



OPENING PLENARY: THE FUTURE OF FUNDRAISING

Speaker: Claire Routley

Fundraising is a busy, demanding job. Sometimes it can be hard to find the space to think about next week, let alone next year. And thinking a decade or more into the future feels like an impossibility. That's why the Summer School is such an important conference. It's an opportunity to come together, to stop - breathe - and think differently about who we are and what we do: to fall in love with fundraising, all over again.

In this session, we'll use this valuable opportunity to take a longer-term perspective. We'll think about the trends we can see around us and what they might mean for the future of fundraising over the next decade and beyond. And even more importantly, we'll spend some time thinking about how we can impact that future: how we can make small changes now in order to shape a future that we want to see - and that the people we work with deserve.

ARE YOU FIT FOR DIGITAL?

Speakers: Jean O'Brien & Tom Hickey

Jean O'Brien (Digital Charity Lab) and Tom Hickey (What if Consultancy) help your non-profit answer the question, are you fit for digital?

Digital fundraising is often seen as the solution to every problem - but you know it's not that simple. Charities dive into digital without the right strategy (or often no strategy at all), skills, or technology. Fundraisers are struggling without the right direction, resources and training. This session takes a fresh, practical approach to digital fundraising, using the "Couch to 5k" mindset: understanding where you are now to build towards success.

Through short presentations, interactive polls, and live discussions, you'll get your organisation's "digital fitness" evaluated and learn how to improve. Jean and Tom will cover digital strategies, using the right channels, breaking down silos, and measuring success. Attendees will get to evaluate their own digital maturity via live voting, and see how they compare to peers.

This fun, interactive workshop is ideal for fundraisers seeking better results in acquisition, retention, and income generation, as well as directors looking to invest more in digital. Whether you're just starting with digital or ready to scale your campaigns, you'll leave with strong insights, a clear roadmap for growth, and the inspiration to tackle digital fundraising challenges head-on.



FROM FEAR TO FOCUS: DEMYSTIFYING AI TO ENHANCE DONOR EXPERIENCES AND DRIVE EFFICIENCY

Speakers: Josh Hirsch & Paramjot Singh

AI doesn't have to be overwhelming—it's a powerful tool to enhance nonprofit operations and deepen donor engagement. This session will break AI down into practical, accessible concepts, showing how it can streamline processes, save time, and improve fundraising strategies. You'll discover how AI transforms donor data into actionable insights, enabling hyper-personalised outreach that builds stronger relationships and drives retention.

Through real-world examples and actionable strategies, we'll explore how AI can improve efficiency, optimise engagement, and empower teams to focus on what matters most: connecting with donors. Leave with a clear roadmap to adopting AI confidently, using it to deliver tailored experiences that delight supporters and amplify your mission's impact.

NAVIGATING RAPID GROWTH, FAME AND CHANGE

Speakers: Josie Isherwood & Harriet Scott

Medical Aid for Palestinians has risen from an organisation with an annual income of £10m and 80 staff, to over £50m and 225 staff globally in less than a year. From a small, niche, and dedicated supporter base to attracting tens of thousands of new supporters from over 120 countries. Find out more about how the charity has adapted its systems, ways of working and fundraising programme to deliver on ambitious goals, whilst also planning for a future when the media and public interest fades, but the need continues to be great.



MY DONOR GHOSTED ME: WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US ABOUT WHY SUPPORTERS STOP GIVING – AND HOW YOU CAN RECONNECT

Speakers: Edwina Newcombe & Caoileann Appleby

Why do your supporters stop giving? Why do they keep giving to others – but not you? And how can we inspire them to start again? Donor retention is key to long-term fundraising success, and in a market where acquisition is increasingly challenging and costly, fundraisers need practical actions rooted in real-world evidence.

Caoileann Appleby and Edwina Newcombe explore the factors that drive donor attrition, and how to successfully engage lapsed donors to reactivate their support. Drawing insight from Ask Direct's *Conversations with Supporters* donor research, they will reveal

the reasons behind donors decisions to stop giving, the psychology behind choosing which charities to stop supporting, and what can inspire them to re-engage.

