

Corporate Fundraising in 2026

The Reality Behind
the Partnerships

Rachel 
Consulting

Wonder.

Prepared by Rachel H
Consulting in partnership
with Wonder Insight

Contents

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➤ OPENING MESSAGES	03
<u>Opening message from the author</u>	03
SETTING THE SCENE	04
<u>Introduction</u>	05
<u>At a Glance</u>	06
<u>Spotlight: Burnout in Corporate Fundraising</u>	07
THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE	08
<u>Profile & Resourcing</u>	09
<u>The State of Corporate Fundraising Today</u>	10
<u>Spotlight: Recruitment, Retention & Organisational Culture</u>	11
<u>Resourcing and Capacity: The Strain Beneath the Surface</u>	12
<u>Leadership, Culture and Buy-In</u>	13
CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES	14
<u>Resources & Partnership Insights</u>	15
<u>Impact measurement: The missing link</u>	16
<u>Spotlight: Impact & Fundable Projects - Turning Data into Confidence</u>	17
<u>Charity of the year partnerships: A mixed picture</u>	18
<u>Spotlight: Charity of the Year (COTY) - Time for a Rethink?</u>	19
LOOKING AHEAD	21
<u>Opportunities</u>	22
<u>Spotlight: Power Imbalance in Partnerships</u>	23
<u>Bright spots: What's Working Now</u>	25
<u>Avenues for Progress</u>	26
<u>Conclusion: The Moment for Change</u>	27
<u>Acknowledgments</u>	29

OPENING MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR



I've worked in corporate fundraising for most of my career. I've been consistently inspired by the people around me: some of the most talented, creative, and passionate individuals in the sector.

But in recent years, I've sensed a shift. The same fundraisers who once led bold, imaginative partnerships are feeling stretched, tired, and, at times, unseen. The constant pressure to deliver, coupled with limited investment and understanding, has chipped away at some of the innovation and drive that once defined this field.

This research was my way of giving those fundraisers a voice. To shine a light on what it's really like behind the scenes, the challenges they face, and the possibilities that exist to create even greater impact.

There is still so much opportunity in corporate partnerships. As we move into 2026, I hope this work gives us greater clarity on what's needed to turn that opportunity into impact, together.

Rachel Holborow, Director of Rachel H Consulting



A message from Fireside Fundraising

Corporate fundraising can be the most exciting form of fundraising. While all donors can change the ending of your charity's story, corporate partners can often change the entire narrative. For example, health charities can work with food companies to make their food healthier, social justice charities can change employment practices and international development charities can improve supply chains.

But these partnerships take time. And when corporate fundraisers are asked to chase 'quick wins' and are shut out of the conversations where they could have the most impact... the excitement fades and we become little more than salespeople on smaller salaries.

Our typical goal at Fireside Fundraising is to provide fundraisers the insight, toolkits and permission they need to achieve meaningful results. So when Rachel mentioned she was creating this report - a voice for the sector - we couldn't help but partner on it. The key message is this: none of us are alone in this, and together, we can make it better.

Andy King, Director of Fireside Fundraising

 [Back to the Contents](#)

Setting the scene

[Introduction](#)

[At a glance](#)

[Spotlight: Burnout in Corporate Fundraising](#)



SETTING THE SCENE

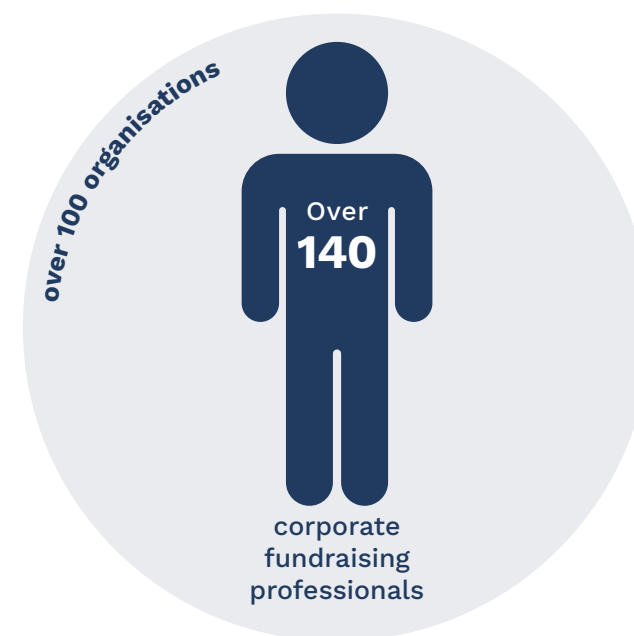
Introduction

Corporate fundraising remains one of the most dynamic, and demanding, areas of the charity sector. For many organisations, it holds huge potential to drive sustainable, unrestricted income and meaningful partnerships that go beyond the transactional.

