

Arts organisations should target employees to garner corporate support

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Summary

This paper examined the practices and rhetoric of corporations who made substantial charitable donations in the aftermath of the 2004 Asian Tsunami. They found that, overall, there was no clear relationship between the type, size, mission or reach of companies with the amount that they gave or their stated reasons for giving. However, the research detected some themes in the rhetoric and behaviour of those corporations that are useful for arts organisations in search of philanthropic funding: particularly recurrent herding behaviour or corporations and the lack of critical thinking when choosing the 'easy' or obvious cause to fund. They concluded that employees (rather than simply chief executives or board members) are more viable and sustainable targets for corporate giving requests.

The reaction to the Tsunami of 2004 has some useful lessons for arts organisations

The specific circumstances of the Tsunami created a burst of activity amongst corporate donors, and arts organisations are never going to be able to match the emotional or humanitarian power of the ask on behalf of Tsunami victims: therefore arts organisations should identify with (and band together with) causes that are seen to be 'easy' choices to fund; additionally to prevent disappointment or fatigue, arts organisations should be prepared to evidence and account for the difference that corporate giving has made (and do so as rapidly as possible).

Employees are a neglected but important part of the system

The main recommendation emerging from the research is to concentrate on employees as key avenues for garnering corporate support and donations (rather than focusing on high-profile personalities like chief executives or board members). This idea reflects the way in which employees increasingly seek workplaces that reflect their values, and the processes by which corporate social responsibility agendas are set within corporations.

Keywords

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campaigning

philanthropy

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