Using real-world examples, they will demonstrate how organisations have used these insights to enhance their individual giving programs. Through tailored reactivation campaigns, personalised messaging, and improved donor stewardship, charities can build stronger, more enduring relationships with their supporters – and recover lost income.

ARE WE ADDICTED TO THE ALGORITHM?

Speakers: Jean O'Brien, Liz Carolan, Clare O'Donoghue Velikić, Mae Dobbs & Jonathan Nolan

Bezos, Zuck, Musk and the bloke from Google all sat in the front row of Trump's inauguration.

As a sector we're reliant on their platforms and products to drive public engagement with our work.

But let's be honest, even pre-Trump these platforms were problematic, but as a sector we've become dependent on them and don't seem to have a plan B.

Should we be worried, what actions should we take, how do we square the ethical circle?

In this session we'll hear from a panel of digital experts with a wide range of views on how we should engage with these platforms.

Panel Chair, Jean O'Brien (Digital Charity Lab), Panellists, Mae Dobbs (Electica), Liz Carolan (ICCL), Clare O'Donoghue Velikić (ODV Digital) and Jonathan Nolan (Concern Worldwide)



BRAINHACKING – 8 ¾ DECISION SCIENCE INSIGHTS TO IMPROVE YOUR FUNDRAISING RESULTS TODAY

Speakers: Marina Jones & Meredith Niles

As fundraisers, we're always asking – what makes donors tick? How do we get them to turn good intentions into real gifts?

What if there were a proven playbook—crafted by Nobel Prize-winning experts—that could unlock these answers?

Good news: there is. And Meredith Niles and Marina Jones have done the hard work for you, distilling it into 8¾? game-changing insights to supercharge your results. Welcome to Brainhacking.

In this session, they'll reveal how decision science can transform your fundraising. You'll learn why donors don't always act how you expect, or economic models say they "should" —and how to design strategies that work with their brains, not against them. Discover the surprising psychology behind incentives (and how to win over your Finance Director), plus get actionable, budget-friendly ideas you can test right away.

SUPPORTER EXPERIENCE FUNDAMENTALS FOR EVERY FUNDRAISER

Speaker: Lesley Pinder

We all want to make sure our donors have a brilliant experience when they chose to trust our organisations with their cash, their time or their voice. Sometimes we take for granted that this is happening already, sometimes we know it isn't but don't know where to start!

In this session, I'll share with you some of the fundamental behaviours and activities that all fundraisers can learn and do to deliver a great supporter experience. And, I'll also share what I've learned that fundraising leaders and organisations should have in place to enable it!



THE POWER OF MENTORING – ENTERING A NEW ERA OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Speaker: Lou Lai

When the world is on fire. We can be the change we need to see. As we navigate uncertainty, tackle new challenges and pressures in the not-for-profit sector - it's easy to lose sight of ourselves. But now more than ever, we need to invest time and energy in our own development. The impact we can achieve in the sector relies on our people. And we need to take charge of shaping the future we want for ourselves and finding the right support to make it possible.

Hear from Louise Lai, who co-founded a volunteer led mentoring community for women working in the social impact space. The FemMentored community challenges the traditional model that favours power and hierarchy as the determining factors of what would make someone a good mentor. Instead this 2,000 strong community has created a safe space, to make connections and build a network of like-minded women navigating the social impact sector.

Their mentoring programme has supported over 1250 women, and Louise will share their journey, the tools and frameworks their community use and how you can apply this to your own learning and development. And how mentoring relationships and a network, just like the Fundraising Summer School Community can help you realise your potential, overcome barriers and have the confidence to succeed.

FUNDRAISING UNDER FIRE: LESSONS FROM UKRAINE FOR A WORLD IN CRISIS

Speakers: Svitlana Pugach, Olga Chevganiuk & Kate Leschyshyn

Fundraising today demands more than creativity — it demands courage. Rising geopolitical tensions, economic instability, and escalating global uncertainty are placing unprecedented pressures on organisations everywhere.

