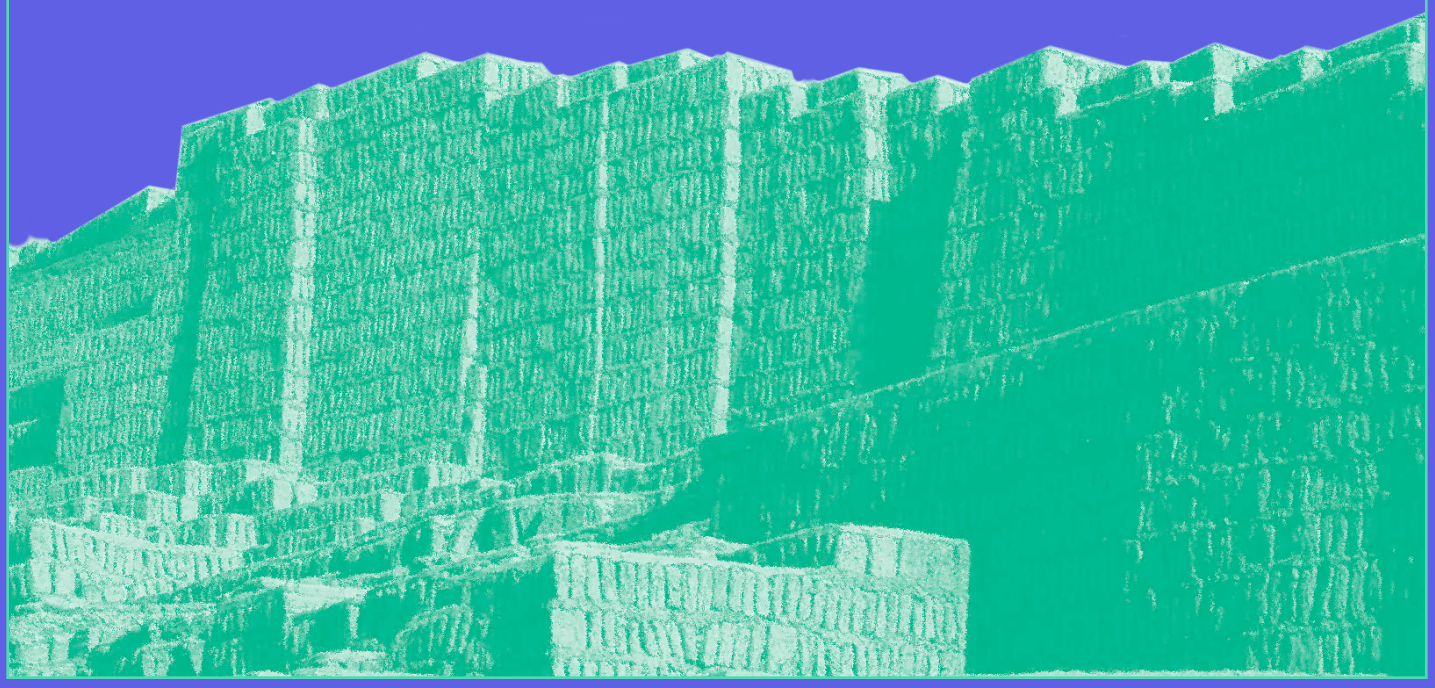
ola | ÓPERA LATINOAMÉRICA

MUNICIPALIDAD DE LIMA

19TH OLA ANNUAL CONFERENCE, LIMA 2026

Governance and Effective Leadership





Paulina Ricciardi and Carmen Gloria Larenas.

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1

Introduction

Ópera Latinoamérica (OLA) brings together more than forty theatres, festivals and performing arts organisations from Ibero-America that share the conviction that collaboration is an essential tool for strengthening the cultural sector. For almost two decades, the OLA Annual Conference has been the network's main meeting point, for fostering exchange of experiences, building partnerships and reflecting on the challenges that cultural institutions face in a context of constant transformation.

The 19th Annual Conference of Ópera Latinoamérica, held from June 16 to 19, 2026 at Teatro Municipal de Lima and Teatro Segura, brought together representatives of 28 member organisations of the network, along with international specialists from the Americas, Europe and Asia. Participants included executives, cultural managers, academics and professionals from various fields linked to the development of the performing arts, as well as representatives of public and private bodies.

Among the institutions represented were Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Theatro Municipal do Rio de Janeiro, Amazonas Opera Festival, Teatro Municipal de Santiago, Teatro Mayor Julio Mario Santo Domingo, Teatro de la Zarzuela, Auditorio de Tenerife, Teatro Real, Gran Teatro Nacional del Perú, Sinfonía por el Perú, Teatro Municipal de Lima, Teatro Solís in Montevideo and Teatro Teresa Carreño. In total, the Conference had participants from 19 countries, adding to the Ibero-American delegation, panelists and guests from Belgium, Canada, China, the United States, England and Italy.

