

# Incrementally diversifying income streams during a live event crisis



Case Study: **Music Network**

New Stream – Fundraising Fellowship, Ireland



Nell Ní Chróinín (l) & Tara Breen (r) performing as part of a Music Network tour with Laoise Kelly & Josephine Marsh. Photo: John Soffe

## Organisational Profile

Founded in 1986, Music Network is Ireland's national music touring and development organisation. Music Network makes high quality live music accessible to communities throughout Ireland, and helps musicians to develop fulfilling careers. Its vision is that of a culture which increasingly values live music in our everyday lives, embracing it as an essential part of a healthy, vibrant society. In spite of the many challenges Music Network faced during Covid-19 in 2021, the organisation pivoted successfully to digital delivery with impressive reach and audience numbers. The organisation has 7 full-time employees including 1 full-time fundraising staff member.

## Organisational Funds Raised:

2020: €860,918

2021: €1,002,256

## Funds raised by Fellow:

2020: €2,750

2021: €30,256

**“Fundraising Fellowship, Ireland has given me great grounding in core fundraising strategies and the opportunity to fine-tune my communication skills. Fundraising is central to Music Network’s strategic plan, and diversifying our income streams has helped us to reach new audiences through our programming.”**

Catherine Hearn, Development Officer,  
Music Network

## Key Achievements:

- 400% increase in Friends
- €18,706 raised via Grade-a-thon
- Secured €8,500 from the Bank of Ireland Begin Together Arts Fund



# Fundraising Fellowship Ireland

## The Challenge

Previous to the Fellowship, Music Network had a dedicated team for PR and communications who had limited time to focus on fundraising. Having identified the need to integrate fundraising into its overall strategic goals, Music Network applied for the Fellowship to recruit a Development Officer. Once the programme began, Catherine Hearn was recruited and tasked with developing new income streams for the organisation, with most of this work started from scratch.

With the impact of Covid-19 on live events, Music Network was facing a mission crisis: how was it possible to be a live music organisation, without live music? The organisation found a way to support musicians and engage with audiences by commissioning 20 new pieces of music through a programme called *The Butterfly Sessions*. These were broadcast in 2021 on YouTube with a donation ask. In August 2021, Music Network programmed live and local concerts in different regions of Ireland, once again reaching audiences and prospects in person. However, due to October's restrictions, the organisation had to pivot back to virtual events. This meant most prospects were unable to experience Music Network's live music offering. While this has been a major challenge, Hearn has been able to invite prospects to performances when possible.

## Marketing and Audience Development – Strategy for Success

In the Autumn of 2020, Music Network finalised its strategic plan for 2021– 2025. Central to this plan was the objective to develop new audiences for live music and to advocate for the value of live music in society. During this period, the organisation also finalised its Diversity and Inclusion policy. The Fellowship was instrumental in helping the organisation focus on communicating impact to its stakeholders through digital marketing campaigns. This included a focus on institutional marketing which bolstered awareness-raising, as well as fundraising campaigns.



## Fellow Profile

Catherine graduated from TCD in 2018 with a BA in English and German. During her time in Trinity she became involved in social and environmental activism, and in her final year, worked in the Alumni Office as a student fundraiser. Catherine has previously worked in bookselling and publishing as well as a stint in New York working for a mindfulness/music start up. Catherine joined Music Network as their Development Officer in June 2020.

## Core Skills / Learning / Activities

-  Strategic planning
-  Marketing plan
-  Fundraising plan
-  Friends & membership schemes
-  Communicating organisational impact
-  Prospect development
-  Relationship management
-  Board engagement & ongoing development
-  One-to-one mentoring sessions
-  Presentation skills
-  Pitching skills and opportunities
-  Job specifications



# Fundraising Fellowship Ireland

## Fundraising – Strategy for Success

Music Network’s strategic goals inspired fundraising campaigns that increased accessibility to its work and raised the profile of the organisation. These were led by clear, exciting, and unique cases for support. With a staff member dedicated entirely to fundraising, Music Network was able to think actively about its fundraising goals, the long-term impact of its fundraising campaigns, and how to retain new supporters.

## Impacts of the Fellowship – Key Developments

### Refreshing and Enhancing Membership

In line with the new strategic plan, Hearn’s first job was to revamp the Friends scheme, offering more accessible levels and concessions for younger members. This led to a 400% increase in Friends membership from 2019–2020. Inspired by the stories of other arts fundraisers through the Fellowship seminars, Hearn began to focus on stewardship, communicating regularly with new supporters via personal emails and programme updates, which has led to high rates of retention.

