet the fundraising goal, and even if the tickets for the event do not sell out, if the organization can create a unique experience that gets members of the community involved in the mission of the organization, then the event is successful. Fundraising events are meant to raise money, but there is always a reason behind needing to raise money.

When you can get people to care about why the money is needed and how their money is going to help a good cause, they will be more than happy to donate to your organization because they care about the mission. The 2023 President's Performance got overwhelmingly positive reviews from the guests who attended the event, and because the mission of the organization is to raise funds for student scholarships, and the fundraising goal was met and exceeded, it is safe to say that the Western Michigan University Theatre Guild President's Performance was a success.

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