Chapter

Fundraising Across Different Causes[1]

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Abstract

Efforts to grow and strengthen the culture of philanthropy in the UK and beyond have largely focused on two dimensions: the total amount of money donated and the effectiveness of philanthropic spending. However, the absence of much comment on, or significant research into, the destination of donations does not alter the situation that some groups succeed in attracting significant philanthropic funds whilst others struggle to secure any – or many – donations. This chapter first seeks to address how can we define what is meant by 'unpopular' causes in contemporary society? Second, we explore examples of 'good practice' by charities that have overcome perceived unpopularity to achieve fundraising success? In conclusion, drawing on the literature review, theoretical approaches and case studies we suggest five types of 'good practice in asking' that are relevant to all types of charities, wherever they perceive themselves to be on the 'popularity spectrum'.

Introduction

There is an extensive literature exploring why people give to charity, but less discussed is the destination of those donations. Britain itself is a generous country, with most people (57%) reporting that they gave to charity in the past year, and a third (31%) within the previous four weeks (CAF, 2019), but that generosity is not equally spread amongst all the tens of thousands of good causes seeking financial support, leaving many charities feeling that their cause is 'neglected', 'a Cinderella cause' and particularly difficult to fundraise for. Given this widespread belief amongst charities that not enough people care about their beneficiaries or

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‘get’ what they do, it is useful to try to understand why some causes appear to more easily attract widespread support whilst others struggle to raise any significant donated income, in order to help all charities maximise their philanthropic reach.

To start, it is important to note that charitable giving varies widely between both causes and individual charities. For example, within the top 100 most popular causes by fundraised income there are twelve animal charities compared to only one mental health charity, and some causes do not feature at all: in the top 100 there is not a single charity supporting ex-offenders, or refugees and asylum seekers (Pharoah, 2020). The CAF (2019) UK giving survey offers further insight into this distribution, highlighting the two most popular causes in the UK were animal welfare and children and young people, with 26% of donors saying they had given to each, this was closely followed by medical research (25%), hospitals and hospices (20%) and homeless people, housing and refuge shelters in the UK (18%). These top five cause areas have remained relatively stable over the past five years. Whilst data on private financial support for different types of causes in the UK shows that some cause areas dominate, further analysis also shows that not every charity working in the same area achieves similar fundraising success. For example, Cancer Research UK, the UK’s most successful fundraising charity attracted almost as much fundraised income in 2019, as all the other cancer charities in the top 100 fundraising charities added together.

Charitable giving is a voluntary act - the freedom to choose which causes to support is an essential element of donor autonomy, and the ability to align personal and philanthropic preferences is an important factor in encouraging giving amongst donors (Frumkin, 2006). Yet normative conceptions of ‘worthiness’ and cultural factors aligning certain causes with elite preferences, creates an ‘unequal playing field’ for fund-seeking charities that fall— or believe themselves to fall—outside the charmed circle of causes that are popular with potential donors. In addressing this, this chapter first seeks to understand donor choice behaviour, reviewing insights from research and literature into how donors choose charities. We then consider two theories which each help us to better understand the distributional pattern of donations, ‘crowding out’ (Andreoni and Payne, 2011; Payne, 1998) and ‘socioemotional economy’ (Clark, 1997). Next we reflect on what good practice looks like at the donor, organisational level and societal level, drawing on case studies to illustrate our argument. Finally, we suggest five implications for practice that are relevant to all types of charities, wherever they perceive themselves to be on the ‘popularity spectrum’.

Overview: How do Donors Choose Charities

The most widely cited research exploring why people give is Bekkers and Wiepking's (2011) meta-review of over 500 studies of philanthropic activity, which identifies eight core mechanisms that drive giving behaviours, as summarised in table 1.

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Table 1: The eight mechanisms that drive charitable giving (Source: Breeze 2019, based on Bekkers and Wiepking, 2011)

While these mechanisms can help us to understand why individuals donate to charity, they are less helpful in aiding us to understand why donors choose one cause over another among the plethora of good causes (Neumayr and Handy, 2019). However, research suggests that solicitation may be the key driver, as one of the few consistent findings in research into charitable giving is that asking matters. The common-sense wisdom "if you don't ask, you don't get" turns out to be the closest thing the field has to an iron law (Andreoni 2006). Despite assumptions that giving is driven by individual-level factors and qualities, such as how much wealth one has, or how compassionate one is, it turns out that whether or not one is asked to donate is the factor with the highest explanatory power regarding the incidence of giving across all causes (Neumayr and Handy, 2019, 783). The reason this matters so much is because being asked creates opportunities to donate, and some degree of social pressure to do so (Meer and Rosen 2011). In the absence of an ask, people may be willing to give but that is less likely to be put into action.

