



Rethinking Fundraising: Professional ethics

Rogare's work on fundraising ethics

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FUNDRAISING

Stephen Thomas

ROGARE
THE FUNDRAISING THINK TANK

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This paper, along with all Rogare's reports, research and other outputs, is available free of charge to the fundraising profession. We think it is important that people should be able to access all the ideas coming out of Rogare, and we are able to give them this access through the ongoing generous support of our Associate Members - Ask Direct (Ireland), Bluefrog Fundraising (UK) and Stephen Thomas Ltd (Canada).

Details of all our projects can be found on the Rogare website - www.rogare.net

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Executive summary

This paper describes all Rogare's work on fundraising ethics.

It complements our paper *Rethinking Fundraising Part 1* – which describes who Rogare is, our mission and vision, and how we go about solving fundraising's big challenges.

Section 1 looks the challenges facing professional ethics in fundraising and sets the context for our work, and what we aim to achieve by doing this.

Our main contribution to fundraising ethics is described in s2. This is the normative theory we call Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics. This states that fundraising is ethical when it correctly balances fundraisers' duties to their donors with their duties to their beneficiaries. This section also describes the theory's reach into professional practice.

Section 3 illustrates the ethical decision-making framework we have developed to apply various normative theories to practical ethical dilemmas in fundraising.

The paper then goes on to look at some of our other work on fundraising ethics: beneficiary framing (s4); the ethics of fundraising during emergencies (s5); how donors sometimes abuse the power they hold in relationships with fundraisers and charities - so-called 'donor dominance' (s6); and the ethics of the new concept of community-centric fundraising and its clash with donorcentricity (s7).

Finally, in s8, we consider our next steps, including our intention to establish a Fundraising Ethics Research Centre that will drastically extend the scope and reach of our work on ethics.

<https://www.rogare.net/fundraising-ethics>

How can fundraisers decide what is ‘right’ in their profession?

In Part 1 of *Rethinking Fundraising* (on p15 in s2), we described our integrated theory of fundraising: building ethically-balanced relationships with all stakeholders, engaging with and better understanding those stakeholders, sharing and disseminated new ideas, and further building the fundraising profession. The bedrock of all this is fundraising’s professional ethics.

If fundraising practices and policies are not built on appropriate ethical theory, then it’s down to luck, guesswork and happenstance whether they are or are not ethical. And if our practices are not ethical, then our relationships with our stakeholders, particularly our donors, will suffer, and the ultimate losers will be our beneficiaries if unethical practices fail to yield as much money as possible to provide the help and services they rely on.

And so professional ethics in fundraising is important in the most fundamental way. And we need to be ethically literate as fundraisers, because the practice of fundraising attracts more than its fair share of allegations of unethical practice, such as:

- how much it costs (the perennial – and nonsensical – demand from some people that every penny they give should be spent on ‘the cause’ and none of it to help run the charity or raise more money)
- use of third-party fundraising agencies
- how charities process data
- ‘aggressive’ or ‘guilt-tripping’ types of fundraising (so-called ‘chuggers’ often being the main targets of such allegations).

These are perennial challenges that fundraising faces across the globe, particularly, but not only, in English-speaking cultures such as the USA, Canada, Ireland Australia and New Zealand.

Fundraising practice has plenty of ethical prescriptions, which are mainly contained in its codes of practice – such as the Fundraising Regulator’s Code of Fundraising Practice in the UK, and the International Statement on Ethical Principles in Fundraising, developed by the Association of Fundraising Professionals in the USA. These codes contain ‘applied’ ethics that tell fundraisers *what* they may or may not do.

But what the fundraising profession has much less of is what’s known as ‘normative’ ethics – theories that help fundraisers understand *why* they may or may not do certain things.

Unlike most other professions or emerging professions – including marketing and public relations, the two most closely related to fundraising – fundraising has very little in the way of a normative ethical foundation upon which its applied practices are built. There is very little scholarship on normative fundraising ethics and there is next to nothing to be found on ethical theory in fundraising published in academic journals.

The absence of normative theory to inform fundraising’s applied ethics and practice means that when fundraisers encounter an ethical dilemma, they often have to make up their ethical policy on the fly/ hoof without guidance or frameworks for them to follow, often leading to sub-optimal ethical decision-making and policies. We only need to look at the incoherent and disjointed response of fundraising in the United Kingdom to the so-called ‘Fundraising Crisis’ in 2015 (precipitated by the death of Olive Cooke), and the Jeffrey Epstein donation scandal in the USA.

A major component of our work to build a richer and more robust knowledge base has thus been to develop new theories of professional ethics that will provide firm foundations for ethical best practice. ❶

What a richer conception of fundraising ethics will mean for the profession

When confronted with ethical dilemmas and challenges, fundraisers will be able to draw on and apply thinking that will deliver more coherent and considered ‘right’ (i.e. ethical) outcomes for their donors and their beneficiaries. Having gone through a robust process and framework to arrive at their ethical decisions, they will have more confidence to justify them once they have made them, and crucially, more confidence to argue for the right thing ahead of a potential dilemma arising, which in may lessen the chances of situations similar to the Olive Cooke/Jeffrey Epstein cases happening in the future.

How we have developed ethical theory for fundraising

Rogare's work on fundraising's professional ethics is centred on the theoretical core of Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics, which is described in more detail in s2.

Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics is the theoretical bedrock of much of Rogare's work on other areas of fundraising ethics, particularly our projects on:

- The ethics of how beneficiaries ought to be 'framed' in fundraising communications (see s4)
- Legacy fundraising ethics during emergencies (see s5).
- The ethics of donor and other stakeholder relationships, including so-called 'donor dominance' (see s6)
- Fundraising regulation (see website - <https://www.rogare.net/self-regulation>)
- Public engagement and advocating for fundraising (see website - <https://www.rogare.net/public-engagement>).