Yet, for those doing the work, the picture is often complex. Fundraisers are stretched thin, operating in a changing landscape where expectations are high, resources are tight, and impact is harder to evidence than ever.

This research set out to understand what's really happening behind the scenes of corporate partnerships - the opportunities, the challenges, and the shifts fundraisers want to see. Through a mix of quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews, we take into account the perspective of fundraising professionals and ESG & CSR professionals to get a sense of what partnership work feels like from their side.

Over 140 corporate fundraising professionals took part, representing over 100 organisations of all sizes and causes across the UK. Their insights offer a rare, unfiltered view into one of the sector's most important income streams, and one that's still full of untapped potential.



SETTING THE SCENE

At a Glance: Headline Findings

79%

of organisations say their corporate fundraising is either just starting or still growing.



Only
19%

have a well-established or high-performing programme.



78%

say their approach has become more strategic in the last two years, but they rate their organisation's strategy only **2.9/5** on average.



For
61%,
corporate income represents less than 10% of total income.



Just
9%
feel their organisation *fully champions* corporate partnerships.



Professionals are calling for a **fundamental shift** - away from short-term, transactional relationships and towards long-term, strategic, and equitable partnerships built on mutual benefit and trust.



SPOTLIGHT

Burnout in Corporate Fundraising

The job has got tougher: economic headwinds, shifting corporate priorities and smaller teams carrying bigger workloads.

What we're seeing

- Applications going in for opportunities that wouldn't have passed the fit test a few years ago.
- Lower conversion driving "apply to everything" behaviour.
- Vacancies not backfilled. Remaining fundraisers covering multiple posts with no reduction in targets.
- Limited prospect research or data/impact support. Fundraisers DIY the insight and reporting on top of everything else.

Why it matters

- Burnout is becoming normalised; effort isn't translating to outcomes, which fuels churn.

What would help

- Corporates to share clearer criteria and offer feedback.
- Charities to balance KPIs with strategic fit, and say no when it's not right.
- Back fill roles or reduce targets and pressure on existing fundraisers.
- Sector-level acknowledgement of burnout and its impact on income.

“

They're going the extra mile, spending time on applications that, strategically, we probably would have seen as a waste of time a couple of years ago because it's not a great fit for us.”

Head of Partnerships

“

We want you to bring in income... but you have no resources, no pipeline, no contacts, no case for support. You have nothing.”

Partnerships
Manager

“

It's not sustainable. You can do it for a while, but eventually it takes a toll. I always feel like I'm holding my breath, waiting for something to land, for the investment to come in. Because if you're not bringing in income, you're not doing what you're supposed to be doing. It feels like your sole purpose.”

Director of Partnerships

Fundraisers from over

**100
charities**

took part, representing
roles at every level, from
officers and managers
to heads of teams,
directors, and CEOs.

32%

of survey
participants have
worked in corporate
fundraising for over
10 years, and 39%
under 3 years.

The Current Landscape

[Profile & Resourcing](#)

[The State of Corporate Fundraising Today](#)

[Spotlight: Recruitment, Retention & Organisational Culture](#)

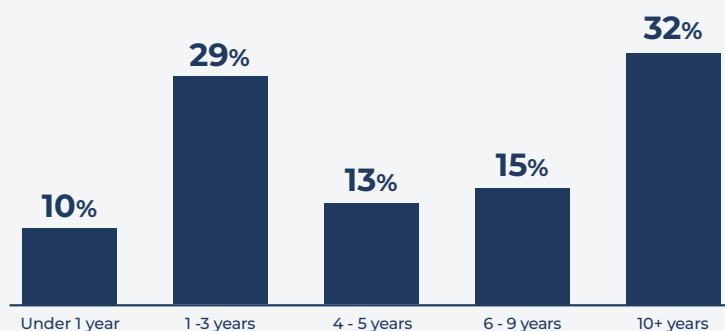
[Resourcing and Capacity: The Strain Beneath the Surface](#)

[Leadership, Culture and Buy-In](#)

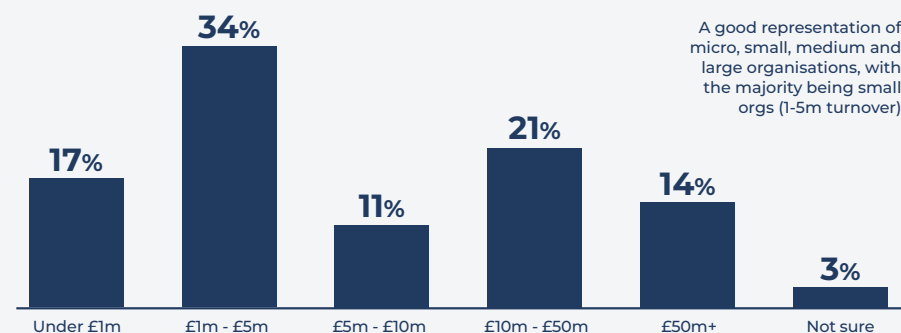
THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Profile & Resourcing