Turning to the few studies that attend to the question of the distribution of philanthropic donations, a common conclusion is that giving decisions are not entirely rational and tend to be highly reliant on donor taste and preferences. Breeze (2013) identifies four non-needs based factors: donor tastes, personal experiences, perceptions of charities competence and desire for personal impact:

- ***Donor tastes:*** Donor taste is a key factor in the selection of charitable beneficiaries. Donors state that they typically support 'things that happen to appeal to me', causes that are 'close to my heart', things that 'touch a chord' and charities 'that I admire' and 'am comfortable giving to'. This approach is collectively termed 'taste-based giving', as opposed to 'needs-based giving', and is exemplified by donors who say

they prefer to support one sort of animal over another, those who support causes aligned with their hobbies or those who give financial support to charities they are heavily involved with as volunteers, such as a scout group or their local theatre.

- ***Personal experiences:*** personal preferences are a factor in giving decisions, even when donors perceive themselves as motivated by needs. Nonetheless, tastes develop because of the individual's socialisation, which includes their upbringing, education, personal and professional experiences. People draw on their own life experiences to create what have been called 'philanthropic autobiographies' (Payton and Moody, 2008) which affects their choice of charitable recipients as they give to causes they feel some connection to, or affinity with, as a result of experiences and incidents that occur in their personal and professional lives, for example donors who support a medical charity after a loved one is affected by the illness it researches or supports, or donors who support sea-rescue charities because they live or grew up living near the sea.
- ***Perceptions of charities' competence:*** The third non-needs-based criteria evident in giving decisions concerns donors' judgements regarding the competence of recipient organisations, such that charities are selected for support based on being 'well-run' and 'efficient', or 'charities that don't pay their staff too much' and 'charities that have low overheads'. There is a consensus that charity competence, as demonstrated in the efficient use of money, is highly attractive and likely to prompt greater donations. However, as most donors lack the time or resources to obtain and compare robust metrics in order to assess organisational competence, they often rely on word of mouth, media coverage or proxies such as the apparent cost of fundraising materials or subjective experience of competency such as the mis-spelling of their name on fundraising communications (Breeze 2010, 35).
- ***Desire for personal impact:*** The fourth non-needs based criteria for giving is a desire for donations to make an impact that is not 'drowned out' by support from other donors or the government. Donors are particularly keen to avoid their donations becoming a substitute for government spending. A preference for 'additionality' is widespread, such that donors are keen to ensure that their contribution enhances, rather than replaces, the funding available for a particular cause. This is especially relevant in the areas of spending on human welfare, as studies show that very high

proportions of the public believe that meeting social need is primarily the job of government rather than philanthropy (Breeze and Mohan 2020).

In addition, Robson and Hart (2020) show that whilst political identity impacts on charitable choice, it also influences perceptions of need. For example, a liberal donor is more likely to respond positively to solicitations that blame external societal factors for issues such as poverty, whereas conservatives instead prefer messages which focus on individual attributes and failings (Lee et al., 2020). This is further supported by van Dijk et al. (2019) who show that donors look for synergies between their personal values and those of charities they wish to support. Chapman et al. (2018) support this highlighting that donors like to give to their 'in-group', meaning they select charities that reflect the priorities of the group they feel they belong too, for example identifying as Christian and giving to Christian organisations.

This overview of the existing research context establishes that philanthropic behaviour is complex and motivated by a multiplicity of factors, that donors choose causes that resonate with their personal experiences and values, and that – crucially – most charitable gifts have to be asked for, before they are given. However, there is a surprising lack of confidence amongst charities about asking people for donations (Thelkelsen, 2011). Charities often rely on their work to 'speak for itself' rather than directly 'making the ask'. Nonetheless as various studies suggest that some causes are inherently more popular than others (Body and Breeze, 2016; Robson and Hart, 2020), consideration of how different causes can maximise their philanthropic reach is important.