What we want to achieve

The upshot of making ethics such a major plank of the work of the Critical Fundraising Network will be to:

- Improve ethical decision making by fundraisers in their day-to-day roles.
- Empower fundraisers to ethically justify, advocate and defend their actions to stakeholders (public, colleagues, boards, regulators, politicians and media).
- Improve ethical decision making in fundraising at a strategic policy level by ensuring fundraising policies are ethically coherent and consistent and not developed solely as a reaction to allegations of unethical practice.
- Advance fundraising's claims to professionhood by putting its professional ethics on a firmer foundation.
- Reduce scepticism about, criticism of, and hostility to fundraising (from the likes of media and politicians) by demonstrating a coherent theory of professional ethics that underpins those activities that attract most criticism.

COMMENT


Rogare challenges common assumptions about fundraising ethics

Cherian Koshy CFRE

While the fundraising sector has recently taken up the important mantle of ethics, primarily led by the Association of Fundraising Professionals and the Chartered Institute of Fundraising, the exploration of ethical principles continues to be drastically under-thought and under-researched.

The codes adopted and reinforced by sector professionals is an important step in the process. However, the work of Rogare in discussing the ethical frameworks in the sector continues to be most relevant to practitioners.

Rogare is challenging the assumptions that undergird the common thinking around fundraising ethics as well as conducting cutting edge research and writing on areas of ethics not previously considered. This space needs to continue evolve and grow with additional diverse voices that prioritise the transparent discussion of not just *what* is purported to be ethical in fundraising but *why* those ethical frameworks are appropriate.

In this way, fundraising practitioners will have the tools necessary to make wise decisions in the field, especially in areas where the codes are silent. These grey areas are where the real ethical work of fundraisers is done and also why ethics is relevant. Rogare is pushing this discussion forward in critical ways. 

Cherian Koshy CFRE is development director at Des Moines Performing Arts and a member of the Rogare Council.

Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics

<https://www.rogare.net/normative-fundraising-ethics>

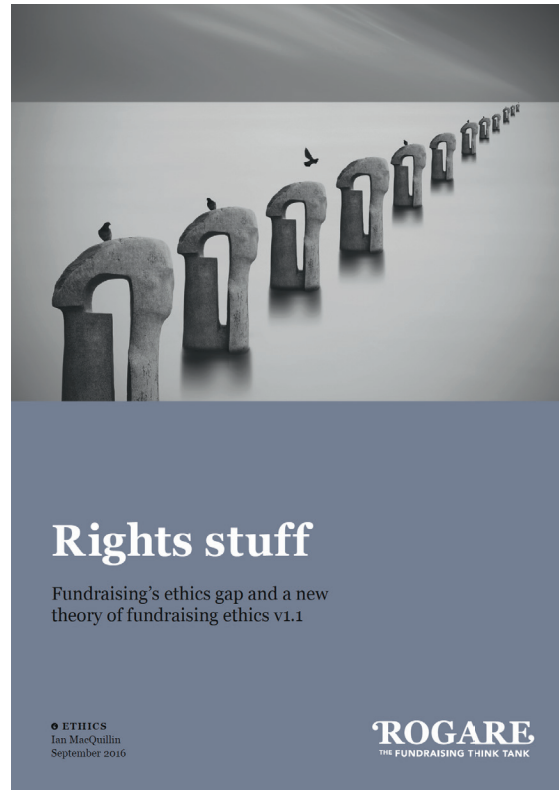
Our main work into fundraising ethics has been in developing a theory of fundraising ethics that can be applied consistently to ethical dilemmas, which we call Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics.

As we said in s1, surprisingly – and shockingly, for such an important topic – there has been very little theory development of professional ethics in fundraising, particularly when compared to closely-related disciplines such as marketing. What ethical theories do exist have focused predominantly on how fundraisers ought to treat donors (see below for a brief overview of some of the other normative theories we have named in reviewing the existing literature). But there is next to nothing that considers what duties fundraisers owe to their beneficiaries, the very people they are raising money for; and theories that put the donor at the centre of ethical decision making inevitably push the interests of the beneficiary to the periphery.

The theory of Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics (fully described in our 2016 white paper - right) states that:

Fundraising is ethical when it balances the duties of fundraisers to ask for support (on behalf of their beneficiaries) with the relevant rights of donors (particularly the right of the donor not to be subject to undue pressure to donate)...

...such that a mutually beneficial outcome is achieved and neither stakeholder is significantly harmed.



Other normative theories of fundraising ethics

Trustism Fundraising is ethical when it promotes, sustains, protects or maintains public trust in fundraising practices and the fundraising profession – and unethical when it damages it.

Donorcentrism Fundraising is ethical when it gives priority to the donor's wants, needs, desires and wishes (provided that this maximises sustainable income for the nonprofit) – and unethical when

it does not. Some thinking has it that ethical donorcentrism is independent of whether it successfully maximises income – in other words, donors' needs should be prioritised even if doing so doesn't raise most money.

Service of Philanthropy Fundraising is ethical when it brings meaning to a donor's philanthropy – and unethical when it does not.

2.1 Reach into professional practice

Practitioner conferences

We have presented our ideas about fundraising ethics at national fundraising conferences – in Belgium, Canada, England and Wales, Ireland, Finland, New Zealand, Scotland, Sweden, USA – various regional conferences in England, and at the International Fundraising Congress in the Netherlands: fundraisers around the world have thus been exposed to these ideas, and we can see uptake of them in various practitioner outputs.

