

Business to Arts
Developing Creative
Partnerships



DeVosInstitute
of Arts Management at the Kennedy Center

Business to Arts/DeVos Institute Case Study – Clonmel Junction Festival

Long-term Artistic Planning and Fundraising

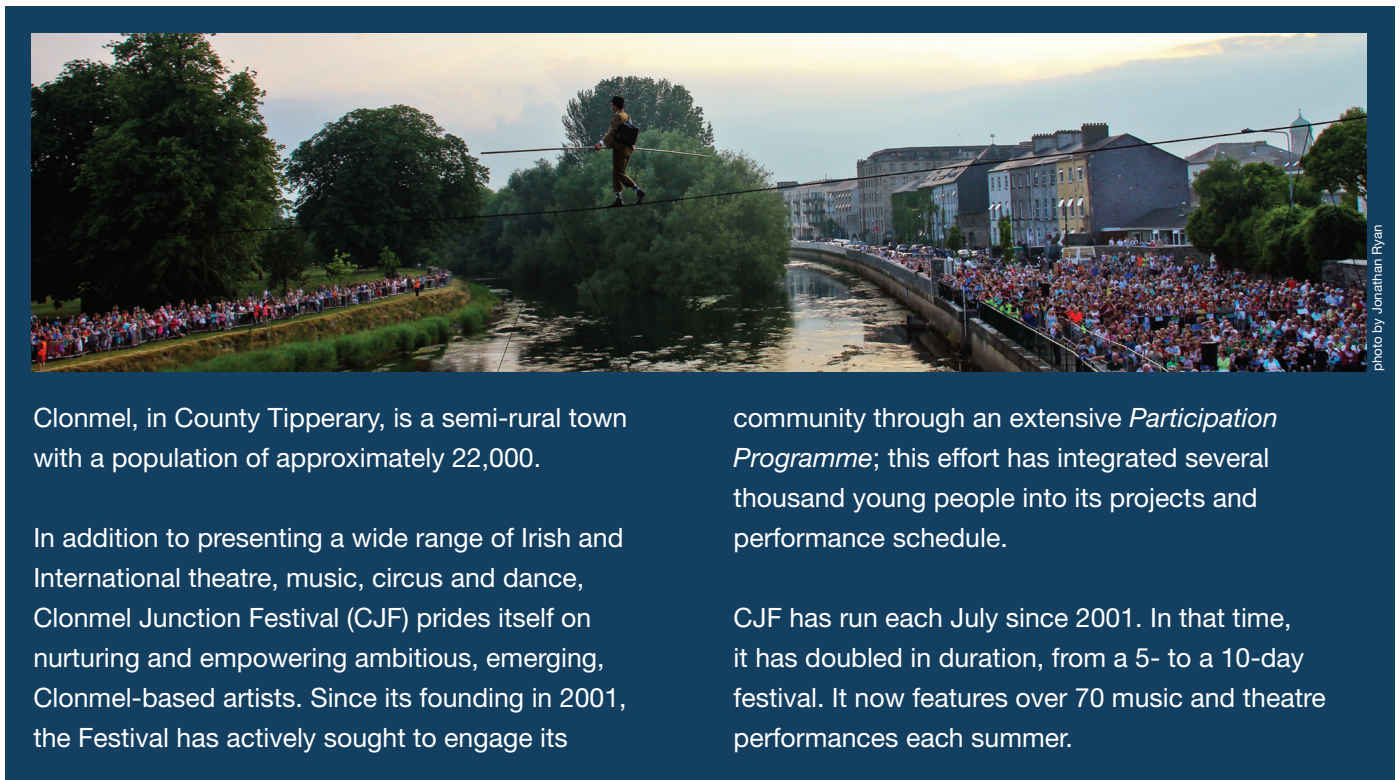


photo by Jonathan Ryan

Clonmel, in County Tipperary, is a semi-rural town with a population of approximately 22,000.

In addition to presenting a wide range of Irish and International theatre, music, circus and dance, Clonmel Junction Festival (CJF) prides itself on nurturing and empowering ambitious, emerging, Clonmel-based artists. Since its founding in 2001, the Festival has actively sought to engage its

community through an extensive *Participation Programme*; this effort has integrated several thousand young people into its projects and performance schedule.

CJF has run each July since 2001. In that time, it has doubled in duration, from a 5- to a 10-day festival. It now features over 70 music and theatre performances each summer.