Theoretical Approaches to Understanding Popularity of Causes

Whilst there are few studies focused on the relationship between the types of causes and their fundraising success, there is a larger body of work exploring the organisational behaviours of charities and their relationships with donors. Here we draw on this literature to present two theoretical approaches which may be helpful in making sense of the meaning of popular and unpopular causes: crowding out theory; the social construction of sympathy.

Crowding out theory: The concept of 'crowding out' comes from the discipline of Economics, and occurs when increased government funding leads to a reduction in income from other sources, such as fundraised donations from private individuals and institutions. The research evidence is mixed, with studies showing that the impact of government funding

on other income sources is not consistent across time and place (De Wit and Bekkers, 2017; Jilke et al., 2019). Indeed, Horne et al. (2005) show that most donors do not know how much government support charitable organisations receive, and thus are unlikely to use this indicator in their decision making. Nonetheless, what is clear is that certain causes receive more statutory support than others, for example charities providing support services for children services receive more tax-funded support than do charities rehoming dogs. Therefore, charities rehoming dogs, being entirely reliant on voluntary income from private donors must focus a great deal of efforts on donor fundraising activities. Thus, Andreoni and Payne (2011) suggest that another version of this phenomena, known as 'internal' crowding out, occurs within organisations when charities reduce their own fundraising efforts as a result of new income success; this presents a plausible hypothesis for why some causes may be more 'popular' (as measured by success in fundraising) than others.

Other possibilities to explain the internal 'crowding out effect' includes Weisbrod's (1988) suggestion that charities do not set out to maximise their income, but rather aim to raise enough money to meet identified needs or to address a particular issue; once this target has been met, they do not continue fundraising efforts even if it were possible to raise more money from other sources. Alternatively, if a charity views itself as unpopular and likely to be overlooked by donors the charity may alter its own behaviour by not making substantive efforts to seek support and therefore crowd themselves out of receiving voluntary income. If a charity decides the cause it represents is too unpopular to receive donated income and does not ask, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. The result in this scenario is also a reduction in fundraising efforts because of securing 'sufficient' funds elsewhere. As the popularity of a cause is related to the amount of voluntary income it attracts, the 'crowding out effect' can create circumstances within which a seemingly successful cause in terms of delivery and income is perceived as unpopular with donors.

***The social construction of sympathy*:** A second theoretical approach that is useful in understanding the topic in question comes from a different discipline, Psychology, and draws on Clark's (1997) notion of the construction of sympathy, or the 'socioemotional economy'. This concept understands sympathy, and giving priorities, as something the donor subjectively and socially constructs based upon their own experiences and the social world they live in (Sneddon et al., 2020), thereby suggesting that the popularity of any cause is governed by the level of sympathy it can attract at any given time. Although sympathy may be considered a natural, reflexive reaction, people are not born knowing how and when to

distribute it appropriately. We know that personal experience increases sympathy, leading to bigger charitable donations (Small et al., 2007), and that individuals also use external guides to modify their thoughts and behaviours by learning elaborate rules for the expression of sympathy that are considered appropriate to the time and social context. For example, research suggests that people, based on their personal experiences, priorities and characteristics, automatically create conceptual categories that place different groups of people in four quadrants of moral evaluation – these are termed by Fiske et al (2002) as warm or cold, and competent or incompetent. The warmth dimension includes traits like (dis)honesty, (un)trustworthiness, and (un)friendliness. These can be considered as traits which help people assess whether someone will help, or harm you. The competence dimension contains traits like (un)intelligence, skilfulness, persistence, laziness, clumsiness, etc. These traits tell people how effectively someone is at achieving their goals. According to Fiske and colleagues (2002) there is an underlying pattern to the way we attribute these personality traits to groups and our subsequent responses, each which ascribe to a particular stereotype s shown in figure 1 below.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE>

Figure 1: The Stereotype Content Model (Source: Adapted form Fiske et al., 2002)