Professional education

Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics is taught as part of the syllabus of the Institute of Fundraising's Certificate in Fundraising.

The theory is included as a core competency in the competence framework of the European Fundraising Association's (EFA) Certification Programme, which outlines the factors/competences that any national member of the EFA ought to include in their professional education if it is to be accredited by EFA.

It is taught as part of the social and nonprofit marketing module of the marketing degree at Hull University and the philanthropy and nonprofit leadership MA at Carleton University in Ontario. It has also been presented to philanthropy MA students at the University of Kent's Centre for Philanthropy, and was central to the module on nonprofit marketing and fundraising ethics taught as part of the marketing degree at Plymouth University in 2017.
Contd on p8.

Resources for Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics

- Rights-Balancing Ethics was formulated in a white paper first published in 2016 (left), which is available as a download from the Rogare website.
<https://bit.ly/Rogare-ethics-2016>
- The theory was expanded and presented for an academic readership in an article published in the *Journal of Business Ethics* in 2019.
<https://rdcu.be/MIEf>
- Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics is the basis of the chapter on ethics in the US fundraising textbook – *Fundraising Principles and Practice*, by Adrian Sargeant and Jen Shang. And it will form the core of chapters on fundraising ethics in two forthcoming books: *Charity Marketing: Contemporary Issues, Research and Practice*, to be published by Routledge in 2021; and the Directory of Social Change's new book on fundraising strategy.
- Ethical decision-making framework.
<http://bit.ly/ethics-framework>
- Ethics of legacy fundraising during emergencies.
<https://bit.ly/legacy-ethics>
- Ethics of beneficiary framing – positive and negative framing.
<http://bit.ly/Reframing-paper2>
- Ethics of beneficiary framing – incorporating beneficiary voices.
<https://bit.ly/reframing-paper3>

6 “We have presented our ideas about fundraising ethics at national fundraising conferences all round the world: fundraisers around the world have thus been exposed to these ideas, and we can see uptake of them in various practitioner outputs.”

2.1 Reach into professional practice (contd)

Regulation and standards

The theory been explicitly incorporated into the Scottish Fundraising Guarantee Statement devised by the Scottish Fundraising Standards Panel, and thus sits at the heart of fundraising self-regulation in Scotland:¹

“Fundraising is the life blood of many Scottish charities and we need to raise funds from voluntary sources. We could not fulfil our charitable mission without the support of generous, thoughtful and committed donors. We value the support of donors and understand the need to balance our duties to beneficiaries with our duties to donors.”

¹ <https://www.goodfundraising.scot/fundraising-guarantee/>

² <https://bit.ly/3uSDZqp>

In 2020, Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics was specifically included in a Fundraising Institute of Australia practice note on fundraising for natural disasters 2020:²

“Fundraising for beneficiaries of national disasters – natural, man-made or otherwise – and Fundraising for other causes not related to the disaster can be challenging and contentious. Members must balance the interests of donors with the interests of beneficiaries in delivering the organisation’s services and mission. Where this balancing decision is contentious, the management and board of an organisation are responsible for the consideration of both factual evidence and the values basis of their fundraising decisions.”

COMMENT

Why balancing the rights of donors and beneficiaries is central to fundraising regulation in Scotland

John Brady

In 2015 during much of the discussion across the UK on revising and enhancing fundraising regulation, there was a frustration from many Scottish charities that the beneficiary was being forgotten about. Much of the media focus, and the focus of senior English politicians, was on donors’ rights, or even the rights of people who had not yet been asked to donate. But the voice of the beneficiary was absent and there was no focus on why charities need to fundraise in the first place.

Following a report by the Scottish Council on Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) into charitable public fundraising in Scotland, SCVO convened a fundraising summit in November 2015. Ian MacQuillin of Rogare made a presentation on Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics. This concept was well received and impressed the steering group that was subsequently set up to shape the new landscape of fundraising regulation in Scotland, which ultimately led to the establishment of the Scottish Fundraising Standards Panel.

When the Scottish Fundraising Guarantee was drafted, one of the central concepts was that fundraising was a balance of rights between the rights of the beneficiary and the rights of donors. Charities did not exist in a vacuum; without beneficiaries there would be no need for charities to exist and therefore no need to fundraise. But equally donors had rights too and therefore fundraising had to take place by balancing the rights of the beneficiaries with those of the donor.

Without the recognition of the rights of the beneficiary, and focusing solely on the rights of the donor, fundraising would be reduced to a transactional commodity such as buying tins of beans or a pair of shoes, rather than improving the lives of disabled people or finding a cure for cancer. 🧠

John Brady is head of fundraising at St Andrews Hospice and was chair of the Institute of Fundraising (Scotland) from 2010-2015, and was a member of the steering group that led to the establishment of the Standards Advisory Board Scotland.

COMMENT

Getting the balance right in emergency appeals in Australia

Roewen Wishart CFRE

Many Australians donated in response to the catastrophic bushfires that raged across the country during the 2019/20 southern hemisphere summer. There were some very large donations, notably the largest Facebook fundraiser result ever (A\$51 million - £27.5 million/US\$35.8 million), which was initiated by an Australian comedian.

Fundraising during any natural disaster involves high emotions and rapidly changing facts leading to some contentious questions. Should charities not providing bushfire responses suspend their fundraising? Did the pace of change during the disaster prevent clear communication of the intended purpose of appeals? Would nonprofit organisations risk soliciting donations from people temporarily in vulnerable circumstances?

The first two problems did, in fact, occur. Some NPO boards or management hesitated in their fundraising. Media commentary and social media posts shared some donors' expectations that all monies should be rapidly disbursed as material or financial support to bushfire victims and environmental needs. Large charities experienced in this work communicated that the needs would stretch over months and years, meaning that immediate disbursement of all funds would be less effective.