How long have you worked in corporate fundraising? (n=143)



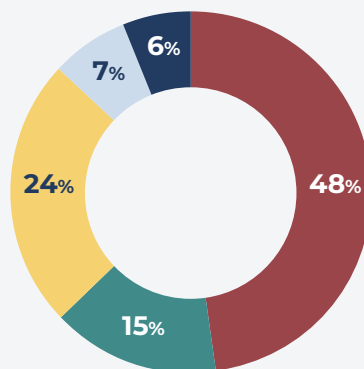
Roughly what is your organisation's annual income? (n=143)



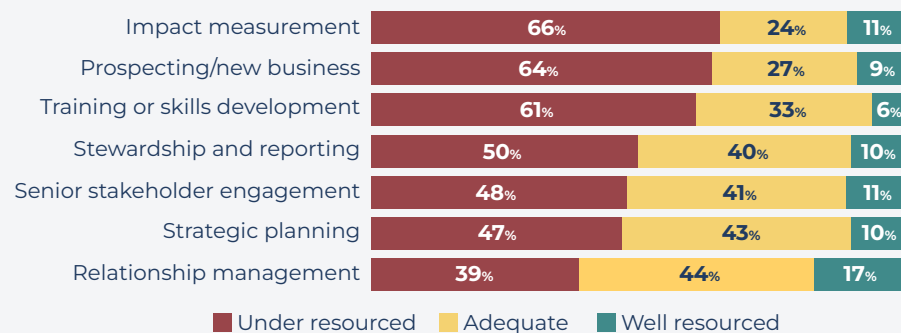
Can you tell us what type of organisation do you work for? (n=143)

- National charity
- Regional charity
- Local charity
- International NGO
- Other (includes CICs, non-profits, cultural organisations)

Mostly national and local charities, with some representation of international.



How well resourced do you think these areas of corporate fundraising are, in your organisation? (n=143)



THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

The State of Corporate Fundraising Today



Most organisations see corporate fundraising as a growth opportunity, but one that's not yet fully realised.

While strategic intent is increasing, delivery remains underpowered. The majority of programmes are still in early stages, often managed by small teams juggling competing priorities. Leadership buy-in and clear strategic direction are inconsistent, leaving fundraisers to push uphill without adequate support or structure.

For smaller organisations in particular, the imbalance is stark: corporate and trustee expectations are growing, yet team capacity and resources are not keeping pace.

“ The landscape now is so much tougher than it's ever been. I've been in corporate partnerships for 10 years, and right now, it's just incredibly challenging.”

Head of Partnerships



SPOTLIGHT

Recruitment, Retention & Organisational Culture

Behind every strong partnership is a capable fundraiser. But too many are working in set-ups that blunt their impact. Pay bands don't reflect the strategic nature of the work, flexibility is being rolled back, and clear routes to progress are patchy. Add inconsistent leadership understanding of fundraising and you get teams that are under-resourced and stretched.

What we're seeing

- Pay and progression out of step with the income and value fundraisers deliver.
- Post-pandemic flexibility shrinking; London-centric, office-first models returning.
- Leadership understanding of how partnerships are built and sustained is inconsistent.
- High turnover and under-investment in recruitment leaving gaps and firefighting.

Why it matters

- When good fundraisers leave, like-for-like replacements are rare, and the financial cost isn't counted.

What would help

- Review pay bandings so they match the scope, accountability and complexity of the role.
- Modernise policies on flexibility, parental leave and progression.
- Build leadership pathways so fundraising expertise has a voice at the top table.
- Invest in retention, not just recruitment. It's cheaper and more effective.

“ You see it all the time, organisations want someone with ten years’ corporate partnerships experience, managing seven-figure accounts, but they’re only willing to pay £38k and expect them in the office three days a week.”

Head of Strategic Partnerships

“ There’s a real lack of understanding that a good fundraiser delivers serious return on investment.”

Sector Recruitment Specialist

“ Fundraising is central to how charities operate. Unless you have strong leaders who advocate for it, who are in the room to make sure it’s delivered the way it needs to be, you’ll keep running into these challenges.”

Sector Recruitment Specialist

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Resourcing and Capacity: The Strain Beneath the Surface

When asked what would make their jobs easier, fundraisers spoke with striking consistency.