Under the title "Governance and Effective Leadership", the conference focused on a central question for today's cultural organisations: how can we strengthen the institutional capacities that allow theatres to be sustainable, relevant and resilient in an increasingly complex environment?

The conversations showed that today's challenges can no longer be addressed solely through artistic programming or day-to-day management. Strengthening leadership, consolidating governance models capable of supporting processes of change, and diversifying funding sources emerged as three closely linked dimensions for securing the future development of cultural institutions.

This document gathers the main lessons, reflections and recommendations shared by the conference panelists. Its aim is to offer a reference tool that brings together ideas, experiences and good practices for cultural institutions in Ibero-America and around the world.

The contents are organized around three main areas:

* Purpose-driven leadership
* Governance
* Fundraising and new financing strategies.



Ópera Latinoamérica 19th Annual Conference 2026 community.

2

Four Key Points on Leadership



2.1

Leadership Built on Trust and Shared Purpose

In a context marked by uncertainty, technological change and the need to diversify funding sources, OLA's 19th Annual Conference made it clear that the main challenge of leadership is not to manage better, but to lead with meaning. Throughout the various conversations a shared idea emerged: the organisations that manage to endure over time are those that build their decisions on a clear and shared purpose. More than an institutional statement, that purpose acts as a compass that guides priorities, strengthens team cohesion and makes it possible to stay the course even in changing scenarios. The reflection on leadership began with a question as simple yet decisive:

What is the purpose of a cultural organisation and what place does it occupy in society?

In his keynote Leadership and governance in classical performing arts organisations, the economist and University of Chile academic Guillermo Larraín argued that institutional purpose cannot be reduced to a statement of principles, but **must be expressed in the organisation's strategic decisions.** Two areas are especially revealing: **the budget and the programming.** That is where an institution truly prioritizes, and the impact it seeks to generate, becomes visible. In other words, it is where purpose takes on meaning.

This reflection opened a broader conversation about theatres' ability to remain connected to society. Rather than preserving a static identity, the challenge is to continually review whom organisations are reaching, which audiences remain on the margins and which new voices can enrich institutional life. As Larraín pointed out, it is necessary to **look at and read your audience**, understanding that social contexts change and that cultural institutions must evolve along with them.

Larraín also argued that purpose is not a static statement, but an ongoing process of construction and review.

5 items proposed by Guillermo Larraín to assess purpose
Monitor: recognize when the current purpose no longer responds to reality.
Discover: bring in new people, knowledge and technologies to redefine it.
Legitimize: create the institutional, regulatory and social conditions that give it support.
Demonstrate: put that purpose into practice and make it visible.
Mobilize: turn it into concrete actions capable of bringing others on board.

CASE STUDY

Teatro Mayor Julio Mario Santo Domingo (Bogotá, Colombia)

One of OLA member theatres that stands out for its purpose is **Teatro Mayor Julio Mario Santo Domingo** in Bogotá Colombia:

> *To foster dialogue between the best of the world's culture and the most outstanding of Colombia's cultures.*

The origin of this purpose dates back to 2009, when the Julio Mario Santo Domingo Cultural Centre was still under construction. In that context, the Santo Domingo family —who donated the building to the city of Bogotá— commissioned a study to make recommendations on the sustainability and future operating model of the theatre. Both representatives of the family and of the District Administration took part in this process.

The study proposed a public-private management model that remains in place today and defined three major vocations for the institution: **artistic, sectoral and social.** Based on these guidelines, and under the leadership of its general director, Ramiro Osorio, the theatre gradually built **an identity of its own.** Over the years, the artistic programming naturally shaped an idea that ended up summing up the institution's meaning: *to promote the encounter between the world's most relevant cultural expressions and Colombian artistic creation.*

A particularly interesting aspect of this case is that the institutional purpose **was not the result of a formal consulting exercise** or of a later strategic definition process. As the theatre's team explained, the phrase that now appears on its website emerged as an expression of the way in which the organisation, spontaneously and collectively, came to understand and take ownership of its reason for being.

After sixteen years, the purpose remains valid. Nevertheless, as part of its current strategic planning process, Teatro Mayor has considered it timely to review it, not to change its essence, but to assess whether it still adequately captures the role the institution seeks to play in the face of the cultural sector's new challenges.



2.2

The Human Capacities of Leadership

In a context marked by technological transformation and the growing complexity of organisations, human capacities have taken a central place in the discussion on leadership.