Yet in Ukraine, these challenges aren't new: non-profits there have spent over three years navigating the turmoil of the largest military invasion since WWII, learning first-hand how to sustain fundraising when the world around them falls apart.

In this bold and reflective session, leaders from three Ukrainian NGOs — working in paediatric cancer care (Svitlana Pugach), animal welfare (Olga Chevganiuk), and military resilience (Kate Leschyshyn) — share their experiences navigating one of the most complex fundraising landscapes in recent history.



What Ukraine can teach us all about leading through the next era of global instability.

Learn what it truly takes to sustain donor engagement, effectiveness, and resilience when donor attention fades, resources become scarce, and traditional fundraising strategies no longer apply.

You'll gain insights on:

- Innovating quickly when the old playbook no longer applies.
- Crafting authentic, compelling appeals that cut through noise and fatigue.
- Keeping donors engaged when crises drag on and headlines move on.

Whether you're part of a grassroots initiative or an international NGO, these frontline lessons will give you a renewed sense of courage, strategic clarity, and vision for what leadership in fundraising must look like in the years ahead.

TOP 10 LEGACY FUNDRAISING STRATEGIES FROM SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH: NATIONAL DATA & RESULTS FROM THE LAB

Speaker: Russell James

After fifteen years in academic research (plus more than a decade in frontline planned and major gifts fundraising), Professor James brings together scientific results from economics, neuroscience, psychology, demographics, and other disciplines to present the ten most important and effective strategies for increasing fundraising success in planned gifts. Beyond just "war stories," this presentation gives you a deep understanding of what works – and why – in effective legacy fundraising.



WHY ARE CHARITY DATABASES SO WHITE (WHY IT'S SUCH A HUGE PROBLEM AND WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?)

Speakers: Henry Rowling & Alicia Jumman

In this session Henry Rowling and Alicia Jumman, will discuss the stark disparity highlighted in recent research, demonstrating the systemic bias in charity databases.

Charities face mounting financial challenges: the cost of living crisis, post-Covid and Brexit impacts, rising service demand, declining income, and inflation. Simultaneously, many aim to recruit younger supporters but struggle to engage donors under 40.

These issues are closely connected. Younger demographics are more diverse in ethnicity, sexuality, and neurodiversity. By attracting younger donors, charities can diversify their supporter base and build a more sustainable financial future.

This session uncovers why charity databases remain predominantly white, exploring historical fundraising practices, data collection bias, and systemic wealth barriers. More importantly, it provides an actionable framework to address these challenges, using audience-led activations to recruit and engage diverse supporters at scale.

PARTNERSHIPS COMPANIES WILL PAY FOR

Speaker: Andy King

Two of the hardest questions for us to answer in corporate fundraising are:

1. What do we offer to companies?
2. How much do we ask them for in return?

The answers to these questions have real consequences. Andy, was once in the room with a horse welfare charity when a trustee suggested that a bank “basically owe us €1,000,000” because they happened to have a horse in their logo. Andy was also the person who convinced a charity to up their ask to a partner from €5,000 to €50,000 – and not only did they do it: they got a yes. This approach became 10x more valuable simply through confidence.

As a relatively young vocation, corporate fundraising doesn't have a huge evidence base behind it. While we can learn from business to business approaches, not everything translates. The best we can do is learn from peers and adapt to what feels right to us.

This session will run you through the most commonly adopted models charities use to answer these questions, and get you planning your own partnerships strategy - ensuring you can build partnerships companies will pay for.



ENHANCING DONOR ENGAGEMENT AND CONVERSION WITH FUNDRAISE UP: A CASE STUDY FROM MSF IRELAND

Speakers: Audrey McGillicuddy & Natascha Elbech

In a world grappling with urgent global challenges, the power to make a difference lies in our hands. This session invites you to join MSF Ireland on a transformative journey as they walk through the revolution of their online donor experience with Fundraise Up.