They need:

- More time and capacity to build relationships and think strategically.
- Better leadership understanding and advocacy.
- Clearer impact reporting and evidence to demonstrate value.
- Stronger propositions and storytelling tools.
- Greater investment in systems, CRMs, and data tools.

Many described feeling stuck in a cycle of “firefighting” constantly chasing immediate income while knowing that long-term success depends on deeper relationship-building.

“ Capacity and cash flow is a real challenge for small charities (I say as someone who has recently moved from a huge to small charity!). I know that impactful corporate partnerships take time (years sometimes!) to establish and think our organisation’s best alignment and chance for long term income growth is to build our corporate partnerships offer and pipeline, but with a tiny team, it’s hard to balance that effort with the urgent need for cash in year and firefighting short term grant applications”

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Leadership, Culture and Buy-In

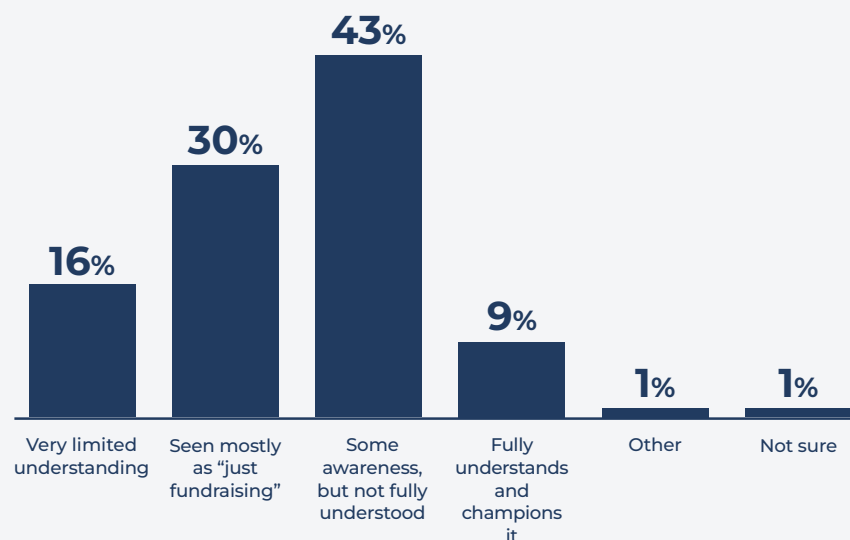
Only 9% of respondents said their organisation fully understands and champions corporate partnerships.

Too often, corporate fundraising is seen as a “bolt-on” rather than an integrated part of a charity’s strategy. Fundraisers called for better alignment between senior leadership, programme teams, and fundraising to ensure partnerships are embedded across the organisation, not siloed.

“ Greater understanding from Exec about what it takes to develop relationships.”

“ More access to the Exec and trustees to enable senior level stewardship and engagement.”

To what extent do you think your wider organisation understands and values corporate partnerships? (n=143)



Participants rated the return of investment from charity of the year partnerships an average score of

3.4/5

48%

report challenges in evidencing impact, echoing the resource challenges

Challenges & Opportunities

[Resources & Partnership Insights](#)

[Impact measurement: The Missing Link](#)

[Spotlight: Impact & Fundable Projects: Turning Data into Confidence](#)

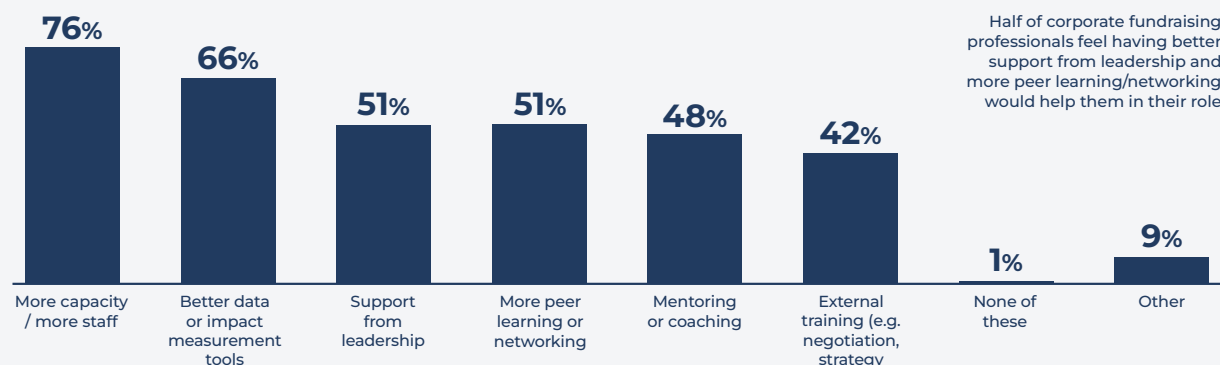
[Charity of the Year Partnerships: A Mixed Picture](#)