Fundraising decision-making in the midst of disasters points to the importance of having a framework for normative fundraising ethics that was formulated before disaster struck.

Following the Australian government's commission of inquiry about all aspects of the bushfire response, which indicated a need for clarity of direction, Fundraising Institute Australia developed a practice note for its members. Initially the primary focus was on obligations to donors, reflecting the two contentious areas mentioned above. However this focus alone would not guide the many NPOs engaged in their normal fundraising programmes unrelated to bushfire response. And it would be a perverse outcome to guide charities to short-term ineffective uses of donations simply because some donors apparently wanted this.

The Rights-Balancing approach developed by Rogare provided an important guide to charities to consider both normative questions: what are our obligations to donors, and what our obligations to fundraise for the benefit of our many and varied beneficiaries? 🧠

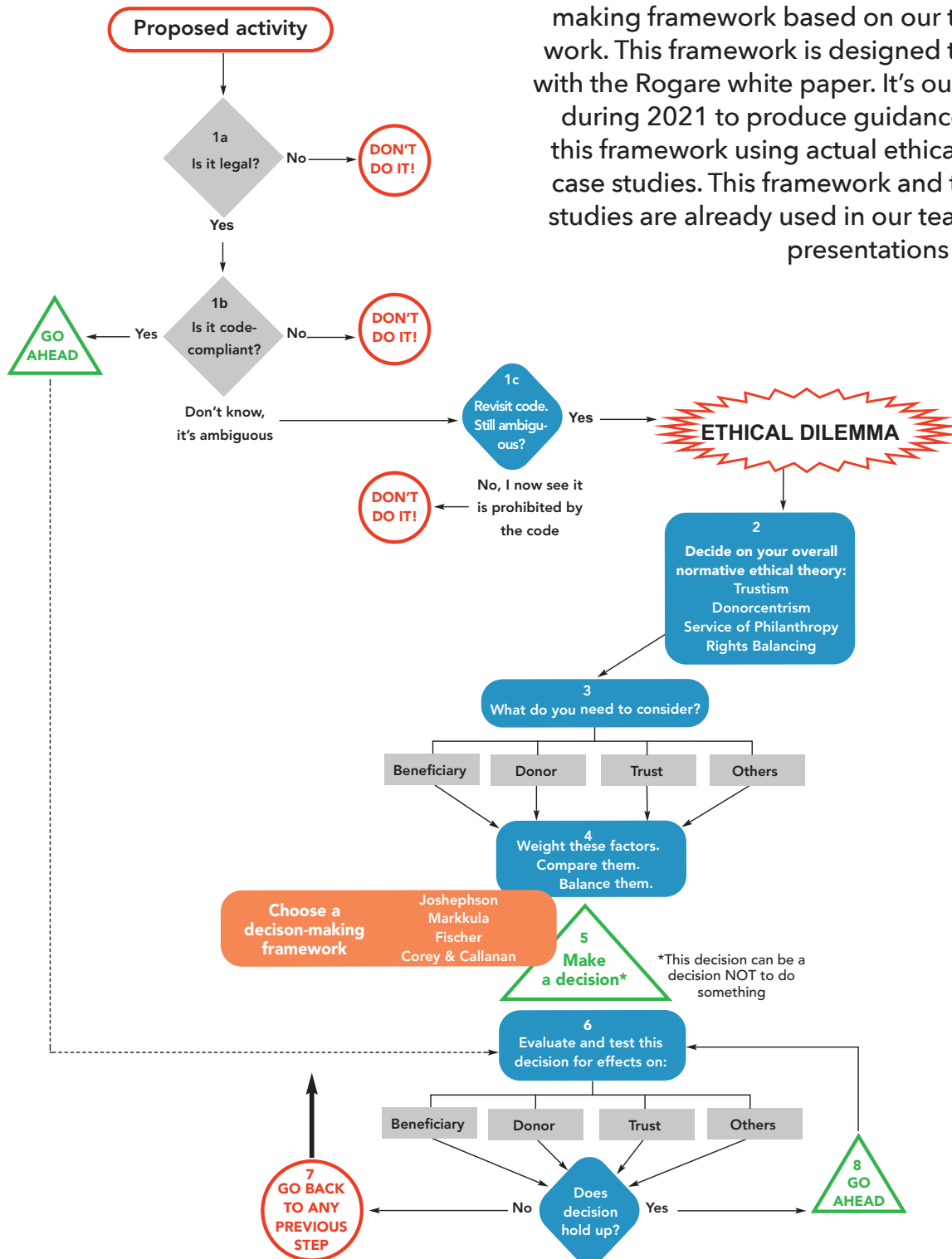
Roewen Wishart CFRE is a member of FIA Code Authority and was a member of Rogare's International Advisory Panel from 2016-2020. He is high value and strategy director at Xponential.

The Rights-Balancing Ethics has been an integral component of the CloF-accredited undergraduate social and nonprofit marketing course at the University of Hull Business School. Students are made aware of the ethical and moral dilemmas fundraisers they may face and are trained in Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics. To give an example, one of the student group had lost a friend due to diabetes and felt caught between doing a tribute fundraising event for him or not, due to concerns that other students may find it distressing. After seeking permission and consent from their friend's family, they held a very successful fundraising event in tribute and memory to their friend, raising over £2,000 for the regional Diabetes UK office. They justified their approach based on raising greater awareness of diabetes among the student population, despite it being personally difficult for the group as it was a personal tragedy for them and concerns that other students may find the tribute distressing. The event was an incredible success and ultimately paid tribute to their friend in a dignified and honorable way while helping to raise greater awareness of diabetes.