Among them, **trust as the foundation of leadership** stood out, along with an increasingly relevant dimension: **generosity.** Although this quality has not traditionally held a central place in leadership theories, the panelists agreed that today it is an essential condition for facing complex challenges that no institution can tackle in isolation.

Leading is no longer only about making decisions or guiding teams, but also about creating the conditions for collaboration, sharing knowledge, opening spaces for participation and recognizing the contributions of others. From this perspective, trust is no longer just a relational value but becomes a strategic asset that strengthens partnerships, encourages collective learning and expands organisations' capacity to adapt and innovate.

This view also made room for a less common reflection: the vulnerability of those who exercise leadership. During the panel *The role of leaders today*, moderated by Carmen Gloria Larenas, president of OLA and general director of Teatro Municipal de Santiago, the panelists were invited to share their main fears when it comes to leading. Rather than seeking individual answers, the conversation highlighted that fear is part of the practice of leadership and that acknowledging it is not a weakness, but a condition for leading organisations in contexts of growing uncertainty.

This concept, widely developed in contemporary leadership theories, is linked to courage and to



Guillermo Larraín, Carmen Gloria Larenas, Cecilia Guzmán, Alejandra Claros Borda and Michael Bobbit.

human dynamics such as risk and emotional exposure. The American academic Brené Brown, in her book *Strong Ground*,[1] argues that there is no courage without vulnerability, defining it as "the emotion we experience when we feel uncertain, at risk and emotionally exposed. In those moments we have two choices: to self-protect and armor up, or to recognize what we're feeling, acknowledge that the emotion is tough to navigate, and choose courage anyway".

In this regard, Michael Bobbitt, president and CEO of Opera America, noted that "fear is normal; the task of leadership is to go beyond fear", stressing that leading does not mean being free of fears, but developing the ability to act in spite of them. For her part, Alejandra Claros Borda, secretary general of CAF – Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean, shared personal experiences about the challenges she has faced throughout her professional career. She acknowledged that, on several occasions, she has had to take on leadership positions in complex and uncertain environments, holding firm to the conviction of earning respect through her work, her abilities and her integrity as a person and as a leader.

The relevance that concepts such as trust, generosity and vulnerability acquired during the conference ties in with a broader discussion about the future of work and leadership. The study *New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage*[2] argues that human capacities —such as empathy, creativity, leadership and collaboration— are precisely the least likely to be replaced by artificial intelligence, since they depend on deeply human skills. In this context, leadership is no longer defined solely by technical ability or formal authority, and comes to rest on relational competencies that make it possible to build trust, mobilize teams and adapt to complex and uncertain scenarios.



Lars Ebert.

1. Brown, B (2025). *Strong Ground*. Random House, New York

2. World Economic Forum. (2025). *New Economy Skills: Unlocking the Human Advantage.* World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/publications/new-economy-skills-unlocking-the-human-advantage/

2.3

Democratic Leadership, Shared Visions

The conversation on *Innovative models of leadership and programming* started from a fundamental question: why did your organisations decide to transform the way they lead and develop their curatorial processes? Rather than responding to a search for innovation for its own sake, the experiences presented showed that these changes arise from the need to build organisations that are more open to dialogue, able to integrate different perspectives and to strengthen a shared vision in the face of the challenges the cultural sector faces today.

For Lars Ebert, secretary general of Culture Action Europe, **leadership must be based on a collective vision and purpose.** When he took on his role in 2023, he began a process of internal dialogue with the team about roles and how they wanted to work collaboratively. From his perspective, and in line with the organisation's vision and objectives, cultural organisations must be deeply democratic, since otherwise they cannot be authentic or credible in their defense of cultural democracy.

After a year of work, the organisation transformed its structure and implemented a **dual leadership** model, shared with his colleague Natalie Giorgadze: she as director general and he as secretary general. All decisions are made jointly. This process requires time and constant conversation, but it rests on a fundamental basis: trust, as a condition for building forms of leadership that people can believe in and actively take part in.

In Ebert's words:

> *That participation is what creates a sense of belonging; a sense of belonging creates trust, and trust creates the conditions for shared leadership.*

In his view, this approach transformed not only the way the team works, but also its relationship with the board and the way the organisation carries out its mission.

In this sense, he identified five principles that underpin this type of leadership: trust, transparency, accountability, equality and equity, highlighting the latter as an indispensable element for building more participatory, legitimate and sustainable organisations.