[Spotlight: Charity of the Year](#)

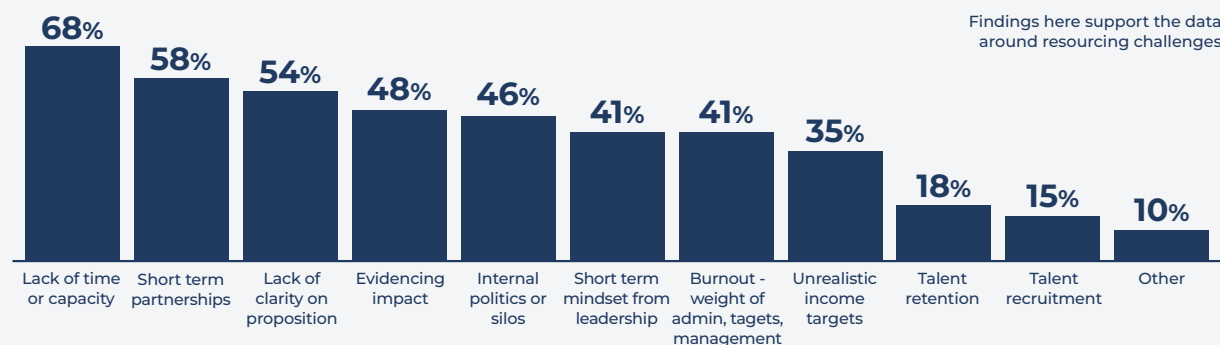
CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Resources & Partnership Insights

What support or resources would help you do your role better? (Select all that apply)? (n=143)

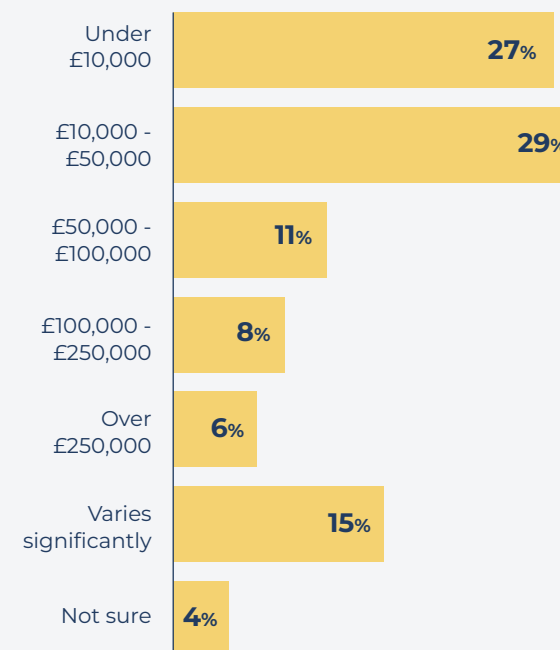


What are the biggest challenges you're facing in corporate fundraising presently? (n=143)



What is the typical value of your Charity of the Year partnerships (including financial + in-kind)? (n=107)

For most (56%) COTY partnerships are valued under £50,000



CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Impact Measurement: The Missing Link

Weak impact reporting was identified as one of the most under-resourced area across corporate fundraising teams.

66% said they want better impact measurement tools, and 48% listed evidencing impact as a top challenge.

Charities know that great partnerships depend on powerful stories and data that demonstrate value, for both sides. But without the right systems, metrics, and resources, this remains a critical gap to fill.

66%

said they want
better impact
measurement
tools

48%

listed
evidencing
impact as a top
challenge

**“ Evidenced case for support
with fundable packaged
opportunities showing impact.”**

**“ Building on impact reporting and
ensuring the business understands
the need to report impact back to
businesses.”**



SPOTLIGHT

Impact & Fundable Projects: Turning Data into Confidence

A core blocker is clarity: what exactly needs funding, where, and at what cost? Without it, asks are vague and hard to convert. When fundraisers can see live funding gaps and match them to prospects, everything moves faster and with more confidence.

What we're seeing

- Unclear funding needs; hard to show where money goes.
- Limited tools to match prospects to specific gaps.
- Vague asks not supported by data.

Why it matters

- Funders are increasingly demanding transparency and specificity. Vague asks weaken credibility and trust.
- Without clarity, internal confidence drops too: fundraisers feel they're guessing, not communicating impact.
- This lack of visibility makes it harder to prioritise prospects, demonstrate outcomes, and steward supporters effectively.

What would help

- Build live, integrated tools that map funding needs by service and location.
- Work closely with delivery teams to keep data current.
- Use the data to tailor asks and avoid duplication.
- Invest in systems that tie operational insight to fundraising strategy.