Dr Haseeb Shabbir, senior lecturer in marketing, University of Hull, and Academy Team member, Chartered Institute of Fundraising

3 Ethical decision-making framework

We have developed an ethical decision-making framework based on our theoretical work. This framework is designed to be used with the Rogare white paper. It's our intention during 2021 to produce guidance on using this framework using actual ethical dilemma case studies. This framework and these case studies are already used in our teaching and presentations (see s2.1).



4 Ethics of the ‘framing’ of beneficiaries

<https://www.rogare.net/fundraising-ethics-framing>

How ought charity beneficiaries be portrayed – or ‘framed’ – in charity advertising and fundraising? There’s often a difference of opinion within charities.

Fundraisers tend to favour those images that they believe will maximise income (which will be used to alleviate the plight of the beneficiaries). These images tend to show in quite stark context the plight and suffering of beneficiaries, often quite graphically.

This is because professional received wisdom says it’s these types of images that raise the most money. But they are often criticised as ‘poverty porn’, which stereotypes beneficiaries or does not accord them an appropriate level of dignity.

So many service delivery staff (and others at charities) tend to favour images that reflect more ‘positive’ values about beneficiaries, maintain their dignity, and focus on the solution to the problem. But fundraisers would argue that such images raise less money.

This argument has become polarised with little progress towards common ground. So Rogare is trying to reframe this whole question by looking at the evidence for and against negative and positive framing in charity advertising, and by trying to develop a new ethics of beneficiary framing derived from Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics.

This will postulate that the frame used is ethical when it incorporates the voices of the beneficiaries so framed, and gives them agency in how they are framed.

These ideas will be published in a special issue of the *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing* (formally the *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*) on fundraising ethics in January 2022, authored by Rogare’s director Ian MacQuillin, Rogare Council member Ruth Smyth, and charity communications lecturer Jess Crombie. 6

What we aim to do

We are planning five green (discussion) papers that explore various aspects of this issue:

1. Review of the ‘philosophy’ behind approaches to this topic to establish the philosophical/ideological nature of the debate and hypothesise as to the degree of polarisation in the discussion
2. Efficacy of positive vs. negative frames.
3. How beneficiaries view their portrayal in fundraising.
4. Commonalities and differences in relevant existing codes of practice
5. A final report presenting a normative argument about how beneficiaries ought to be framed in fundraising.

Although papers 1 and 5 bookend this project, there is no requirement that each paper is published in order (except paper 5) and we shall publish each paper as and when it is completed

We have so far published two of these papers:

Paper 2 by Ruth Smyth Ian MacQuillin summarises and analyses the published academic evidence for and against positive and negative framing (below left).

Paper 3 by Jess Crombie collates, summarises and analyses the studies that have explored the voices and agency of charity beneficiaries in how they are framed in fundraising materials (below right).



Ethics of legacy fundraising during emergencies

<https://www.rogare.net/legacy-ethics>

The Coronavirus pandemic currently sweeping the world has raised some disquiet that it would be unethical to ask people at risk of dying from Covid-19 to make a bequest to a charity.

To explore this issue, Rogare commenced a project to identify the ethical issues facing legacy fundraising in all emergencies that are likely to result in severe loss of life, such as a pandemic or epidemic (even a man-made one such as the opioid crisis), war, or societal disruption (such as might be the result of economic depression or natural disaster).

The project team set out to:

1. Identify potential ethical challenges/issues/dilemmas relating to legacy fundraising during emergencies generally and the current pandemic specifically.
2. Differentiate these from the usual ethical challenges/issues/dilemmas faced by legacy fundraisers – i.e. what makes this ethical issue relevant to the current situation or any other emergency?
3. Analyse these ethical dilemmas through the lenses of existing theories of fundraising ethics to recommend possible resolutions.

The concept of framing questions sets to identify ethical dilemmas is now being expanded by two of the project team – Claire Routley, the project leader, and Cherian Koshy, both members of the Rogare Council – into an approach that can be used more generally, not just in the concept of emergencies. Their ideas will be published in a special issue of the *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing* (formerly the *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*) on fundraising ethics in January 2022.

In carrying out the first two stages, the project team classified the various arguments into two question sets:

Question Set 1 – ‘offence’ and other overarching ethical questions

These were a range of questions such as the consideration of people in vulnerable circumstances, communicating about a death-related subject at a time when thoughts of mortality were high, or public perceptions around ‘ambulance chasing’.

Question Set 2 – ‘urgency’ and other ethical dilemmas in practice

This set included issues such as the possibility of people making legacy decisions in a hurry, the risk of short-term offence leading to long-term detriment to legacy giving, or the importance of offering a convenient way to give at a time when other options (e.g. attending events) might not be available.

The team then examined these questions through the lenses of the ethical theories described in Rogare’s white paper on fundraising ethics, including, of course, Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics, the recommended approach.

The team’s full deliberations and are available in the final report, which can be downloaded from the project page on the Rogare website.

As this report says:

“This paper doesn’t give you definitive answers about what is right or wrong, what is appropriate and isn’t – ethics isn’t as simple as that. Instead, we explore questions, and try to bring in multiple perspectives and arguments. And ultimately these issues will always have to be worked through in your own organisation and context.”

The legacy fundraising ethics paper has been translated into Japanese by the Japan Legacy Gift Association (see p13). ●

COMMENT

Thinking differently about legacy ethics in Japan

Ai Ogawa

When we think of ethics during the serious situation of the global Coronavirus pandemic, as fundraisers, we thought there should be common thinking toward it, even though we may think that each country has a different cultural background.