### Building a network of support

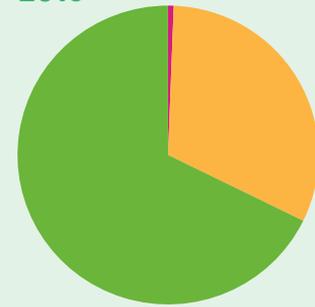
The Fellowship has provided a structure for prospecting, which has empowered Hearn to work with the Board. Hearn successfully collaborated with the Board to progress these strategies, leading to new introductions, and engagement with 16 new potential corporate supporters. With these connections in place, conversations can now be progressed at the organisation’s 2022 live events.

### Crowdfunding and Individual Giving

Given the increased isolation brought about by the pandemic, Music Network felt 2020 was a timely moment to develop their Instruments for Older Learners project, which would provide instruments and tuition for older people wishing to return to music. They were also exploring innovative ways to connect with their audiences, given live events were on a hiatus. After conducting research about other lockdown fundraisers, Music Network developed the concept of the Grade-1-a-thon: a fundraiser which invited aspiring musicians of all ages to participate by learning a new musical instrument to grade 1 level. Participants were tasked with encouraging friends and family to sponsor their endeavour, with all funds going towards acquiring instruments for older learners.

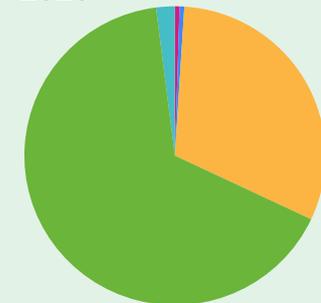
## Sources of Contributed Income

2019



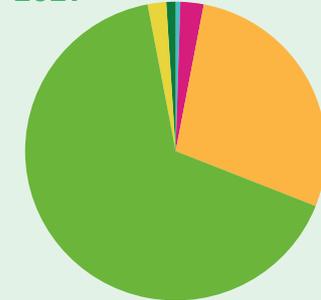
- Membership & Friends 1%
- Grants 31%
- Arts Council 68%

2020



- Corporate Sponsorship 0.5%
- Grants 31%
- Arts Council 66%
- Membership & Friends 0.5%
- Other 2%

2021



- Patrons 2.5%
- Grants 28%
- Arts Council 66%
- Membership & Friends 0.5%
- Other 1%
- Crowdfunding 2%

## Fundraising Fellowship Ireland

The Royal Irish Academy of Music was secured as a project partner so that participants could take their RIAM Grade 1 exams free of charge. The campaign exceeded its target of €10,000 and raised over €18,000, with 50 participants learning 15 different instruments.

### Successful Grant Writing – ‘Bank of Ireland Begin Together Arts Fund’

Through the Fellowship, Hearn has been able to work on creating compelling applications that are tailored to each grant funder while retaining the integrity of the programme that needs support. Informed by training from the Fellowship, these cases for support are more data driven and more focused on evaluation and impact than before. After working on a number of grant applications in 2021, Hearn was successful in securing a €8,500 grant from the Bank of Ireland Begin Together Arts Fund in partnership with *Business to Arts*. This grant will support its Roscommon Residency for Older Learners, a project that will improve community access to instruments and music-making and connect people with live music outside of the standard concert format. It will also create new employment and professional development opportunities for local musicians.



Network tour with Bangers & Crash. Photo: Hannah Levy

### Conclusion

Despite the lack of live music for most of 2021, Music Network has managed to support musicians, engage audiences, programme performances and begin to diversify their income streams, while staying true to their mission and goals. Participating in the Fellowship in the midst of a live arts crisis was a challenge, however Hearn has used



ICO Sing Out With Strings

**‘Fundraising Fellowship, Ireland afforded Music Network the opportunity to employ a dedicated fundraising resource for the first time. This has enabled us to increase our focus on diversification of income streams, raising vital funds for the organisation and laying the foundations for further fundraising successes into the future.’**

Sharon Rollston, CEO, Music Network

the opportunity to develop her skills and build capacity for Music Network. She took on the Fellowship learnings and implemented them through individual giving campaigns and establishing a pipeline of prospects with the Board. She is building on these successes as she continues to fundraise for the Music Network instrument bank, touring van, and residencies for older learners. Each fundraising campaign has been a springboard to the next campaign, strengthening Music Network’s base for support and guaranteeing a sustainable and exciting future for the organisation.

### Fundraising Fellowship

Fundraising Fellowship, Ireland is a partnership between *Business to Arts* and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. The programme builds capacity in cultural organisations across Ireland and addresses key fundraising challenges affecting the sector. In 2020, two cultural organisations were offered 50% matched-funding to hire a fundraising professional or marketing & fundraising professional. This case study is part of a series which highlights the achievements and challenges faced by organisations and their Fellows throughout the programme.