“ We work really closely with our support management team and within that we have a restricted funding tool. So what that does - it breaks down by every single service, every location, what's left to fund. A lot of fundraisers just don't know what needs funding. This tool gives us that clarity. It means we can have much more specific conversations and show exactly what impact a company's money will have.”

Head of Regional New Business

“ Across all the organisations I've worked in, only one has managed full cost recovery. But even they struggle to reconcile income with programme delivery in a robust way and with future business planning - which was pretty non-existent”

Director of Partnerships

CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Charity of the Year Partnerships: A Mixed Picture

75% of respondents said their organisations take part in Charity of the Year (COTY) partnerships.

While these remain a common entry point, many fundraisers describe them as *short-term*, *resource-heavy*, and *inequitable*. Staff vote models tend to favour well-known brands, leaving smaller or niche causes sidelined.

However, when done well, COTY partnerships can:

- Raise profile and open doors to wider networks.
- Engage employees and senior leaders.
- Generate significant income and goodwill.
- Act as a springboard for longer-term, strategic relationships.

Fundraisers agree that the best partnerships extend beyond a year, are values-aligned, and integrate skills-sharing, volunteering, and impact storytelling.

“A year is too short – you’ve only just got to know each other by the time it ends.”

“Application processes require huge amounts of capacity and time... for a 5% chance of partnership.”

“They give us stability for the year ahead – the structure is really helpful for budgeting.”

“It helped to raise our profile and we formed a couple of new partnerships because of it.”



SPOTLIGHT

Charity of the Year (COTY)

COTY can deliver real value, for example profile, income, staff engagement, but it can also feel opaque, resource-heavy and emotionally costly. Charities put in significant unpaid work, sometimes with little visibility of criteria or process; corporates can struggle to give timely, useful feedback.

What we're seeing

- High-effort bids with no guarantee of return.
- Limited transparency on selection, criteria and timelines.
- Internal pressure to apply regardless of fit, because “it’s a big brand.”
- Consortium models talked about more than they’re used.

Where it works

- Clear, published criteria and timeline, with realistic asks of finalists.
- Meaningful employee involvement (co-creation/activation).
- Right-sized ambition: income, engagement and benefits matched to the charity’s capacity.
- Multi-year terms so momentum and learning aren’t lost after year one.
- Modest cost coverage for finalists to recognise bid effort.
- Co-designed activation plan (campaigns, volunteering, skills-based support) with agreed KPIs and simple reporting.

What would help

- **Publish the basics up front:** eligibility, criteria, scoring, decision-makers, stages and dates.
- **Cap effort:** a short EOI first; only finalists complete fuller proposals. Provide a small stipend or donation for finalist time.
- **Fit first:** ask charities to self-assess against 3–5 must-have criteria before applying; share a “what good looks like” example.
- **Feedback as standard:** one or two lines of honest feedback to all shortlisted applicants; a short debrief for finalists.
- **Think beyond 12 months:** build in a year-2 option or extension pathway if the partnership is working.
- **Consider portfolio or consortium models:** where no single charity can deliver the breadth required, fund a lead + partners with defined roles.
- **Dignity by design:** accessible timelines, reasonable notice, and flexibility for smaller charities (e.g., alternative formats, Q&A clinic).



SPOTLIGHT

Charity of the Year (COTY)

“

Corporates need to be more honest, more transparent, more upfront - and that goes right from the application process, whether it's a COTY or a pitch.”

Head of Partnerships

“

I had to tell some charities not to apply, and then I just didn't have more time to tell them why they didn't make it through again afterwards. People forget there are human beings on the other side of these processes.”

CSR Specialist

“

I also expected to see more consortium partnerships... I'd worked on a consortium partnership before and it really worked. But I haven't seen any recently.”

CSR Specialist

“

I'm not convinced we need an employee vote. People will get behind whatever charity is chosen - but there does need to be meaningful employee involvement in the charity selection process.”

Senior ESG Specialist

Looking Ahead

[Opportunities](#)

[Spotlight: Power Imbalance in Partnerships](#)

[Bright spots: What's Working Now](#)

[Avenues for Progress](#)