The first quadrant (top right), social reference stereotype, includes those who we view as being both warm and competent and 'people like us'. The second, paternalistic stereotype, we view as being warm but incompetent, they are similar to us but have fallen on hard times or are experiencing difficulties (for example if someone falls ill). These first two quadrants are 'in-groups' and more likely to be considered 'deserving' of our sympathy. As Smith (1976) notes, sympathy and feelings of moral responsibility are easier to elicit when presenting donors with situations which they are familiar with. The third quadrant, envious stereotype, is the first 'out-group', those we are more likely to view as 'undeserving' of our sympathy, who we view as competent but we feel cold towards. The fourth outgroup, we neither view warmly nor view as competent. According to Murphy (2020) this group are then targeted with particularly harsh, often dehumanising, framing. For example, this can help us understand the frequent negative media attention concerning asylum seekers and immigrants (Drywood and Gray, 2019). As research tells us that sympathy plays a key role in decision-making when help is required (Batson, 2011), the social construction of those we will feel sympathy for and those who we will not, is a likely strong predictor as to who we will give

donations to, and who we will not. This leads us to question whether the concept of popular and unpopular causes really exists beyond that of the individual donors' sympathetic preferences, societal identification of the 'in-group' and 'out-group' and the context at any given time.

Examples of Good Practice

In 2016, the authors of this chapter carried out research analysing how 'unpopular' causes have been defined in media outlets over the past 2005-2015 years. We began by analysing twenty years of UK media coverage in order to identify the ten most 'unpopular' charitable causes areas, as shown in table 2.

<INSERT TABLE 2 HERE>

Table 2: 'Unpopular' causes as defined in UK media coverage 1994-2014, source: Body and Breeze, 2016.

We then conducted a thorough examination of publicly available material on ten successful fundraising charities working in each of these cause areas in order to demonstrate that 'unpopularity' is not a necessary barrier to raising funds from individual donors.

In the next section we identify good practice in asking at three different levels of the fundraising process: (1) the organisational level of the charity; (2) the interaction between the donor and the cause; and (3) wider societal norms and values.

Good practice at the organisational level

A culture of philanthropy: A charity is said to have a 'culture of philanthropy' when, 'most people in the organisation (across positions) act as ambassadors and engage in relationship building. Everyone promotes philanthropy and can articulate a case for giving. Fundraising is viewed and valued as a mission-aligned programme of the organisation. Organisational systems are established to support donors. The chief executive/director is committed and personally involved in fundraising' (Belle and Cornelius, 2013:3).

Embedding a commitment to fundraising throughout organisations creates a 'culture of philanthropy' that has a proven connection to successful fundraising (Gibson, 2016). Creating

a culture of philanthropy extends beyond the staff and volunteers of a charity, embracing cheerleaders and donors as well. According to Ferguson (2019) 'it is not just about maintaining past donors and acquiring new ones; it is about viewing all individuals as a vital part of your organization who can bring more to the table than just money' (p.2).

For example, in 2016, our research identified mental health as the topmost 'unpopular cause' in the UK as defined by UK media outlets (Body and Breeze, 2016). Indeed, as MIND's (2015) own research highlighted, stigma against people with mental health illness occurs across all socio-economic groups, potentially making this a difficult to cause to fundraise for. In efforts to combat this, the mental health charity purposefully placed fundraising at the heart of the charity's communications strategy and has worked with all staff and supporters to ensure fundraising is understood as a key strategic priority. Since 2015, they have more than doubled their fundraised income through donations and legacies, from £10.4m in 2015 to £26.4m in 2020.

Cultivating celebrity cheerleaders: Research has highlighted that charities who actively celebrate and engage celebrity and well-known supporters experience positive impacts on their donations (Peterson et al., 2018). Celebrities are most effective as cheerleaders when they can speak from authentic personal experience to a large following, thus effecting donations (Knoll and Matthes, 2017). For example, the Terrence Higgins Trust, a charity aiming to end HIV cases in England by 2030, which is promoted by a multitude of global names, including pop-star Elton John and actress Dame Judy Dench, whose support helps raise the charity's profile and gain access to major donors in their networks.