That is why we wanted to translate the Rogare report at this time so that we can learn from it and share it within Japanese legacy fundraisers as one of the new directions toward ethics during emergencies.

The Japan Legacy Giving Association holds regular meetings with our association members once every three months - we call it the Legacy Fundraising Salon. We introduced the report at the salon held in October 2020, where we presented a summary of Rogare's ideas, and it was well received by members.

It once again helped me understand the usefulness and value of sharing knowledge from overseas. 🌐

Ai Ogawa is secretary general of the Japan Fundraising Association.

The Japanese version of the legacy ethics paper can be found here: https://izoukifu.jp/2020/11/05/ethics_emergencies_j/



Ethics of legacy fundraising in emergencies project team

- Dr Claire Routley, project leader, Legacy Fundraising (UK)
- Heather Hill, Chapman Cubine Allen + Hussey (USA)
- Cherian Koshy, Des Moines Performing Arts (USA)
- Lucy Lowthian, Sue Ryder (UK)
- Meredith Niles, Marie Curie Cancer Care (UK)
- Ligia Peña, Greenpeace International (Canada)
- Michael Rosen, ML Innovations (USA)
- Andrew Watt, Accordant Philanthropy (UK)
- Roewen Wishart, XPonential Fundraising (Australia)

6 Donor dominance

<https://www.rogare.net/donor-dominance>

Received best practice wisdom in fundraising says you should always put the donor at the heart of everything you do. This is the core idea of 'donor-centred' fundraising (and Donorcentrist fundraising ethics) that underpins relationship fundraising. But can Donorcentrism go too far? And does it lead to issues of so-called 'donor dominance'.

'Donor dominance' refers to any serious form of undue or inappropriate influence that a donor or group of donors exerts over a nonprofit organisation or its staff.

These issues were brought out into the open in 2018. First there was the scandal of the Presidents Club fundraising dinner when an undercover journalist exposed totally unacceptable behaviour by male guests. And later in the year, a survey carried out by the Association of Fundraising Professionals and the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* in the USA found that a quarter of female fundraisers had faced sexual harassment at work and of these, 65 per cent said at least one offender was a donor.

Rogare is currently exploring this topic. First we are conceptualising the issue and surveying fundraising practitioners to ascertain how much and how

widespread these issues are. Second we have conducted an international survey that sought to identify the types of donor dominance fundraisers have experienced and in which types of fundraising.

The research showed that large number of fundraisers had encountered issues such as withholding donations, demanding unentitled benefits, directing the mission/project and inappropriate behaviour.

Such power abuse was unsurprisingly found in major gift fundraising, but was also prevalent in many other domains – it is not just an issue confined to big philanthropy. 🗣️

Reach into professional practice

Our research into donor dominance has been presented at fundraising conferences in Australia, Brazil, UK, USA, and has been featured in the charity sector media in the UK and USA.

Project leader

The Donor Dominance project is led by chair of the Rogare Council Heather Hill, who has a long-standing interest in this issue, and has written on the matter for the *Critical Fundraising* blog and the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*.

Donor dominance in action

Here are just a few of the examples of unreasonable demands made by donors uncovered by our research:

"A major donor who historically underwrote most of our annual event costs refused to do so unless we moved the venue (where we had always had it) to another location because the donor disliked the new chef at the venue we had always used. We didn't move – and they didn't give ever again."

"A demanding volunteer board member used charity resources for his own events. These were badged as supporting the charity but did not result in any income. He implied that I should do what he wanted if we were to continue to count on his support."

"Board member wanted tickets to a sold out concert and threatened to take away underwriting for a different event unless I put her to the front of the wait list and got her in."

"A donor told me he would make a major gift if we violated tax law and acknowledged his gift at a higher level."

"Lead members of a friends group threatened to not make their gifts or seek other support unless the charity let them run the fundraiser themselves, using significant charity resources, but without any staff oversight."

Community-centric fundraising ethics

<https://www.rogare.net/community-centric-fr>

Donor-centred fundraising is the main philosophy of practice in the fundraising profession, in the English-speaking world and beyond. But its core principles have been challenged by the rise of the new community-centric fundraising (CCF) movement – inspired by the ideas of American thought leader Vu Le.

While donor-centred fundraising aims to inspire donors by making them feel good about their giving, the CCF movement has argued that this has several negative outcomes, including that it marginalises and ‘others’ charity beneficiaries, perpetuates white saviourism and fuels systematic injustice, and that it facilitates donor dominance (see s6).

Rather than foregrounding the needs of the donor as an ethical stakeholder, CCF prioritises the needs of ‘the community’, as an entity, above the needs of donors and even individual charity missions. A formulation of normative CCF ethics (along the lines of other theories presented in s2, p6) would therefore be:

Fundraising is ethical when it prioritises/serves the needs of the community, and unethical when it does not.

CCF therefore represents a direct challenge to many of the core tenets of donor-centred fundraising.

But it raises many ethical questions of its own. CCF has said fundraisers ought to decline donations if they feel those donations would better help a different part of the community. How a fundraiser should navigate such an ethical minefield – deciding which parts of the community deserve more support – is yet to be articulated.

In August 2020, Rogare published a green (discussion) paper (below left) that aims to unpick the issues at play in the clash of philosophies and ethics and explore whether there is sufficient common ground between donor-centred fundraising and community-centric fundraising to strike an accord.

Our conclusion is that there is enough common ground, but it is up to each side whether they wish to compromise to reach a consensus.

Irrespective of whether the CCF movement wishes to reach an accord with donor-centred fundraising, many of its criticisms of donorcentricity are nonetheless valid, and donor-centred fundraisers ought to take them seriously. 6



The donor-centred baby and the community-centric bathwater

Is an accord between the two philosophies possible?