The Festival's Mission

Clonmel Junction Festival is working year round producing, presenting and promoting arts events in the Clonmel region of South Tipperary, culminating in an annual 10 day festival each July that celebrates the Arts, and the life and times we live in.

Challenge—A Short-Term Planning Cycle

The bedrock of the Festival's funding model is the support it receives from the Arts Council of Ireland. As this funding is decided on an annual basis, CJF had, by default, adopted a culture of short-term planning; how could it plan its art in advance when it would not understand its budget until months before the season began?

Financial prudence appeared to require a reactive, 10-month planning cycle; as a consequence, it was rare for CJF leadership to plan beyond the Festival's fiscal means in any given year. The result was that little strategy informed the Festival's programme from one year to the next.

The New Stream/DeVos Institute Programme invited CJF leadership to challenge this paradigm. The programme argued that without a longer-term artistic plan, CJF stood little chance of identifying—much less engaging or soliciting—a more diverse donor base. Without a broader funding base, CJF would continue to rely on increasingly unpredictable sources. It would almost certainly struggle, year after year, to fund more ambitious work. And, without innovative work to challenge and surprise its audiences, and create awareness beyond Clonmel, CJF would likely stagnate.

As such, CJF found itself in a dilemma: how to break free from a short-term cycle, subject to the annual variations of public funding, without assuming an intolerable level of risk? How would it controvert this “cycle in reverse?”

A. Strategy One—Long-term Artistic Planning

CJF embraced this notion, and set about planning five aspirational but achievable and mission-driven projects for the period of 2013–2015. It did not know *everything* it would do three years in advance; but it set down on paper, and started to discuss with friends and supporters, the *major* projects it would pursue. This was a “leap of faith”—but one CJF leadership knew it could not afford *not* to take.

This shift provided CJF, for the first time, with the leeway to conduct true prospect research, to identify a thoughtful approach to donors, and to cultivate a more broad base of support for projects of a scale and a complexity that a shorter-term planning cycle simply disallows. The “bet” was

that this longer-term view (and larger-scale thinking) would inspire others to see CJF and its programming in a different light—one worth funding at a more substantial level.

CJF's challenge would be to balance this increased programmatic appetite with the reality of its fundraising progress. CJF leadership understood that it would always work against the fundraising odds, given its distance from Ireland's major financial capitals (and its attendant financial elite). At the very least, this longer-term approach would afford CJF the *luxury of time* to plan, prospect, cultivate, and solicit at a deeper (and perhaps more patient) level than its urban counterparts.

B. Strategy Two—An Extended Fundraising Timeline

However, CJF leadership realised that planning was not enough. It knew it must develop compelling “mechanisms” or (donor programmes) that could compete with the benefits and sponsor visibility provided by its larger, more affluent urban competitors.

It decided upon an effort to make its fundraising programme more *flexible* and *personal*. While it had an existing *Friends Programme* through which to solicit annual donors, this “one-size-fits-all” approach would be unlikely to attract more substantial gifts. Additionally, this one-year programme disallowed a conversation with potential multi-year donors.

CJF realised that in order to encourage larger gifts, it would need to offer donors a personalised, high-touch way to engage directly with work that moreover appealed to their specific interests.

A Renewed Solicitation Structure

Following a full review of current fundraising mechanisms, the Festival made two structural changes:

- It introduced a *Commissioning Patrons* programme for individual donors at an increased level of giving: €500 and €1,000. This programme promised participants a role in the development of a new work during the 2014 season (access to rehearsals, premiere seating, credit as a commissioner, etc.). Until then, CJF's *Friends Programme* only offered three levels of giving; €100, €300 and

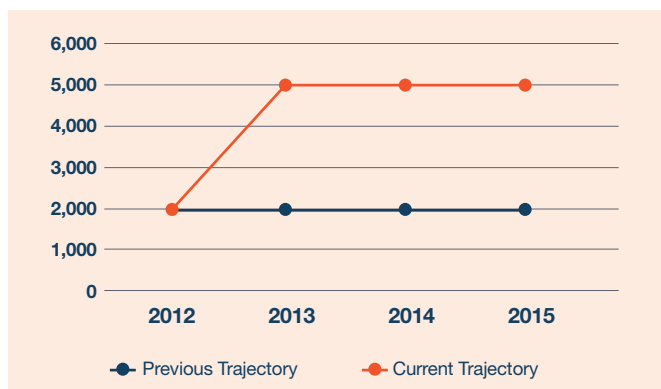
€500, with “one-size-fits-all” benefits. While necessary, the *Friends Programme* could not accommodate an individual’s personal interest in the development of a specific project. CJF now had the justification to “up the ante”, to solicit at a higher level, given the scale of vision allowed (perhaps for the first time) by its long-term planning approach.