This view was also shared by Andrea Caruso, who explained that during her tenure at the head of Theatro Municipal de São Paulo she brought in **committees made up of a range of players from the cultural sector** to take part in shaping the artistic programming. The aim was to broaden the perspectives from which the cultural offering was designed and to address social needs and/or issues, such as the representation of women composers, racial leadership and the diversity of voices present in the institution. As she noted, during her years leading the theatre the points of view of different people, including the audience, were incorporated to build more diverse programming, with repertoires capable of representing a greater plurality of experiences and perspectives.

2.4

Self-Care as the Foundation for Building Healthy Teams

Another lesson shared during the conference was that **leadership begins with the care of the person who leads.** Before leading teams or driving transformations, it is necessary to develop the ability to observe oneself and recognize one's own emotional state.

In this regard, Lucas Yepes, board member of Teatro Metropolitano de Medellín, Colombia and head of business at COMFAMA, raised the importance of carrying out a **self-assessment** exercise (see recommended reading on page 31). He noted that, while it is usually easier to look outward and identify other people's problems, the real challenge is to ask ourselves:

* **How am I doing?**
* **How am I looking at the world?**

Lucas Yepes' recommendations for building healthy work teams
Build teams that enjoy what they do.
Identify and enhance each person's strengths.
Believe in others and trust the team.
Respect and actively listen to its members.
Seek harmony in working relationships.
Acknowledge problems and address them in a timely manner.
Promote honesty and open communication within the team.



Taken together, these practices reinforce the idea that team well-being depends not only on how work is organized, but also on the quality of relationships, trust and the ability of leaders to create spaces for collaboration and mutual care.

Gallup's **State of the Global Workplace: 2026 Report**[3] presents the results of its annual study on the experience of workers worldwide. The 2026 edition reveals a decline in employee engagement, reaching its lowest level since 2020, and analyzes the main trends in well-being, workplace climate and leadership in more than 140 countries and territories.

Seven competencies that make the difference in leadership, according to Gallup
1. Build relationships.
2. Develop people.
3. Lead change.
4. Inspire others.
5. Think critically.
6. Communicate clearly.
7. Build accountability.



Galilé Cardona and Lucas Yepes.

3. *State of the Global Workplace: 2026 Report*, de Gallup. https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace.aspx

LEADING WITH MEANING

Having gone through the four points on leadership most often mentioned at the gathering, it can be observed that, although not all the panelists explicitly referred to the concept of purpose, it was present throughout the different conversations.

It can therefore be inferred that purpose is a kind of engine that gives meaning to the daily work of cultural organisations. In fact, one of the conference's calls was not to lose sight of it: to remember where we come from and **why we do what we do.**

During one of the panels, Carmen Gloria Larenas, general director of the Teatro Municipal de Santiago, illustrated this idea with Chile's Heritage Day (Día de los Patrimonios), an initiative that every year opens heritage buildings to the public free of charge. She stressed that watching people visit the theatre for the first time, and the solemnity and joy with which they experience it, makes it possible to reconnect with **the meaning of cultural work.**

Along these lines, Xiomara Suescún, former director of the Centro Nacional de las Artes Delia Zapata Olivella in Bogotá, described how her personal experience of coming from one of Colombia's regions allowed her to exercise leadership with a purpose focused on the participation of people from other provinces of the country, thus making room in the theatre's programming for the arts of diverse territories.

In the conversation with Vania Masías, founder and president of the cultural association D1 in Peru, she also highlighted the meaning of her work and the role of education and art as tools for **social transformation.**

After more than twenty years of experience, she noted that the greatest challenge has been to train children and young people who believe in their ability to transform their reality.

> *Art does not lie, and when you are transformed from within, from the emotions, the change is powerful and systemic.*
>
> Vania Masías.



Flavia Furtado, Vania Masías and Norma Correa.

CASE STUDY

"Introducing the first statewide social prescribing solution in the United States".[4]

Michael J. Bobbit, president and CEO of Opera America, asked during the panel he took part in, entitled *The role of leaders today*:

> *How many of you believe that the arts are good for your health?*

The Arts-based social prescribing program is an initiative implemented in Massachusetts, United States, that integrates the arts and culture into the health system through social prescribing. Through a partnership between Art Pharmacy, Mass Cultural Council and health organisations, professionals can refer patients to cultural activities —such as visits to museums, theatre, dance or music— to improve their well-being, reduce social isolation and complement medical treatment, especially in mental health and chronic illness. The program was developed after a three-year pilot and is the first to be implemented on a statewide scale in the United States.

This case shows how cultural organisations are evolving toward more collaborative and cross-sector models. The connection between culture, health and public policy generates shared benefits, strengthening organisations' social impact and creating solutions in which all the stakeholders involved contribute and benefit.



Michael Bobbit.