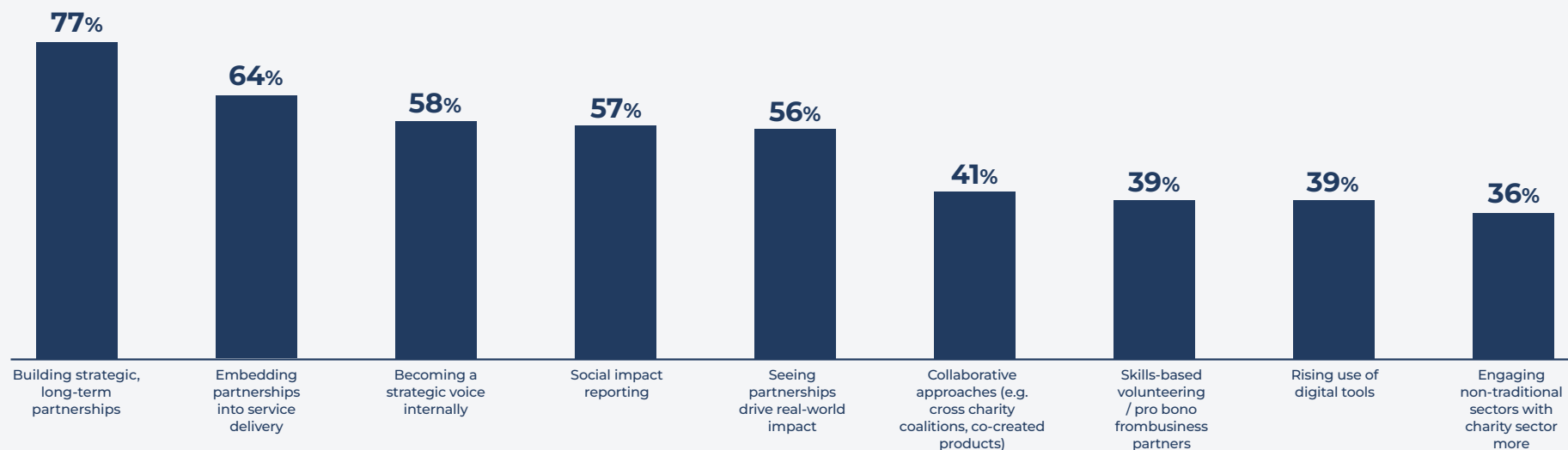
[Conclusion: The Moment for Change](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

LOOKING AHEAD

Opportunities

What do you see as the biggest opportunities in corporate fundraising right now? (n=143)





SPOTLIGHT

Power Imbalance in Partnerships

Despite the language of collaboration, power often sits with the corporate. Charities are asked to deliver more without the funding to cover it. Saying no can feel risky, especially with big brands. Internally, we still undervalue charity brands and expertise.

What we're seeing

- Additional asks without underwriting delivery costs.
- Fear of pushing back leads to unsustainable commitments.
- Charity assets given away too freely.
- Patchy internal understanding of value and boundaries.

Why it matters

- Charities absorb costs that should be shared, stretching teams thin.
- Over time, this undermines both sustainability and mission integrity: work follows corporate priorities rather than community need.
- It also damages confidence and culture internally, fundraisers and delivery teams feel disempowered to challenge unfair terms or assert value.
- The result is a cycle where undervaluing charity expertise reinforces the very imbalance we're trying to shift.

What would help

- Embed partnership principles. Establish clear internal policies on boundaries, minimum investment levels, and decision-making criteria so “no” becomes a strategic choice, not a personal risk.
- Foster sector-wide dialogue. We need more open conversations about power and partnership ethics, including how to challenge extractive models and celebrate examples of genuine co-creation.
- Champion equitable partnerships. Sector bodies, networks, and funders can play a role in setting expectations for fair value exchange and shared accountability, helping to normalise balanced practice across the sector.



SPOTLIGHT

Power Imbalance in Partnerships

“

They want all this extra stuff, but they're not prepared to underwrite it... we just can't work like that, because we can't deliver without the known funding.”

Head of Partnerships

“

When I joined, we were pretty much just giving out our logo and assets for next to nothing... Changing that mindset and getting the operational side of the organisation to understand that we can't just bend over backwards and say yes to everything - that's been a real challenge.”

Head of Strategic Partnerships

“

Charities are working so hard to force a square peg into a round hole - and no one calls it out. I see it happening and just think, why are we doing this?”

Senior ESG Specialist

“

I think it happens because of the pressure to raise money. Charities feel they have to say yes to everything, even if it's not a good fit, just to secure income and avoid risk.”

Senior ESG Specialist



LOOKING AHEAD

Bright Spots: What's Working Now

Amidst the challenges, the research uncovered clear areas of innovation and success.

Fundraisers reported breakthroughs via:

- Long-term strategic partnerships with embedded goals and senior buy-in.
- Authentic relationship building and co-creation with corporate partners.
- Powerful storytelling, including lived experience leadership and campaigning angles.
- Creative engagement, from skills-based volunteering to cause-led products.
- Cross-sector collaboration, internally and externally.

These examples show that when charities are resourced and empowered to think long-term, corporate partnerships can transform, not just income, but impact.