By deeply engaging donors, MSF Ireland powered the organisation to respond more effectively to global crises, turning hope into action and compassion into a force for global good.

This session we will demonstrate the impact of improved UX, highlight how Fundraise Up has streamlined the donation process on MSF Ireland's website, and how user-friendly features have reignited passion for fundraising by making the process more rewarding for both donors and fundraisers.

They will share real results, including data on the rise in the number of donors converting to regular gifts and how innovative tools equip non-profits with the necessary technology to secure sustainable funding.

FROM RUBBISH TO RESCUE TO RELATIONSHIP: FUNDRAISING STORYTELLING RECONSIDERED

Speakers: Jeff Brooks & Julie Cooper

Many hardworking fundraisers who believe in the power of storytelling, think we have to choose between two story types in fundraising:

1. Fact-heavy argumentation with "organisation as hero" stories.
2. Emotional "donor as hero" stories.

In this session, Julie Cooper and Jeff Brooks, explain why both of these models have serious flaws:

The first is simply rubbish – ineffective at raising funds. It's irrelevant to donors.

The second, while it can be effective, often sets up an unhealthy "victim/rescuer" dynamic. It can lead to the "othering" and even belittling of beneficiaries.



Good news: There's another way to tell stories in fundraising!

Recent research in psychology has uncovered the concept of “companionate love” – the human need to help those we are connected with. Instead of focusing on rescue narrative, we can create stories that encourage connectedness. This approach not only works to raise funds, there's evidence that it leads to more donor engagement and retention than the “rescue” model.

Julie and Jeff will show you the remarkably easy ways to transform your stories to the relationship approach that changes the world, and helps donors better understand the work they fund.

INSPIRING YOUR DONORS FOR A LIFETIME: THE GREAT BIG PICTURE (AND THE DELICIOUSLY EFFECTIVE DETAILS)

Speakers: Ken Burnett & Lisa Sargent

By all accounts, giving should be a golden experience. A lifetime experience. Filled with generosity and meaning, and the potential to do great good. Yet donors leave in droves, and a fundraiser can clear a room instantly just by announcing what they do for a living. Now the world is on fire. And just when we need fundraising and giving most, dispirited fundraisers are leaving in droves too. What's the cure?

Unlock relationship fundraising like you've never seen it before: Join best-selling nonprofit authors and fundraising experts Ken Burnett and Lisa Sargent as they draw you into fresh concepts, the latest theory, and DNA-deep generosity principles, all backed by practical, tactical, deliciously effective real-world examples to help you reignite your passion for fundraising, inspire your donors, and keep them connected and giving for a lifetime.



USING DATA TO OPTIMISE YOUR FUNDRAISING PROGRAMME

Speakers: Jon Kelly & Kate Mulchrone

Charities are facing an increasingly challenging fundraising environment right now. Many are facing dwindling files as it becomes harder to attract new supporters and harder to keep supporters too. This session will take a long hard look at why charity databases appear to be 'shrinking' and how your data could be the key to unlocking key insights as to what is causing this and what you can do about it.

We will examine the key things to look for, reveal simple tricks which can help you revert these trends and highlight some recent case studies from charities in Ireland and the UK.

The session will cover a range of techniques (from simple to more advanced) to help you use your data to understand your supporters better, reveal their behaviours and engagements and drive more targeted communications to engage your supporters better.

There will be something you can use whatever your size or level of data maturity.

FUNDRAISING IN TURBULENT TIMES PANEL

Speakers: Gaby Murphy, Ken Burnett, Mary Gamble & Áine Myler

In an era marked by economic uncertainty and shifting donor priorities, Fundraising in Turbulent Times explores how non-profits and mission-driven organisations can adapt, innovate, and thrive. This panel brings together experienced fundraisers and thought leaders to discuss strategies for building resilience, maintaining donor trust, and unlocking new opportunities despite challenging conditions.

Drawing on lessons from past crises—such as the 2008 financial crash and the COVID-19 pandemic—we'll examine what worked, what didn't, and how those insights can shape more effective fundraising approaches today.