4. *Introducing the first statewide social prescribing solution in the United States*. art-in-health social prescribing–. https://massculturalcouncil.org/blog/introducing-the-first-statewide-social-prescribing-solution-in-the-u-s/

3

Governance



The board maintains an ongoing dialogue with the executive team and takes an active part in decision-making.

Andrés Rodríguez Spoerer.

When talking about leadership, it is essential to look at the full spectrum of those who make decisions in organisations. For this reason, for the first time at an Ópera Latinoamérica conference, one of the sessions was devoted to reflecting on the different models of governance, boards, trusteeships and/or boards of directors found both in OLA member organisations and in other cultural institutions.

This first exercise revealed great diversity in how corporate governance is configured. The conversation was therefore illustrative of how each structure responds to the needs, circumstances and dynamics of its own country and organisation.

This was evident in the panel *Board and governance models* moderated by Isamay Benavente, director of Teatro de La Zarzuela, Spain. The governance of the four institutions that took part in the conversation is completely different, as illustrated in the table below.



Miguel Molinari.

CASE STUDY

Governance models discussed in the panel:

Teatro Municipal de Lima (Peru)

A public entity with no board. The highest authority is the Mayor of Lima, who appoints a culture manager and director of the municipal theatres, responsible for leading its management.

Challenge: greater independence of the theatres' administrative and management areas from public structures. This would reduce bureaucracy in decision-making processes and lessen the impact that political changes can have on the stability and continuity of cultural institutions.

Fundación Ibáñez Atkinson (Chile)

A private non-profit entity focused on developing three areas: music, reading and the environment. It has a family board made up of six people.

Challenge: generational succession. The sustainability of this type of organisation depends not only on ensuring the continuity of the endowment, but also on passing on to new generations the commitment to the cause and the purpose that gave rise to the institution.

Teatro Metropolitano de Medellín (Colombia)

A private entity with a social purpose. The board is made up of 14 people linked to philanthropy from the business and industrial sectors, who contribute their own resources and act as an extension of the theatre's management and administration.

Challenge: protecting the theatre's mission and its future sustainability. To that end, in 2025 an advisory process was carried out that resulted in a Corporate Governance Manual, which gathers good practices for its board members.

Teatro di San Carlo de Nápoles (Italy)

A public institution whose board is made up of representatives of the public sector. The model provides for the inclusion of private-sector representatives, who commit to a sustained financial contribution as a condition for joining the board.

Challenge: ensuring its financial sustainability remains to the challenge.

María Patricia Marín, director of the Teatro Metropolitano de Medellín, highlighted the trust between the board of directors and the executive team. They have the freedom they need to programme and lead the theatre's management. In the case of the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples in Italy, its artistic director and superintendent, Fulvio Macciardi, mentioned that the board plays a strategic and supervisory role, without intervening in decisions on artistic programming. Andrés Rodríguez Spoerer, Head of music of Fundación Ibáñez Atkinson, noted that the board maintains an ongoing dialogue with the executive team and takes an active part in decision-making. Each area of action is led by specialists who, in addition to implementing the foundation's programmes, propose new initiatives to the board to broaden their reach and impact. This model fosters collaborative work and the board's constant involvement in the institution's activities.

Miguel Molinari, director of Lima's municipal theatres, explained that, thanks to a municipal ordinance with a budget allocated by law, he has been able to guarantee an annual opera season for the city. He also stressed the importance of having tools that provide autonomy and legal certainty.

Regardless of whether the structure is public, private or mixed, a common point in the presentations was the crucial role of the board in facilitating, supporting, strengthening and safeguarding management. This ties in with the attributes of a good board proposed by the US services firm Smithbucklin[5], set out in the table below.

Attributes of a good board according to Smithbucklin
Commitment to purpose Keep decisions aligned with the institution's mission and purpose.
Collaborative spirit Promote dialogue, value different perspectives and collectively support the board's decisions.
Curiosity Stay informed, ask questions, explore new ideas and make evidence-based decisions.
Accountability Participate actively, prepare for meetings and honor the commitments made.
Relevant expertise Contribute specialized knowledge and put it at the service of the organisation, while also recognizing the expertise of the executive teams.
Integrity Act with honesty, transparency and ethics, always putting the institution's interests first.

5. Roosendaal, D. (2025). 6 *Attributes of Exceptional Board Members.* Smithbucklin https://smithbucklin.com/insights/article/6-attributes-of-exceptional-board-members/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

4

Fundraising and New Financing Strategies



It's not just about generating money, but about it being a space that people can access, use, experience.

Susan Johnson.