Good practice at the donor level

Arousing donor sympathies: Research shows that the successful framing of a cause is linked to better fundraising outcomes. Examples of the importance of framing include the finding that donors respond more generously to one 'identifiable victim' than they do to hearing statistics about large numbers of unknown, yet similarly affected people (Dickert et al., 2016). This finding explains why disaster relief appeals tend to be 'fronted' by one face, usually that of a sympathy-provoking child, Multiple other studies highlight how individuals are more likely to feel sympathy for an image of a sad child, and thus more likely to donate, than they are if presented with an image of a happy child (Allred and Amos, 2018; Small and Verrochi, 2009). Whereas other research suggests that videos which highlight the differences

between donors situation and the beneficiaries situation also have a positive effect on fundraising amounts (Van Rijn et al., 2017). However, there are moral sensitivities to balance here. Research has suggested charities need to take care to not use imagery which reinforces negative stereotypes and instead should adopt longer term strategies which seek to educate donors about the wider issues which sit behind a cause, such as food poverty, to help achieve longer term social change (Bhati and Eikenberry, 2016; Body et al., 2020).

Charities that deliberately and carefully frame their key message and reinforce that framing through all their communication activity, including carefully chosen images (still and videos), are more likely to elicit the attention and sympathy of donors. For example, Storybook Dads, a charity which works with parents in prison to produce CDs and DVDs of themselves reading a book to their children, frames its beneficiaries as the innocent children with an in-prison parent. Their website material in 2020 leads with the statement: 'Prisoners' children haven't committed a crime'. They use videos to illustrate this message, primarily of sad children, made happy by listening to their storybook or reconnecting with family. The website, social media and marketing material reflect a child-focused approach with a range of drawings and doodles, giving the impression that children have helped design the brand and are directly asking the donor for support. As a small charity, they have more than doubled their fundraised income between 2017 and 2019.

Minimising perceptions of culpability: Clark's (1997) notion of the 'socioemotional economy', suggest donors prefer beneficiaries whose needs arise through little or no fault of their own and hence are perceived to be free—or more free—of culpability. Research has highlighted the importance of educating donors by bringing more voices of beneficiaries into fundraising and telling more complete stories, particularly about needy or marginalized people, rather than just overwhelmingly focusing on donor motivation to give (Bhati and Eikenberry, 2016). For example, Refugee Action, a charity supporting refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK, notes on their website (2020) that refugees face 'hatred, isolation and destitution they face when they arrive in the UK', and seek to challenge this narrative by highlighting 'everyone who's had to flee their home deserves a chance to live again', and offering insight into individuals' stories highlighting stories of persecution. Alongside these stories, fundraising materials show pictures of families and children, reinforcing the message that the donor and beneficiaries have shared values and networks, and that beneficiaries are victims of persecution and war, thus need our support. Between 2015 and 2019 the charity's

fundraised income has increased by 34%, which is likely supported by such messaging, coupled with increased media and political attention.

Good practice at a societal level.

Attracting positive media coverage: Media discourses are widely understood to be directly reflexive of public opinion (Ewart, 2000:2). Mass media acts as a gate-keeper at two levels: first deciding which social issues make it on to the public radar, and second shaping how they are presented which impacts on how people are encouraged to think about an issue rather than just whether the topic appears in the media (Hale, 2007). The recent rise of social media has dented the power of the mass media to some extent and greatly benefited charities as communication messages can now be spread more democratically through diverse networks of individuals lacking traditional media power. For example, The Lucy Faithful Foundation, a charity working with child abusers or those at risk of abusing, has received ongoing public criticism because of its client group. Despite attracting 'bad press' it has invested in facilitating supporters prepared to champion the cause in television and radio interviews, and has pro-actively used social media, such as blogs and twitter, to promote the value of their work direct to the public. Their social media campaign "It's time we talked about it" launched in March 2019 saw Twitter impressions increase by 539% in the first 3-months. In the same year fundraised income increased by 40%.

Implications for Practice

In drawing this chapter to a close we identify five key areas that directly impact on successful fundraising.

Asking: We conclude that asking donors to donate is the single biggest factor affecting giving. We know that almost all donations occur in response to a solicitation. Asking for donations means investing in fundraising, not just in financial terms but also by strategically placing fundraising at the heart of the organisation, including establishing a culture of philanthropy. Such investment can pay dividends, regardless of the size of the charity.

Framing the cause: Framing the cause effectively to both capture donors' sympathies and appeal directly to donors' personal tastes is key to securing donations. Personalising the

message of the charity through story-telling and individual case studies is more likely to appeal to donors' sympathies. Examples of good practice discussed in this chapter, offer good examples on their websites, highlighting personal and compelling stories of individuals that help donors emotionally connect to the cause and feel empathy with the beneficiaries. Such approaches allow donors to understand and visualise the impact of their gift, whilst simultaneously overcoming issues associated with the cause being labelled as unworthy or unpopular.

