

10 KEY LEARNINGS ON FUNDRAISING

FROM THE GENEVA
ASSOCIATION DAYS



GENEVA

INTRODUCTION

Fundraising and sponsorship present significant challenges for associations, yet they are vital to the organisation’s health and ability to take meaningful actions for their members and the causes they champion. A robust funding strategy not only sustains operations but also enhances the impact of initiatives aimed at serving diverse communities.

Funding can originate from various sources (private donations, conferences revenues, membership fees,...), and the proportion each contributes to an association’s budget can differ widely. However, it is crucial for associations to diversify their funding streams to mitigate risks and ensure long-term viability. In this document, you will discover insights into donor and funding diversification, along with valuable advice and shared experiences that can inspire you to enhance your organisation’s financial resilience.

This white paper was written based on the knowledge shared during the Geneva Association Days 2025 by Bénédicte Pansier, and Ioannis Pallas, along with insights gathered from the participants.

BÉNÉDICTE PANSIER
ET IOANNIS PALLAS

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GENEVA THE PERFECT DESTINATION
FOR INTERNATIONAL AND
EUROPEAN CONFERENCES



ASSOCIATION DAYS
GENEVA

The Geneva Association Days is a two half-day event aiming at providing a dynamic and inclusive platform for associations and NGOs. CEO and Directors of International and European associations and NGOs came together to access cutting-edge knowledge and exchange with experts. The masterclasses’ topics are carefully selected to address concerns of associations and foster fruitful collaborations. The first edition of the Geneva Association Days was held in from the 29th to the 30th of January and fully organised and financed by the Geneva Convention Bureau.

The Geneva Convention Bureau is a passionate team of experts in promoting Geneva as a congress destination. We provide in-depth knowledge of the meeting industry with a focus on customised solutions.

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BÉNÉDICTE PANSIER



**SECRETARY GENERAL,
FONDATION APPRENTIS
D'AUTEUIL INTERNATIONAL
(FAAI)**

As Secretary General of FAAI, Bénédicte Pansier aims to protect and act for young people in great vulnerability in Switzerland and abroad, through education and professional integration, in collaboration with local partners.

The priorities of the Foundation are the fundraising of international projects, advocacy with the United Nations and the support of a professional integra-

tion restaurant in Geneva, the Birdhouse.

Bénédicte has 25 years of international experience in fundraising and private sector partnerships (UN World Food Programme, International Diabetes Federation, and GAVI), marketing in the private sector, teaching (University of Lugano) and, hospitality & training (the Mérieux Foundation)

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IOANNIS PALLAS



**MANAGING DIRECTOR,
EUROPEAN SOCIETY OF
ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES
(ESAE)**

Passionate about making things work more efficiently. Especially when it comes to Strategy, Governance and Impact.

Experienced in consulting, advocacy, and development projects evaluation, Ioannis possesses a thorough knowledge of EU and country-member politics and an insatiable need to be constantly up to date with an array of topics spreading from technology

and climate to currencies and commodities.

ESAE fosters the professionalisation of Association management through peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and collaboration. As part of the ESAE Community, Association professionals learn from one another, gain a thorough knowledge of the sector, overcome common challenges, and develop the skills necessary to create effective strategies for success.

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10 KEY LEARNINGS ON FUNDRAISING

1

TALK ABOUT PARTNERSHIP, NOT SPONSORSHIP

Reframing your funding strategy from sponsorship to partnership can profoundly shift your mindset and open new avenues for collaboration. This change moves the focus from a transactional relationship to a more meaningful connection. Partnerships can bring invaluable benefits beyond monetary contributions. By identifying and aligning with the right partners, you can unlock opportunities for joint projects, innovative ideas, and collaborative efforts that resonate with your mission. This alignment can build lasting relationships that strengthen the overall impact of your organisation.

2

FIND A SHARED VISION WITH YOUR PARTNERS

When seeking new partnerships, it's essential to view them as collaborative relationships rather than one-sided transactions. A successful partnership is built on a shared vision, where both parties can find common ground. Start by analysing the identities (mission, vision and values) of potential partners that align with your organisation's goal. There are likely projects that could benefit both parties, enhancing visibility for the partner while improving their corporate social responsibility (CSR) reputation, for example. This symbiotic relationship not only supports your initiatives but also gives a sense of community and common purpose.

3

ESTABLISH A CULTURE OF FUNDRAISING WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION

Fundraising should be a collective effort, not just the responsibility of a designated department. Empowering every team member to seek partnership opportunities in their daily roles can lead to new connections and synergies. By encouraging a culture of fundraising, your organisation can leverage the diverse networks and skills of its members, creating a more efficient and effective approach to securing support. Encouraging collaboration across departments can uncover hidden opportunities and lead to innovative fundraising strategies.

4

TAKE THE TIME AND SAY NO

Fundraising is inherently a long-term strategy that requires patience and discernment. It's essential to recognise when to decline potential partnerships that do not align with your organisation's values or goals. Focusing on collaborations that genuinely add value is more beneficial in the long run. The ability to identify when it is appropriate to interrupt negotiations helps to avoid wasting time and energy on unproductive discussions. Sometimes, the timing or the fit simply isn't right, and it's better to redirect your efforts toward more promising opportunities.

5

WHY IS DONOR DIVERSIFICATION IMPORTANT?