Financial sustainability has become one of the main challenges for cultural organisations. In a scenario marked by shrinking public resources, growing competition for funds and an increasingly uncertain economic environment, institutions are called upon to broaden and diversify their funding sources in order to strengthen their ability to project themselves into the future.

This need does not mean replacing the role of the State. On the contrary, the conference reaffirmed that public funding remains a fundamental pillar for guaranteeing cultural rights and the development of disciplines such as opera, whose operation can hardly be sustained through earned income alone. However, the current context calls for complementing that support with new strategies that make it possible to build more resilient and sustainable organisations.

The aim of the panel *Philanthropy and new models of income diversification*, moderated by OLA's executive director, Paulina Ricciardi, was to show alternative models through concrete cases.

Susan Johnston, director of operations at the Southbank Centre in London (United Kingdom), shared how the institution has had to rethink its funding model in the face of a sustained decline in public support. In 2015 this represented approximately 53% of its income, and today it stands at 26%. Given this scenario, and considering that raising philanthropic funds and strategic partnerships posed an ongoing challenge, the organisation chose to focus on its assets, in this case the building, which stretches over 11 acres on the banks of the Thames. Today, around **45% of its income comes from commercial activities** linked to the venue, which has 18 restaurants and shops.

One of the strategies they have implemented is renting out space for graduations. It's not just about generating money, but about it being a space that people can access, use, experience. They follow the same approach with shops and businesses through a curator; for example, they make sure the restaurants offer all kinds of cuisines and price points. These businesses offer transactional opportunities as well as other ways of connecting with audiences and even potential funders.

This strategy brings in close to two million visitors a year. It has strengthened financial sustainability, attracted new audiences and broadened the ways in which people relate to the cultural centre, reinforcing its institutional purpose of promoting cultural democracy and establishing itself as a space open to everyone. Today, around 40% of its programming is free.

Mónica Carrillo, director for the Americas and Climate lead at Myriad USA, a philanthropic foundation that facilitates international donations to a range of projects, including cultural ones, also took part in this panel. For the past three years,



Mónica Carrillo.

the organisation has expanded its work in Latin America. Its role is to act as the legal representative so that museums, theatres and other institutions can receive tax-deductible donations from the United States without having to set up as non-profit organisations in that country. It also supports US donors in channeling their contributions to initiatives outside the United States.

In that country, the concept of philanthropy is rooted in its culture. In a single year, more than 592 billion dollars are donated in the United States, and 77% of that amount comes from individual donations. Alberto Rebaza, president of Museo de Arte de Lima, MALI, called for understanding **philanthropy as a commitment to a cause and not only as a financial donation,** a view that, in his opinion, still prevails in much of Latin America.

Philanthropy also means contributing time, knowledge, networks and the capacity to influence. From this perspective, although the absence of tax incentives can be an obstacle, it does not by itself explain the development —or lack of development— of a philanthropic culture. That is why, for MALI, the first step is to build a community that feels part of the institution's purpose and wants to contribute to it through different forms of participation.

CASE STUDY

Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI)

The Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI) is a private institution whose mission is to preserve the leading collection of Peruvian art, spanning from the pre-Columbian period to contemporary art, including colonial, republican, indigenist and modernist collections. Although the building it occupies belongs to the Municipality of Lima, the museum receives no funding from it, so 100% of its resources come from private sources.

Alberto Rebaza, president of the museum, explained that MALI's financial sustainability rests on a clear premise: **not depending on a single source of income.** As he stated during the panel:

> *We do not expect a single source of funding to be enough to carry out our activities, but rather to have a diversity of income streams that, at different times, can respond to the financial challenges any private institution faces.*

Today, the museum combines a range of revenue-generating strategies. Around **40% of its income comes from its education programme,** which offers painting, dance and other courses and workshops for different audiences. This is complemented by two art auctions held each year, a community of more than 120 patrons, a fifteen-member board with a strong philanthropic commitment, an annual fundraising gala and the rental of its spaces for private events.





Raquel Rivera and Christina Loewen.

Mónica Carrillo mentioned a specific strategy that makes it easier for organisations to become interested in supporting a cause: diversifying the way the message is delivered. A corporate or private donor with strong ties to education or technology will probably not donate to a theatre or museum, but if the information shows the institution's work in those areas, it will appeal to that foundation's or donor's giving priorities. This can make the next generations want to support institutions that may seem traditional.

Another model presented was that of the Association for Opera in Canada, introduced by its CEO, Christina Loewen, who discussed the potential of **social finance** as an alternative for strengthening the sector's sustainability. This mechanism consists of granting repayable loans or making impact investments, whose returns allow resources to be reinvested in new cultural projects.