Illustrating the cause: Choosing the right images to illustrate a cause in print, online and broadcast media, is essential to supporting the chosen framing of a cause. Imagery should focus on fostering empathy and connection. However, there are several moral sensitivities to consider when considering illustrations used to frame a cause, and charities should take care not to reinforce negative stereotypes which can be counterproductive to long-term change.

Empowering supporters: Successful fundraising charities make the most of all available resources including employees, volunteers, beneficiaries, donors and celebrity supporters who can use their networks and influence to reach and empower people who are unaware of the need and may be motivated to donate. Empowering the people at the heart of a cause - beneficiaries, former beneficiaries, their parents and loved ones, as well as volunteers and staff - to ask their social networks to support the cause, is an efficient and effective way to secure donations (Yörük, 2012). Donors are known to respond positively to the person who is doing the asking, as well as to the cause they are asking on behalf of. This phenomena, known as 'relational altruism', or the 'champion effect', underlines the importance of supporting volunteer fundraisers who can efficiently and effectively reach large numbers of potential donors (Scharf and Smith, 2016; Chapman, Masser and Louis, 2018)

Making good use of celebrities is another way of extending reach and influence, as some donors look to well-known supporters as a shorthand method for assessing a charity's calibre (Breeze, 2013). Engaging such individuals can be difficult for smaller charities with fewer resources, but cheerleaders do not need to be famous as social media enables anyone who is connected to other people to promote the work of a charity.

Raising cause profile: Opportunities to raise a charity's profile can be created through calculated marketing efforts, or they can be opportunistic. Accepting that the visibility of a cause is largely influenced by wider social factors means that a charity needs to remain vigilant for opportunities to discuss and promote the work of their organisation at all

opportunities. Many charities lack the funds, resources and networks to launch significant media campaigns, and their supporters and leadership may not endorse significant spending on non-frontline activities. Social media has helped redistribute some of this power, meaning some charities have launched successful donor education and fundraising campaigns. However it is often beneficial for charities to work together to raise the profile of specific causes and use their combined resources and networks to secure sufficient media support for the effort to be fruitful.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the topic of fundraising across different causes by focusing on the question of how donors choose causes, and the implications of this for charities' marketing and fundraising activities. We argue that good fundraising at an organisational level is primarily concerned with internal investment in, and advocacy of, fundraising. Investment in fundraising is not tied to success or otherwise in generating other types of income - the search for philanthropic support is viewed as a valid task that is owned and supported by the whole organisation and is not at risk of internal crowding out. Good practice at the donor level in the charity - donor relationship is exemplified by successfully arousing sympathy and minimising perceptions of culpability amongst the beneficiary group. Charities that invest in the 'ask' and frame their cause effectively position themselves more favourably with donors. Empowering cheerleaders and advocates can further enhance this relationship. And finally, at the societal level, successful fundraising depends to some extent on successfully influencing media coverage of the beneficiary group as well as the work of the organisations working in that area. We note that the rise of social media is helping to redistribute some power into the hands of charities and their supporters, but they do remain reliant on favourable depiction of their work in the main news outlets.

In summary, we conclude that the UK is a generous country, but this generosity is not evenly distributed or allocated according to objective criteria of 'worthiness', so all charitable organisations need to work hard to attract voluntary support. The landscape of charitable activity is increasingly filled with well-framed, emotive causes competing for donors' support. Whilst we know that an individual's decision to donate is hugely influenced by subjective experience and personal taste, we also know that they are unlikely to seek out charitable causes beyond their normal frame of reference or experiences. This means

charities, especially those that perceive themselves to be unpopular and/or working in cause areas beyond typical donors' experiences, must create an organisational culture of philanthropy, consider carefully how they frame their cause and its beneficiaries and be pro-active in drawing attention to their work. As such we recognise that they sometimes need to work harder to ensure they make their cause as visible and compelling as possible for donors. However, this is not an impossible task as demonstrated by the examples given above. Whilst we recognise that some causes are undoubtedly a tougher 'ask' than others', none should pre-emptively write themselves off as 'unpopular' and therefore unlikely to attract private support.

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