Donor diversification is vital for several reasons. First, it enhances financial stability and mitigates risk, ensuring that your organisation is not overly reliant on a single funding source. Second, having a diverse donor base builds credibility and trust with potential sponsors; if others believe in your mission, new donors are more likely to join. Additionally, a broader network can lead to increased visibility and public awareness, amplifying your organisation's reach. The first step to donor diversification is to identify the challenges and opportunities your organisation faces. This will help explore partnerships that effectively address these areas and promote growth. Thinking outside the box and outside your usual donor profile can reveal potential partners from various sectors—individuals, corporations, government funding, foundations, and more.



6

GROWTH FOSTERS GROWTH

To effectively kickstart your fundraising efforts, leverage initial investments from membership fees or conference participation fees. By reinvesting these funds into developing products or services that benefit your members, you not only enhance your organisation's reach and effectiveness but also create a virtuous cycle of growth. As you expand your offerings and attract more members, your audience broadens, leading to increased interest from potential partners. This, in turn, provides additional resources that can be reinvested into further enhancements and initiatives. By demonstrating tangible outcomes from these investments, you can continuously attract further support, establishing a long-lasting and self-reinforcing model for organisational growth.

7

ABANDON COLD PROSPECTIVE STRATEGIES

As you expand your partner base, it's important to understand that a one-size-fits-all approach will not yield the best results. Cold calling and emailing often result in low returns on investment in today's fast-paced, information-saturated environment. Instead, prioritise personalised communication and face-to-face meetings, which can significantly enhance relationship-building with potential partners. Engaging in networking events, conferences, or informal lunches can lead to fruitful discussions and unexpected opportunities for collaboration. By establishing genuine connections, you increase your chances of securing support and uncovering potential partnerships that may not have been initially apparent.

8

HIGHLIGHT AND COMMUNICATE

Setting clear key performance indicators (KPIs) for your fundraising initiatives is vital, as is effectively communicating these metrics. Transparency with your partners builds trust, which in turn boosts your credibility and helps retain existing donors while attracting new ones. Recognising and thanking your partners during events or in online communications not only provides them with visibility but also strengthens loyalty and a sense of belonging within your donor community. Think about organising a special event especially for your partners to express your gratitude and reinforce your relationships. To communicate more effectively, employ storytelling techniques to share the impact of partnerships. This will enhance emotional connections and encourage ongoing support.



9

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

Prioritising quality over quantity in partner relationships is crucial. Striking a balance is important; having too many sponsors can overwhelm your organisation with administrative tasks, distract it from its mission. Additionally, if events are overly tailored for sponsors, paying participants may feel undervalued, leading to reduced attendance and lower engagement. Focus on maintaining high-quality interactions to enhance the value of partnerships.

To do so, start by carefully qualifying your target donors to ensure alignment with your mission and values, thereby avoiding ethical or reputational risks.



10

BE CREATIVE

Offering visibility to partners goes beyond simply displaying their logos on your website or at events. Consider creative ways to provide meaningful exposure, such as allowing them to present awards during your gala dinner. This opportunity positions them as thought leaders, while aligning with their CSR strategies, if the award is relating to DEI or sustainability, for example. Additionally, you can consider partnerships around certifications for your members. This type of collaboration offers partners a chance to engage with participants actively, reinforcing their commitment to your mission while providing substantial value to all involved.





CASE STUDY

THE EUROPEAN SOCIETY OF ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES (ESAE)

During the Geneva Association Days, Ioannis Pallas, the director of ESAE, shared an inspiring transformation story. In 2018, his association relied solely on membership fees to fund its budget. By 2024, however, ESAE diversified its funding sources, establishing a four-source budget (membership fees, awards & summit, sponsorship, events and others) increasing the annual budget 10-fold in a 6-year period.

This expansion of funding sources and budget not only enhanced financial stability but also contributed to a grow-

ing membership base. ESAE adopted a reinvestment strategy aimed at creating more valuable content and services for its members. This approach created a virtuous cycle, driving both funding and membership growth simultaneously. Importantly, ESAE was selective in its partnerships, avoiding the trap of accepting every opportunity that arose. Instead, the association cultivated a small, dedicated community of 25 partners, which included destinations, association management companies, knowledge partners, conferences, events, and service providers.

In 2018, ESAE hosted only two educational and networking events each year. However, as they reinvested their resources, they developed a broader array of offerings. By 2024, ESAE provided a comprehensive suite of products and events, including:

- A community platform
- A job board
- Recorded webinars
- Post-event reports
- Thought articles authored by members
- A knowledge library
- Discounts from partners for members
- 16 educational and networking events annually
- 20 community meetings each year
- Two leadership circle events each year
- The European Association Summit
- The European Association Awards

Each of these initiatives not only represents potential funding opportunities for partners but also reinforces ESAE's credibility.

Looking ahead, ESAE plans to continue this successful strategy while remaining vigilant against overwhelming their members with low-value partnerships. This commitment ensures that both members and partners continue to derive significant value from their engagement with the association.

GENEVA THE PERFECT DESTINATION FOR INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN CONFERENCES



Geneva is a premier conference destination, home to major international organisations like the UN, WHO, and CERN, alongside internationally renowned academic institutions, such as the University of Geneva, the Geneva University Hospitals, Campus Biotech and CERN. Its central location, international airport with over 145 direct flights, and high service standards attract significant events, like the World Cancer Congress 2022 & 2024 and the World Hospital Congress 2025.

Strategically located in the heart of Europe, Geneva offers stunning views of Lake Geneva and the Alps. An efficient public transport system facilitates easy navigation. Congress organisers and delegates enjoy free access to Geneva's efficient public transport, ensuring seamless travel throughout the city.

Learn more on the Geneva Convention Bureau website and get in touch with the team.

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