Loewen explained that this model has been possible because the organisation has tools to measure the social impact of its initiatives and resources from government contributions received over several years. On this basis, the association has begun investing in co-productions by some of its member organisations, generating financial returns that will allow it to expand the fund available for new loans and investments. In this way, social finance becomes a tool that not only strengthens the organisation's financial sustainability, but also contributes to the development of the Canadian opera ecosystem.

Along the same lines, Vania Masías, founder of D1 Asociación Cultural, presented a funding model that emerged in response to the need to sustain its social purpose over the long term. Faced with dependence on external funds, she chose to develop a self-sustaining model, in which a dance academy and a cultural events production company generate the income that funds the organisation's social programmes. To ensure the continuity of its programs of transformation through art, she created a non-profit organisation with a self-sustaining model, in which the social impact projects are funded by the income generated by a dance academy and a cultural events production company. This has allowed it to diversify its sources

of income and reduce its dependence on external funding, showing how generating its own resources can become a tool for strengthening a cultural organisation's sustainability.

Along these lines, the report *A Seat at the Table: Embedding Commercial Thinking in the Cultural Sector* by the Association for Cultural Enterprises (Cultural Enterprises Report 2026)[6] states that "commercial activity now makes up the largest share of income for cultural venues in the United Kingdom, averaging 40%, ahead of fundraising, grants and ticket sales". The document concludes that organisations that **integrate this perspective into their strategic decisions, especially in programming, achieve better results in income generation.**

6 keys to strengthening the commercial performance and sustainability of cultural organisations, according to the *Association for Cultural Enterprises*
1. Develop commercially friendly programming.
2. Add special events and make the most of seasonal moments (Christmas, Halloween, holidays, etc.).
3. Design memorable experiences for audiences.
4. Take the weather into account when planning programming.
5. Have physical spaces suited to the weather conditions.
6. Try out new initiatives and test how they work in order to assess their impact and results.



Cecilia Guzmán.

6. *At a Seat at the Table: Embedding Commercial Thinking in the Cultural Sector*. Association for Cultural Sector de Cultural Enterprises Report 2026. https://culturalenterprises.org.uk/a-seat-at-the-table/

