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Medical giving in rude health

A new focus on major donor relationships has kick started fundraising to new levels at UNSW's Faculty of Medicine. **Matthew Miles** tells the story.

As recently as 2006, the philanthropic income of the Faculty of Medicine at the University Of New South Wales (UNSW) totalled only \$200,000 per annum. Although fundraising was a priority among the most senior staff, awareness and buy-in from middle level academics was low.

In 2006, the decision was made to employ a manager and team of four dedicated to fundraising and external relations. This was the catalyst for an astonishing turnaround. The faculty has since realised 30 times its previous annual income, in two years earning more than \$12 million in donated and pledged major gifts for a range of important projects spread over numerous areas of medicine.

Snowball Effect

As one of the leading research-intensive medical schools in Australia, the faculty has long en-

joyed good relationships with a number of high-net-worth donors, and allocating specific staff resources to fundraising meant the faculty could begin to capitalise on these relationships.

With the team also actively fostering collaboration with key internal decision-makers, the result has been a kind of snowball effect. Escalating income has occurred hand in hand with a new understanding by academic staff of the importance of philanthropy, fast-tracking the creation of a funding-focused culture more conducive to future success.

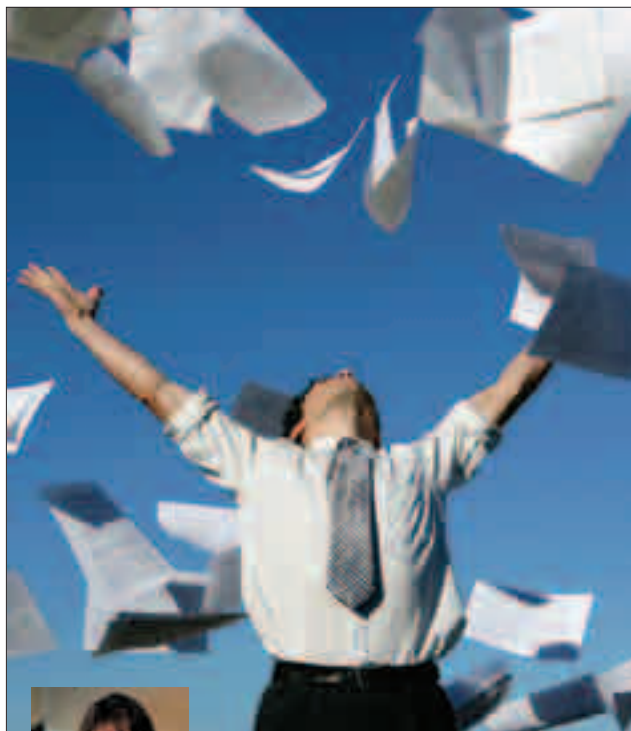
Early Success and Cultural Change

The faculty's chief asset is a goldmine of ready, willing and financially able donors. Several large gifts – one of \$2.5 million and another of \$1.5 million – were made as the new funding team found

its feet. This helped forge a good reputation early on with colleagues (particularly academics), some of whom were unconvinced of the need and value of fundraising.

The team continued to build momentum and credibility by grabbing opportunities to give around 30 presentations on-campus to audiences ranging from academic staff to executives and board members. This not only helped to break down the 'silo' mentality common in a large institution, it communicated positive messages about fundraising successes to bring these key decision-makers on board.

All the team's successes with major gifts have revolved around taking a central role in a collaborative group. In every instance, others have been critical to the accomplishment of a major gift, whether that be the dean, Professor Peter Smith, chancellor



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On a sprawling university campus, the location of the office of development was also a major factor in the team's effectiveness. Being situated within easy reach of the medical school's senior leaders including the dean was essential to getting 'buy-in' in a timely manner, sharing information quickly and making decisions.

The chance to collaborate with the faculty's advisory council out of session and not just during the set four meetings a year was also vital.

Major Gifts Strategies

The main strategy to secure major gifts is to concentrate on the faculty's areas of uniqueness or world leadership.

Rather than planning to make a structured number of face-to-face meetings a year, the development team's approach is organic, arising from natural situations such as meeting donors at one of the medical school's events.

The goal is listening to what the donor says about their needs, then commencing a dialogue about potential areas for support. Talks are ultimately formalised into a written proposal (the ask) focusing on benefits for the funder and alignment with their vision. This proposal is adjusted where

needed to suit preferences and overcome any obstacles to finalising the gift, and where possible steps are taken to bring on board all necessary parties.

The status of the medical school makes the process easier - the standard of the work being conducted provides a very compelling, ready-made 'case for support'.

Big Gifts Coming In

In the last two years several large gifts have been made to the faculty. The Cure for Life Foundation, founded by Dr Charlie Teo, donated over \$2.3 million to a senior academic position to research brain cancer at the Faculty's Lowy Cancer Research Centre.

The Balnaves Foundation supported the official launch of the Indigenous Medical Scholarships program this year by committing \$450,000 to enable three indigenous students to study medicine.

An existing collaboration between the Oncology Children's Foundation (OCF) and the faculty led to a gift of over \$1.75 million for UNSW researcher Peter Gunning to explore cures for childhood cancers with the lowest survival rates.

A donation of \$105,000 continued The Anika Foundation PhD Scholarship, funding research into adolescent depression and suicide - a common and devastating health issue.

What Next?

Currently all the faculty's funding is from major gifts. The plan in 2010 is to boost small to mid-level giving by nurturing alumni relationships. This could include recruiting a dedicated staff member to further develop the annual Dean's Lecture event for medical alumni, making updates to the alumni database, launching a faculty alumni e-newsletter, and publishing more medical school articles into the university's alumni magazine, UNSW Alumni, for a greater presence.

Matthew Miles

Matthew Miles is the director of development and external relations at the Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales (UNSW).



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