• ETHICS/RELATIONSHIP FUNDRAISING
IAN MACQUILLIN
August 2020

ROGARE
THE FUNDRAISING THINK TANK

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“Community-centric fundraising represents a direct challenge to many of the core tenets of donor-centred fundraising. But it raises many ethical questions of its own.”

Next steps in Rogare's work on fundraising ethics

As we hope to have made very clear in this paper, ethics is absolutely central to Rogare's research agenda. We have described the projects about fundraising ethics that we have completed or are ongoing and also signposted projects under other topic headings where ethics is a major component of those projects. This brief section outlines the major work on ethics that we plan to carry out in the future:

- Virtue ethics in fundraising
- Feminist Care Ethics and fundraising
- Ethical decision making
- Establishing the Fundraising Ethics Research Centre.

8.1 The virtuous fundraiser – virtue ethics and fundraising

What are the personal and professional virtues a fundraiser ought to have to act ethically in her role? Honest? Trustworthy? Respectful? What about caring? Or judicial? Or competent?

Most fundraising ethics considers what's right according to whether it has good outcomes (consequentialism) or is considered to be a moral way of acting (deontology). This is what our initial white paper that established Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics does.

Consequentialism and deontology are two of the three main branches of normative ethics. The third is virtue ethics. The next big step in our development of a theory of fundraising ethics is to craft a fully-fledged concept of ethical fundraising based on virtue ethics, and we aim to publish as a white paper during 2021, which will complement our original paper on Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics. Initial ideas were presented at the Institute of Fundraising national convention in 2019.

8.2 The caring fundraiser – Feminist Care Ethics and fundraising

A further contribution to normative fundraising ethics could be derived from Feminist Care Ethics, which is a branch of virtue ethics that attempts to provide an alternative perspective to the traditional ('masculine') perspectives of duty and justice that are emphasized by both consequentialism and deontology.

Our early work on Care Ethics suggests that the notion of a 'caring fundraiser' will bring further nuance to what will become a substantial and sophisticated professional ethics for fundraising. Our task is to produce a paper outlining these ideas that will complement the original white paper and the paper on virtue ethics.

8.3 Ethical decision making

We have so far mainly focused on theory development rather than applied ethics (because there is so little of it and the theory has to come before the application). So we now want to turn our attention towards applying that theory. We took a big step in that direction with the paper on the ethics of legacy fundraising during emergencies (s5).

Our next step will be to provide guidance in using our ethical decision making framework (s3), using some actual ethical dilemmas from professional practice. We would also like to uncover what ethical decision making heuristics or frameworks fundraisers are currently using, which we plan to do through a global survey of fundraisers' attitudes and approaches to their professional ethics.

The survey will present fundraisers with a series of ethical dilemmas and ask them to make a decision on what they would do in a variety of scenarios. After each scenario we would explore the issues that fundraisers felt they wrestled with in taking each decision and how they justified the decision eventually taken. This will allow us to gain insight into the type of ethical theories currently guiding their decision-making and allow us to identify where and how Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics would have most benefit.

Our early work on Care Ethics suggests that the notion of a ‘caring fundraiser’ will bring further nuance to what will become a substantial and sophisticated professional ethics for fundraising.

8.4 Fundraising Ethics Research Centre

Much of Rogare’s work is conducted by and disseminated through our Critical Fundraising Network. (For more details on how this network operates, see s5 of Part 1 of *Rethinking Fundraising*.)

We do this through Research Projects, in which we aim to tackle a specific research question; and Knowledge Collectives, in which we collate the best existing evidence and theory and signpost that to practitioners.

For subjects in which our research agenda is well advanced we plan to create research centres that will allow practitioners, academics, pracademics and others with a serious interest in their specialist topic to really drive forward and expand our work in these areas.

The first such centre we plan to establish during 2021 is the Rogare Fundraising Ethics Research Centre (FERC).

The first step in this will be to set up a steering group that will, among other things, finalise the objectives and rationale for FERC, its terms of reference, and to set its research agenda and objectives. As well as the five objectives that we listed at the start of this section on p5, further objectives of FERC are likely to include:

- Raise the profile of fundraising ethics as a topic for academic study
- Embed ethics at the heart of professional practice
- Provide a forum to exchange and share new ideas about fundraising ethics.

In support of the first of these, FERC is already collaborating with the *Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing* (formerly the *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*) on a special issue on normative fundraising ethics, which will be published in 2022. This online special issue will have 13 specially-commissioned articles that explore areas of normative ethics in fundraising that have rarely, if ever, been previously considered, including care ethics, children and young people and stakeholder approaches to fundraising ethics.

Three of the articles come from Rogare’s Critical Fundraising Network: question framing of ethical dilemmas, by Cherian Koshy and Claire Routley (see s5); beneficiary framing, by Ian MacQuillin, Jess Crombie and Ruth Smyth (see s4); and a new review of the field of normative fundraising ethics by Rogare’s director Ian MacQuillin, which will be the most comprehensive treatment of the topic yet, describing 15 normative approaches to ethical of fundraising.

Once it is established, all the work and projects outlined in this paper will be subsumed under the FERC brand, as will all future Rogare outputs on ethics. Some of these future research topics are likely to include some or all of those listed on p18.

Continued on p18.