Attendees will gain practical tools and real-world examples to help navigate volatility while staying true to their mission and maximizing impact.



THE HIDDEN CODE OF END-OF-LIFE DECISIONS: WHAT LEGACY FUNDRAISING CAN LEARN FROM DECISION-MAKING IN LIFE INSURANCE, ANNUITIES, ESTATE PLANNING, AND HEALTHCARE

Speaker: Russell James

Death is different. When it comes to making decisions involving end-of-life, people respond in unusual ways. In this presentation, Professor James brings together scientific and demographic research from a range of end-of-life decisions to uncover remarkably consistent principles of what works in persuasive communication. Understanding this “hidden code” will change the way you think, and talk, about legacy giving and planned giving.

MAXIMISING IMPACT: LESSONS FROM MSF IRELAND'S RECORD-BREAKING Q4 2024 DRTV CAMPAIGN

Speakers: Audrey McGillicuddy & Rob Patmore

In this session, we will delve into the remarkable success of MSF Ireland's Direct Response Television (DRTV) campaign in Q4 2024, which outperformed all previous campaigns. By leveraging existing resources, optimising media strategies, simplifying and enhancing our call-to-action, we achieved unprecedented results.

This presentation will provide a comprehensive analysis of the factors that contributed to this success and offer actionable insights for other organisations looking to enhance their fundraising efforts.

Attendees will be provided with practical insights and proven strategies to enhance their DRTV campaigns. By sharing MSF Ireland's experience, We aim to inspire other organisations to innovate and optimise their fundraising efforts, ultimately leading to greater impact and success in their missions.



SILO KILLER (QU'EST-CE QUE C'EST) – INDIVIDUAL GIVING IN A POST-DIRECT MAIL AGE

Speakers: Damian O'Broin & Jan Rane

Direct mail is dead. Meta is screwing with you. Media channels have fragmented. No-one answers the phone anymore. Opt-outs are through the roof.

Individual giving has become more challenging than ever, at the very moment that we need it most.

In this session, Damian and Jan will talk about how direct mail has changed - for good and for bad - what really works to inspire donors, why direct mail is never enough on its own, why we need to move from obsessing about a channel to focusing on our supporters and the relationship (or lack of relationship) we have with them, and why there's more to life than direct response.

We'll share examples of how direct mail can work, how digital can enhance donor experience and how it all comes back to the supporter.

And how this all connects to the real endgame - legacies.

SHIFTING TO OPEN STRATEGIES – HOW YOU COULD APPLY THIS THINKING AND APPROACH TO YOUR ORGANISATION

Speakers: Lou Lai & Louise Barton

We need to think differently about how we strategise, plan and respond to the ever changing world. We want to be human-led, and make the constant change our advantage - creating structures and processes to harness it not to combat it. In this session we'll explore what open strategy is. How the thinking, framework and principles can be applied to our planning and day to day execution of our organisational strategy.

Hear from Lou Lai and Louise Barton, who'll share manifesto's approach to open strategy and how they embedded this within UNICEF UK. Hear how UNICEF UK challenged themselves to lead the organisation better, and deliver more for children. In implementing this approach with the support of manifesto, it has had a positive impact on their people, culture, how they plan, collaborate and importantly their impact and income. Key takeaways will include the principles and tools you can start applying within your teams today. Spoiler alert - this kind of thinking can be used for more than just strategies.



MIND THE GAP: CO-CREATING A FUNDRAISING DATA FOUNDATION

Speakers: Jane Trenaman & Cian Murphy

Calling all fundraisers – this is a session you won't want to miss.

We know that data can often feel like the missing link in our work - something we all know we need, but can struggle to access, analyse or action.

That's why, this year, Charities Institute Ireland commissioned brand new research to get to the heart of what's really happening with fundraising data in our sector.

For the first time, we now have a baseline: a clear picture of where we stand - how we're performing, what challenges we're facing, and where the opportunities lie when it comes to using data to drive fundraising success.

