



Fundraising Institute Australia

Article by Peggy Hailstone
Headshot courtesy of FIA

When the average person thinks fundraising it's generally raffle tickets, tin rattling, and schools and charities holding fetes or selling chocolates. Yet the reality across Australia is universities teaching masters level courses, non-profit organisations implementing highly strategised fundraising plans, and experienced fundraising professionals working creatively and tactically to genuinely make a difference.

Chris McMillan, CEO of the Fundraising Institute of Australia (FIA), agrees the stereotypical view of fundraising personnel as a 'grass-roots activity that anyone can do' is changing. "The fundraiser is viewed as becoming more professional, but slowly, slowly," she says.

As the peak body representing fundraising in Australia, one of the FIA's roles is to professionalise the industry. With high turnover rates in fundraising roles, with historically few planned career paths, and with many fundraisers falling into fundraising (rather than consciously choosing it as a career), professionalisation is not an easy barrow to push.

"A lot of fundraisers are [understandably] so focused on what they're doing they don't look up and think, 'well, I should engage with the peak body and get involved with more networking and more opportunities.'" McMillan strongly encourages fundraisers to change this mindset. Think about approaching your employer for an FIA membership subscription on the basis that (for them) it's both inexpensive professional development and a tax deduction.

In terms of professionalisation activities, the FIA works across the areas of advocacy of standards, professional development pathways, and measurable credentials. Operating since 1968—originally as The Australasian Society of Fundraisers—the Institute has worked hard over the past four decades to formulate industry and commercially accepted principles and standards.

Now an incorporated organisation with a staff of ten, the FIA has put their stamp on four best-practice fundraising principles. These are the Code of Principles of Fundraising Practice, the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, the Fundraiser's Promise to Donors, and the Code of Acceptance and Refusal of Donations. An FIA Complaints Process also accompanies these principles.

This has the goal of promoting best-practice and encouraging ethical behaviour, and offers a structured and mediated complaints process if any party believes this has not occurred.

McMillan also talks passionately about the FIA's seven standards. These are operational standards that members and organisations agree to abide by when committing to an FIA membership. With 11 standards now in place, there is basically a standard to guide every fundraising activity: bequests, telemarketing, direct mail, electronic fundraising, events, grants, workplace giving etc. As issues arise, and as technology and business operations change, the FIA responds by developing the necessary updates. It does this by drawing strongly on input from its member base, and through discussion and collaboration with relevant commercial and non-profit industry bodies.

When asked why fundraisers should join the FIA, McMillan is quick to mention transparency. "When you become a member of the FIA you agree to operate under the Principles and Standards of Fundraising Practice. This is really saying that whatever you are doing in fundraising is of an ethical nature," McMillan explains. It's about being upfront with donors at a time when donors are increasingly discerning.

Ostensibly, membership also has a number of benefits for both the individual and organisation. These include reduced fees for industry conferences and training courses, access to local networking channels and State chapters, access to industry specific seminars and workshops (again, at a reduced fee), access to industry scholarships, access to a mentoring program, and access to a range of publications (Advancing Fundraising, a bi-monthly national magazine; Fundraising Matters, a bi-monthly State e-bulletin; and Raising Our Voice, an information e-bulletin service for organisational members).

Organisation membership has the additional benefit of being able to draw upon FIA as media spokesperson for current and sensitive issues. Similarly, in their advocacy role—or when developing standards and principles—organisational members are FIA's first port of call for consultation and policy development.

Organisation members can also use the Institute's logo on communications materials to indicate their public commitment to ethical standards. Individuals can use FIA post-nominals on business cards or communications materials to denote their commitment to industry principles (e.g., MFIA/Member Fundraising Institute of Australia, AMFIA/Associate Member Fundraising Institute). As these brands become more heavily used and publicly promoted, and as professionalisation of the industry becomes more embedded into daily practice, expect the worth and awareness of this signage and lettering to grow in value.

Professional Development

A keen advocate for ongoing learning, McMillan is also eager to promote the Institute's professional development activities. "We have professionally recognised programs that are either of a residential or short course nature which are all about ongoing learning."



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Organisational Profile

Some of these programs include Madison Down Under, Skills 123, Diploma, and accreditation as a Certified Fund Raising Executive (CFRE). "CFRE is an international recognised credential and in Australia we are the body that oversees people coming through and doing the exams, supporting them through the whole process," McMillan advises. Further information on the skills and diploma courses, including application forms, can also be found on the website.

McMillan is pleased that university level courses in philanthropy and non-profit studies are cropping up across Australia. The theoretical and research level of learning is important for an industry implementing and advocating professionalisation. "It also means career paths for people coming new into the profession, and that is certainly something we want to encourage." The FIA, she assures, is consulted about many industry professional development activities and has a close working relationship with Queensland University of Technology (the first Australian university to establish tertiary training in philanthropy and non-profit studies).

With approximately 35% of all non-profit income derived from fundraising it is no wonder the industry is in a growth phase and that professionalisation of fundraising staff is an important issue.

With some 700,000 Australian non-profits fighting for the fundraising dollar, it is also not surprising that industry standards and principles, and industry accreditations, are fuelling transparent operations.

There is little doubt too that the role of fundraiser is increasingly a professional one; it requires high-level communication skills, the ability to negotiate, the capacity for financial and staff management, administration skills, conceptual and lateral thinking ability, and interpersonal skills second to none. Time will tell whether this new style of philanthropic staff will be rewarded with the kudos and compensation that their broad, yet highly-specialised skill-set, deserves.



Full details on organisational and individual membership can be found on the FIA's website www.fia.org.au or call 1300 889 670 during office hours to talk to a membership officer.

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