KEYNOTE

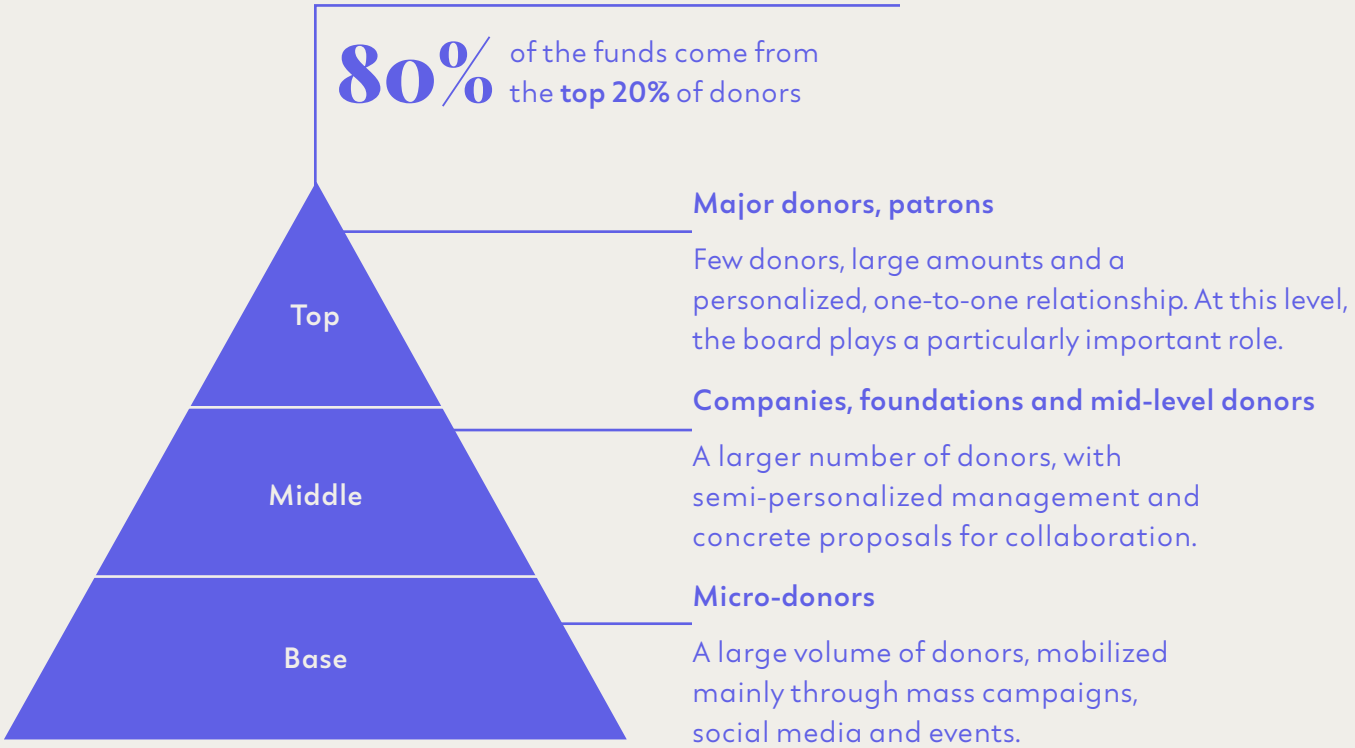
The Role of Boards in Fundraising

Cecilia Guzmán, board member of Teatro Municipal de Santiago and founding partner of G-V, addressed the role of boards in fundraising, understood as raising resources from a broader perspective than simply seeking funding. **The starting point is not financial resources, but the purpose that drives an organisation and its ability to bring others into that project.**

One of the ideas she shared was the definition used by the Spanish Fundraising Association: **Fundraising is not about money. It is about the desire to make the community, society and the world a better place.** This perspective invites us to understand fundraising as a strategy for building long-term relationships, based on trust, shared impact and the creation of value for society, rather than as a one-off mechanism for obtaining resources.

Types of donors

It is essential to understand donors, because you don't speak to all of them in the same way.



KEYNOTE

Tips for reaching out to donors

Stop asking and start inviting.

Don't be afraid to go out and seek support, and build tolerance for failure. Not every conversation ends in a donation, and learning from them is also part of the process.

Follow up with donors. They are allies of the organisation, so it is important to invite them, keep in touch and make them feel part of it, regardless of the size of their contribution.

Put the cause or project first. Donors are not interested in funding the organisation's day-to-day operations, but in being part of a concrete project.

Measure and communicate results. Have metrics to assess how the campaign worked, how many people it reached and which strategies were most effective.

Having the resilience to accept failure. Not every conversation results in a donation, and learning from these experiences is part of the process.

The role of the board

Board involvement is key and can take place in three dimensions:

1. **Work**

Devoting time to fundraising, attending meetings, inviting potential donors to performances, getting to know the theatre and bringing them closer to its projects.

2. **Influence**

Putting the board's networks and contacts at the service of finding new funds and allies.

3. **Knowledge**

Contributing its members' experience and knowledge, putting them at the service of the cause.

KEYNOTE

Steps for running a fundraising campaign

1. Case for Support

The starting point is to build a master document that organizes the campaign's narrative and answers three questions:

* Why do we exist?
* Why us?
* Why you?

2. Preparation

* Message design.
* Development of deliverables and materials.
* Campaign preparation.

3. Quiet phase

* One-to-one conversations with potential donors.
* Building an initial base of support.

4. Public phase

A mass campaign built on the base of relationships developed during the quiet phase.



Susan Johnston and Alberto Rebaza.

4

Conclusions OLA Lima 2026

The 19th Annual Conference of Ópera Latinoamérica left one central idea in place: cultural organisations can no longer sustain themselves on artistic excellence or institutional tradition alone. In today's context, their legitimacy depends on their ability to articulate a clear, shared and verifiable purpose that guides programming, resource allocation, relationships with audiences, the search for funding and decision-making.

One of the strongest themes was the need to strengthen governance. In this sense, boards emerge as key players in protecting artistic and institutional autonomy, especially in the face of excessive dependence on a single funder or external pressures that could divert the organisation from its mission.

Leadership, for its part, was understood less as a position of authority and more as a practice of building trust. It was stressed that today's leaders must know how to listen, diversify perspectives, build agreements, read changes in their environment and build shared purposes. In contrast to more vertical models, values emerged such as generosity, listening, adaptability and the courage to uphold difficult decisions, even when that means setting limits.

The idea that cultural leadership must be collective and relational also came through strongly. It is not only about steering an institution inwardly, but about activating ecosystems: boards, teams, artists, communities, authorities, companies, audiences and other organisations. Trust, transparency, equity and participation were put forward as conditions for meaningful and sustainable leadership.

In terms of sustainability, income diversification appears not only as a financial strategy, but as part of a broader institutional vision: expanding audiences, activating spaces, generating new uses, building community and demonstrating social value. The importance of inviting institutions that contribute resources to a cause, and of replacing a transactional logic with one that brings public and private organisations on board to generate social impact, was also highlighted.

ANNEXES

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Recommended reading

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