Whether your organisation is just starting out on its data journey or already investing in data capacity and strategy, the findings from this research will resonate. It's packed with real-world insights, drawn from both numbers and narratives, and highlights the bold ambition of fundraisers across Ireland navigating a rapidly changing landscape.

This is more than just a report - it's a foundation. One that fundraisers, leadership teams and boards can use to make smarter decisions and advocate for stronger support. It's also the first step in building something bigger: a sector-wide understanding of what good data practice looks like and how we can collectively raise the bar.

Your voice has helped shape this work - and now, we're inviting you to be part of what comes next.

Join Cian Murphy and Jane Trenaman for this first reveal of the findings, connect with your peers, and help us shape the future of data-informed fundraising in Ireland. With your continued involvement, we'll go deeper into performance metrics, KPIs, and the tools that really make a difference.



CRAFTING EFFECTIVE LEGACY PROPOSITIONS

Speakers: Edwina Newcombe & Annetta Murphy

Unlock the power of research, insight, and creativity to transform your charity's legacy messaging

If your charity's legacy messaging isn't moving hearts—or driving action—it's time to rethink your approach.

At Ask Direct, we've helped leading charities like Arthritis Ireland, Barnardos, and GOAL turn legacy giving into a vital, inspiring part of their fundraising strategy. In this high-impact session, we'll share the proven methodology we use to craft legacy propositions that not only resonate with supporters—but compel them to act.

Our approach combines behavioural insight, supporter research, strategic clarity, and the creative spark that makes messages memorable and motivating. If you want to elevate your legacy communications and leave a lasting impression, this session is for you.

What you'll gain:

- A clear understanding of why your legacy proposition is the cornerstone of effective legacy fundraising
- A behind-the-scenes look at how supporter research directly shapes and strengthens the legacy proposition
- A practical, expert-led walkthrough of the Ask Direct process for developing high-performing legacy propositions and examples of propositions that we have crafted for Irish charities.

You'll leave with tools, tactics, and real-world inspiration to start building—or refining—a legacy message that delivers results.

Don't miss this opportunity to learn from the experts behind some of the most successful legacy campaigns in the sector.



LEADING WITH YOUR VALUES TO RAISE MONEY ONLINE

Speakers: Jessica Hailstone & Seán Bergin

In this session Jessica (Forward Action) and Seán (Barnardos Ireland), answer the question, How do you not only connect with cold audiences online, but inspire them to act?

For nearly a decade, Forward Action has been refining its approach to digital mobilisation—engaging audiences, driving action, and delivering results. In 2024, they partnered with Barnardos to test this model in Ireland, as part of their “Change their Story” campaign.

Using innovative AI-powered imagery, Barnardos’ wider campaign used multiple channels to powerfully convey how donations could change lives. But while traditional channels like OOH, print, and radio spark strong emotional responses, digital offers immediacy—where audiences can act in the moment—and the ability to test and optimise creative content quickly.

Partnering with Forward Action, Barnardos capitalised on the public concern driven by their storytelling, and brought their digital mobilisation strategy to life. Together, the focus was on converting concern, into donations. Using a low-barrier, values-based handraiser journey, they engaged digital audiences through solidarity-driven entry points, seamlessly leading to optimised donation asks.

Attendees at this session will get an introduction to the digital mobilisation model used by Barnardos, and how it powers online income. Hear how compelling storytelling and AI-powered visuals sparked empathy and urgency. And get a better understanding of the unique strengths of digital, from immediate onward journeys to rapid creative testing.

CLOSING PLENARY: LOVE ISN'T ALL WE NEED

Speakers: Oisín Coghlan, Johnny Ryan & Ruadhán Ó Críodáin

How we can rise to the moment and meet the challenges we face in our world today.

As we face unprecedented challenges in our world and in our work, we’ll hear from leading voices working across climate, digital rights, LGBTQ+ rights and combatting the far right about what we need to do now and how we can rise to meet the moment - as fundraisers, as a sector and as a community.