- It likewise re-structured its corporate *Sponsorship Programme*, introducing a three-tiered programme: €5,000, €10,000 and €15,000. Additionally, this programme would function as a multi-year mechanism, allowing sponsors to pledge support for up to three years. In previous seasons, Festival sponsors were generally contributing on a one-time basis, at between €2,000 and €10,000.

The Outcome

A number of significant outcomes have resulted from the introduction of a long-term planning approach paired with new fundraising mechanisms.. The most significant results include:

- A sponsor who had, for 10 years, contributed €2,000 each year, made a three-year, €5,000 p.a. commitment (for a total of €15,000). This 150% increase in giving from a single donor marked an important turning point for CJF: it had proven that a long-term approach to artistic planning provided parallel freedom to stage a legitimate approach to high-level donors in a multi-year context.

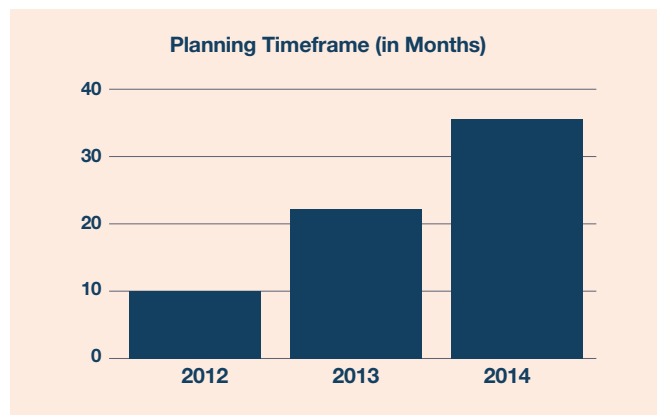


- At the introduction of the *Commissioning Patron* programme, three long-term, €300-level *Festival Friends* increased their gifts to the €500 level. It became clear that in the absence of a higher-octane “ask” — which provided donors with the ability to sponsor the development of a new work — CJF was “leaving money on the table.”

- The Board of Directors responded actively to the introduction of the *Commissioning Patron* programme. Although not all were able to join at the €500 level themselves, they utilised this improved structure to approach a group of new, high-level prospects from within the Clonmel community. As a result, 3 new *Commissioning Patrons* were solicited, with a total yield of €4,000 towards the 2014 programme.

In sum, Clonmel increased its gifts from non-public sources by over 150% in its first year alone.

Out of the five projects planned from 2013–2015, one was realised in 2013, two will be realised in 2014 and one is in place to be part of the 2015 Festival. **As of today, each of these projects has the necessary financial resources in place to secure their place in the programme.**



The Takeaway

In 2012, CJF leadership recognised that without a culture shift, it would likely never break the mould of a 10-month planning cycle. In addition to the stress this placed on the artistic planning process, this short-term approach had taken its toll on the psyche of the organisation. How would it ever achieve greater artistic quality and community impact when there was rarely time to react, much less plan for the future?

The process of long-term planning is now integral to the Festival's mentality. Both staff and Board are aligned around a series of short-, mid- and long-term planning goals. A "menu" of projects is available to any interested "investor", and these conversations are taking place years, not months (or weeks) in advance of the season. Already, substantial portions of the 2015 programme have taken shape and two projects are in place for 2016.

CJF coupled the increased confidence of its artistic planning process with an increased rigor in its fundraising effort. Mechanisms linked directly to the artistic process (the *Commissioning* programme) provided personalised, exciting opportunities for donors who wish to be involved with CJF in a deeper way. Clonmel's relatively remote location, and assumed lack of access to individuals of affluence, has not hindered this effort.

While the sums raised to date may be modest, they have made a significant impact on the budget of this regional festival, and greatly inspired the planning confidence, and artistic impact, of this impressive undertaking.

What appeared impossible just two short years ago may just be the ticket to a brave new chapter in this Festival's bright future.

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