“ Recently won a transformational three-year partnership which needed significant senior buy-in and close working with programme colleagues.”

“ Using the charity’s campaigning angles/policy position to start conversations with companies... backed by research and stories of lived experience.”

“ Collaboration has won us a new partnership and enabled progression in charity applications that we haven’t seen before.”

“ Teams working together to achieve a new business aim, creating culture shift.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Avenues for Progress

When asked what they would change about corporate partnerships in the charity sector, fundraisers called for:

- **A shift from transactional to transformational:** longer-term, strategic partnerships that create long term impact.
- **Greater equity and respect:** charities recognised as equal partners, not “suppliers.”
- **More collaboration:** charities working together instead of competing for small pots of funding.
- **Broader value recognition:** partnerships that include skills, advocacy, brand, and networks, as well as money.
- **Systemic change:** greater stability, realistic targets, and leadership that actively enables a shared ambition.

In short, fundraisers want a culture shift toward trust, transparency, and shared purpose.

- “ Would love to see a shift from short term transactional partnerships to longer term more meaningful partnerships.”
- “ Focus on transformational goals rather than transactional... finish the partnership when that’s completed rather than limiting to a COTY.”
- “ Don’t look at it as easy income stream, instead look at the broader picture: companies bringing financial value, technical value, communication opportunities.”
- “ Charities should believe in themselves more and look for the numerous opportunities that exist to collaborate with companies, beyond financial donations.”



LOOKING AHEAD

Conclusion: The Moment for Change



Corporate fundraising stands at a crossroads.

The potential is undeniable but unlocking it will take more than goodwill and short-term targets. It demands investment, leadership, and a more honest conversation between charities and corporates about what partnership really means.

If you recognise your team in these pages, take it as a signal to act. For corporate fundraising to truly thrive, we need to make strategic partnerships the norm, supported by better resourcing and braver, more honest conversations. Start by agreeing what you'll stop doing, what you'll resource properly, and how you'll measure progress. Set the conditions - clear priorities, realistic capacity, and fewer internal blockers with clearer boundaries. Then work together on fit-first partnerships you can measure and grow.

Three shifts will unlock most of what's stuck:

1. **Clarity** - what needs funding, at what cost, with what outcomes.
2. **Capacity** - time, tools and roles that match the targets.
3. **Courage** - saying no to poor-fit opportunities and yes to multi-year, values-aligned work.

Start the conversation here (use in your next SMT/Board)



Use the questions below to test where you are today, and agree the first changes you'll make in the next 90 days.

Strategy & fit

- What are we not going to chase this year, and why?
- Which 2–3 partnership types fit our mission, reach and capacity best?
- Do our targets reward transformational partnerships, or just short-term wins?

Capacity & roles

- Are targets aligned to headcount and skills? If not, what changes now (people, scope, or numbers)?
- Who actually owns new business, stewardship, impact reporting and design/comms, and do they have time to do it?

Impact & data

- Can we show, today, the top five fundable gaps (costed, by location/programme) and what difference funding makes?
- What will we measure with partners (3–5 outcomes) and how often will we report it?

Governance & ways of working

- What decisions can fundraisers make without waiting (and what's the SLA for the ones that need approval)?
- For COTY: do we have a decision making framework and a ceiling on bid effort? Are we insisting on clear criteria and multi-year potential?

Power & boundaries

- Where are we saying “yes” to unfunded asks? What's our red line, and who enforces it?
- How will we price and protect our brand, data, and staff time?

People & retention

- Are pay, flexibility and progression matched to the scope and complexity of the role?
- What will we do this quarter to keep our best people?

Choose one change you'll make this month. A target reset, a decision making framework, or a resource you'll fund. Put an owner and a date against it, tell the team, and hold yourselves to it. In 90 days, review what's different, keep what works, drop what doesn't, and move the next blocker. You don't need to boil the ocean, but you do need to be clear about what comes next.



LOOKING AHEAD

Acknowledgments:



First and foremost, I want to extend a huge thank you to everyone who took part in the survey and shared your invaluable insights for this research. I've been genuinely blown away by the generosity, honesty, and openness of those who contributed.

So many of you also offered your time for the interview stage, and while I was only able to speak with a small fraction of those who volunteered, I'm deeply grateful for every offer. To everyone I did have the chance to interview, both from the charity and business sides, thank you. The conversations were thoughtful, generous, and energising, and your perspectives have shaped this report in meaningful ways.

Finally, a special thank you to my sponsor, Fireside Fundraising, for backing this work with such enthusiasm and belief in its value to the sector. And to my promotional partner, Pearlfinders, for helping to share it far and wide.



Wonder.



With sponsorship from Fireside Fundraising and promotional support from Pearlfinders. Independent report: findings and conclusions are the author's.