8.4 Fundraising Ethics Research Centre (contd)

Possible topics for further research at the Fundraising Ethics Research Centre

- The ethics of altruism and effective altruism
- How similar/different is fundraising ethics to marketing ethics and what can we learn from marketing ethics
- Postmodern and critical approaches to fundraising
- How much ought people give/do people have a duty to give?
- To which stakeholders do fundraisers owe duties and what are those duties/what rights to these stakeholders have?
- Criticisms/critique of Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics
- Further developing the ethics of donor relationships
- Problems of 'white saviourism' in donor-centred narratives
- The ethics of community-centric fundraising
- Ethics of data protection (particularly privacy and consent issues)
- The boundary between ethics and professional standards and the conflation of ethics and standards
- A general ethical theory of gift acceptance and refusal
- A general ethical theory of fundraiser remuneration
- Ethics of educational (schools and higher ed) and healthcare fundraising and their commonalities and differences to mainstream charity fundraising ethics
- Competition between charities in the fundraising space
- The reach of professional ethics – who is subject to it (volunteers, crowdfunders etc.)
- National/cultural differences in fundraising ethics
- Ethical implications of the use of behavioural science in fundraising.

Possible activities and outputs

We envisage a number of activities and outputs that could be conducted under the FERC banner.

Scoping study – To identify what ethical issues in fundraising need to be researched and explored, we'll consult with the profession at an early stage. We will aim to identify normative questions such as those highlighted in the box on this page, rather than identifying specific ethical dilemmas in professional practice. This will help to establish the foundation for FERC by identifying the big under-thought issues in fundraising ethics.

Knowledge Collective for fundraising ethics. We will establish a Knowledge Collective on fundraising ethics to sift existing material and direct practitioners to the best available writing and theory on the topic.

Symposia, seminars and other events – there are opportunities for many events, both physical and virtual. One particular format we intend to explore is a symposium on fundraising ethics in general or on particular ethical issues. Another option would be to have roundtables in which we aim to discuss particular ethical topics/issues/challenges to uncover new ideas or achieve consensus. Ultimately, we would look at a larger conference specifically about fundraising ethics.

Journal on fundraising ethics – adopting our communications strategy of influencing the influencers (see s6 of Part 1 of *Rethinking Fundraising*), we have a medium-term ambition to produce a journal dedicated to fundraising ethics that will span the boundary between academic ideas and professional practice. Its objective will be to introduce sophisticated ideas about ethics to the fundraising profession and demonstrate their applicability in professional practice and policy-making.

Training and education courses and materials – Rogare will develop a series of educational and training materials and courses based on our work on ethics. Our ultimate objective will be to have this course accredited as part of a professional qualification and through an academic institution. ⑥



- *Rights stuff: Fundraising's ethics gap and a new theory of fundraising ethics*
- Ian MacQuillin
- 2016
- <https://bit.ly/Rogare-ethics-2016>



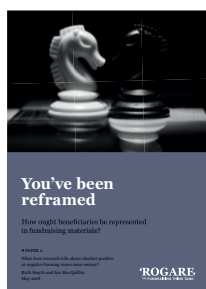
- *The donor-centred baby and the community-centric bathwater. Is an accord between the two philosophies possible?*
- Ian MacQuillin
- 2020
- <https://bit.ly/Rogare-CCF-paper1>



- *Fundraising ethics, a rights-balancing approach*
- Ian MacQuillin and Adrian Sargeant
- 2019
- <https://rdcu.be/MIEf>



- *The ethics of legacy fundraising during emergencies*
- Claire Routley, Cherian Koshy, Lucy Lowthian, Meredith Niles, Roewen Wishart, Michael J. Rosen, Heather Hill, Ligia Peña and Andrew Watt
- 2020
- <https://bit.ly/legacy-ethics>



- *You've been reframed – discussion paper 2: Positive and negative framing*
- Ruth Smyth and Ian MacQuillin
- 2018
- <http://bit.ly/Reframing-paper2>

- *The virtuous fundraiser – presentation to IoF Convention*
- Ian MacQuillin
- 2019
- <http://bit.ly/virtuous-fundraiser-presentation>



- *You've been reframed – discussion paper 3. Putting the contributor centre frame: What the people in our pictures think about the way we tell their stories.*
- Jess Crombie
- 2020
- <https://bit.ly/reframing-paper3>

- *Initial results from Donor Dominance survey*
- Heather Hill and Ian MacQuillin
- 2019
- <http://bit.ly/donor-dominance-survey>



Rogare's work on fundraising ethics – a quick summary

What we have done

- Developed a new theory of fundraising ethics – Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics
- Used Rights-Balancing Fundraising Ethics as the foundation for further work on beneficiary framing, ethics of regulation, ethics of stakeholder relationships, and public engagement
- Devised an ethical decision-making framework.
- Published two papers on the ethics of beneficiary framing
- Conducted research into donor dominance.

What we are going to do next

- Establish the Fundraising Ethics Research Centre and bring all our work on ethics under the FERC banner
- Publish papers on virtue ethics and Feminist Care Ethics in fundraising
- Publish remaining papers from the beneficiary framing project
- Develop ethical decision-making guidance and uncover the types of ethical decision-making processes currently used by fundraisers around the world.

Get in touch

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Rogare - The Fundraising Think Tank CIC is a community interest company registered in the UK, registration number 11807930.

Rogare brand identity created by Rebecca Woodall at Bluefrog Fundraising.

Associate Members

Rogare is supported in its work by a number of Associate Members - partners to the fundraising sector that share our critical fundraising ethos. Our Associate Members are:

askdirect

Ask Direct

Strategic and creative agency (Ireland)

<https://www.askdirect.ie>

bluefrog
FUNDRAISING

Bluefrog

Creative agency (UK)

<https://bluefroglondon.com>

Stephen Thomas

Stephen Thomas

Full-service fundraising agency (Canada)

<https://stephenthomas.ca>

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