

Adapting fundraising strategies: tailoring practices to diverse contexts

ECFI Peer to Peer Exchange Report:

Pécs (Hungary) - Mureş (Romania)

Purpose of the exchange

The exchange project consisted of two visits and one additional training. Firstly, MKA (Mures Community Foundation) staff visited Pécs in May 2024 and participated in our Giving Circle fundraising evening. The second visit was by PKA (Pécs Community Foundation) staff to Tirgu Mures, where we participated in the Bikeathon fundraising event in September. The complementary training was organised with the remaining project funds, and took place in Budapest, with Sándor Gál, head of the MKA, giving a training session to representatives of Hungarian community foundations, in the presence of a representative of the GYSZA (Roots and Wings Foundation).

First visit:

The purpose of the MKA's visit was to participate in the Giving Circle in Pécs, to see how we prepare and run the event. How we prepare the start-up organisations, how we keep in touch with them. The other main objective was to give them an insight into the workings of the PKA, its day-to-day activities, and our specific projects.

Second visit:

The purpose of the PKA's trip was to visit in person the long-watched event the "Bikeathon" in Târgu Mures, to participate and get a behind-the-scenes look at the event. Our goal was to see if such a fundraising event could be adapted to the conditions in Pécs.



Exchange participants © CF Pécs

Supplementary training:

In Budapest in November 2024, Sándor Gál from MKA and representatives of Hungarian community foundations spent a whole afternoon together at the GYSZA office, where we received a detailed presentation and methodological training on all aspects of the Bikeathon event, from organisation to implementation.

Key learnings, findings, and future plans

Visit one - Pécs

The representatives of the MKA and the PKA met each other, and after a short walk around the city, we took part in a joint working meeting at the House of Civil Communities in Pécs, where Csilla Vincze, the director of the House, told us about the history of the House and presented the various forms of cooperation with NGOs.

Afterwards, the representatives of the PKA introduced the members of the MKA to the work of the foundation, introduced them to our various special projects, such as the Lénárd Kata Fund and the P-AGE Conscious Ageing Programme. The relationship between the local civil sector and the municipality was discussed, as well as good practices where the civil sector and the municipality can work together, e.g. community budgeting.

The next day, MKA representatives met the three organisations participating in the Giving Circle and were actively involved in the preparations before the event. They joined us to cheer and support the projects at the Giving Circle.

On the last day, we had a working breakfast and summed up the experiences and lessons of the past days. We compared the work of the two foundations and discussed what we can learn from each other: relations with the local government, team development/professionalisation, involvement of volunteers, communication-marketing. And we planned the details of the PKA's visit to Tirgu Mures.

Key Learnings and outcomes for MKA

During the exchange visit to Pecs we had the opportunity to participate in the “Élő Adás” event - which is a similar event to our Donor Circle event. In this event what surprised us was the large number of participants which generated a very good atmosphere - the participants in our event were smaller (about 60% of the participants in Pecs).

One difference we noticed compared to our event was the setting of threshold amounts for the projects fundraising at the event - which was missing in our event - each project had a single targeted amount - but we are thinking to implement it. One very big difference between the two organisations that we noticed was the fact - that PKA is organized more on volunteerism of members (board members and other volunteers) which is an advantage - the involvement at our organisation of board members find more restricted - the activities in PKA are carried out by an executive team that is also hired and/or on contract basis. From this experience we believe that we should work more on the involvement of board members in the activities of the foundation which could add value to our work. On the other hand, working with a paid team for which we have to fundraise, forces us to think about our projects/events to be "profitable" and self-sustaining and growing.



Bikeathon, © CF Pécs

Another major difference that we found is the age of the board/team members - MKA has younger members and from several age groups - but this aspect forces us to think about involving younger people in the foundations work and to think more about a process of handing over the baton and sustainability of the foundation/foundations in the longer term.

The PKA representatives travelled to Tirgu Mures to participate in the Bikeathon programme. On this visit, representatives of the ITT-HON-KA Community Foundation from Tatabánya also joined the programme, stepping in for the FKA (Ferencváros Community Foundation).

The three days there were intense. We started the first evening with a dinner together. The next day we met at the MKA office and helped with the preparations. Then we had a joint meeting where Sándor introduced us to their foundation and told us about the history of the Bikeathon and the details of its organisation. We found the financial management of the event and the fine details of fundraising particularly interesting. The difficulties of the relationship with local government were also discussed.

We also talked about the organisational structure of the MKA, setting an example of how to work efficiently with a more professional team and a good division of tasks. On Sunday morning, we helped with the unpacking and the Bikeathon was off! Two of us took part in the ride, we did the mountain section with our own bikes. At the end of the event, we celebrated our successes together. After the end of the Bikeathon, we got to know MKA's IT partner company and spent some time at the check point in their yard.

Key learnings and outcomes for PKA

As with many of our study abroad trips, it became clear to us that if we want to move up a level in fundraising, we need to strengthen our professional team.

The role of the curators needs to be transformed: they need to play a major role in resource generation, networking and vision building.

The paid staff team also needs to be reshaped. Professional colleagues are needed to manage, administer and communicate the Foundation's affairs on a day-to-day basis. Professionalism is also essential to organise an event of the scale of the Bikeathon.

Another important lesson is that we need to intensify the engagement and involvement of the corporate sector in order to broaden the sources of our goals and projects and to bring the corporate and civil sectors closer together to tackle local issues effectively and jointly.

The relationship between the Foundation and local government still needs to evolve for both organisations. In Pécs, the PKA has the advantage that the municipality already asks for our opinion on certain issues concerning the civil sector, the creation of a civil strategy and the implementation of the community budget. This level of contact does not yet exist in Târgu Mureş.

We also learned a lot from our Romanian colleagues in the field of marketing and communication, in particular digital communications. A good website, application, social media platforms are essential to reach the widest possible audience with our goals and mission.

The help of the private sector is important, their contacts and outreach help the foundation to communicate its mission and engage a wider audience.

In the future, our team's communications officer will have to develop her work in this direction.

Additional training in Budapest

In Budapest, the GYSZA office hosted a training session held by Sándor Gál for representatives of Hungarian community foundations on the background of the Bikeathon event. He went deeper into the financial basics, fundraising methodology and all the details of the organisation. The Hungarian fundraisers listened to the presentation with interest, and all of them learned a lot from what was said.

Several of them are thinking of introducing similar methodologies in their own fundraising events, and we even talked about the concrete possibilities of adapting Bikeathon.

Key learnings and outcomes for the participants

The main lesson learned at the workshop was that the background work, preparation, financing and execution of a Bikeathon-level fundraising event requires professional teamwork, starting early, and carrying out all the tasks thoroughly, with assigned responsibilities and deadlines.

For these tasks, in addition to the curators and paid staff, external experts and project-based extra staff may be needed.

The funding and fundraising part requires thorough preparation at business plan level, the IT support requires the involvement of a professional partner, all levels of communication require thorough planning and implementation, and the event itself is a multi-day, intensive job.

However, such a large city-wide fundraising event means a great deal to the local community, with all participants coming out winners and ultimately improving the local community.