



THE COST OF CHARITY OF THE YEAR PARTNERSHIPS

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IT'S TIME FOR CORPORATES TO DO BETTER.

Charity of the year partnerships have the power to change lives. When designed well, they create lasting impact, drive innovation, and strengthen communities. But, all too often, the process of securing these partnerships comes at a significant and rarely acknowledged cost to charities.

Charities invest days, weeks, and even months into competitive applications, often with little clarity, shifting goalposts, and minimal feedback. The financial and emotional toll of these processes is immense. Evidence suggests fundraisers are diverting time from other income-generating activities, experiencing stress, burnout, and even leaving the sector entirely. And yet, time and again, we see processes that lack transparency, respect for charity resources, and a clear pathway to success.

This report, researched in 2025, explores the true cost of corporate partnerships, not just in financial terms, but in the impact on fundraisers, teams, and organisations.

This is not about calling out individual organisations, this is about calling for change. If we want corporate partnerships to work, they need to be transparent, fair, and designed with respect for charity resources.

It's time to do better.

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READING THIS REPORT!**

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CASE STUDY: PREMIERSHIP RUGBY 2025

Premiership Rugby's 2025 [tender process](#) for their first official charity partnership provides a valuable case study on the challenges of corporate fundraising applications. While the opportunity has the potential to be transformative for the selected charity, the application process highlighted many of the recurring issues charities face in securing corporate support.

THE INVESTMENT

- 112 charities are known to have applied for the partnership.
- 31 charities responded to an open request for feedback on the application process.
- On average, each organisation had 3.55 people working on the application.
- The most common job roles involved included fundraising managers, senior managers, heads of teams, directors, and external consultants.
- The average time spent on the application was 9.63 days, with some charities investing up to 30 days.
- 83.3% of charities reported diverting time from other fundraising priorities to focus on this application.

THE COST

Based on an average £38,000 salary for a corporate fundraiser, the charities that were not invited to pitch collectively spent circa £157,000 on this process. A more realistic estimate, factoring in directors, CEOs and external consultants, suggests the total cost to the charity sector was in excess of £250,000.

THE IMPACT ON FUNDRAISERS

Charity professionals described the application process as draining, frustrating, and demoralising with concerns raised about fairness and transparency. Many fundraisers felt that selection criteria was unclear, priorities shifted mid-process and rejection feedback was vague, unhelpful and seemingly copy and pasted between similar charities.

2026 UPDATE

Mental Health UK were announced as the league's first official charity partner in this [press release](#). The page encourages fans to donate. So far just £234 has been raised on the [public profile](#).

Premiership Rugby were invited to comment on this report but did not provide a response.

I ACTUALLY LOSE SLEEP OVER THESE APPLICATIONS, THERE IS SO MUCH PRESSURE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP TO APPLY, AND THE EXPECTATION THAT WE'RE ALWAYS THE PERFECT FIT.

IT IS DEMORALISING (ESPECIALLY WHEN WE ARE SUCH A SMALL TEAM WITH LIMITED RESOURCES). IT FEELS LIKE THERE WAS NEVER A CHANCE OF US SECURING THE PARTNERSHIP.

A lack of clarity around funding and expectations was another key issue raised in the survey of participants. Applicants reported that there was no indication of the financial return or level of fundraising commitment expected from the selected charity. One charity, upon requesting further details, was informed that Premiership Rugby had not considered budgeting for staff time, which raised concerns about whether charities were being asked to deliver a partnership without adequate support.

The lack of structure in the selection process left charities uncertain about how applications were assessed. Rejected charities received a decision within 24 hours of the deadline, raising concerns over whether reviews were thorough or pre-determined. Applicants noted the absence of a clear scoring system, making it unclear what was prioritised. One respondent said, "It felt like a box-ticking exercise rather than a true partnership selection." The lack of transparency led to doubts about the fairness of the process.

THIS MATTERS.

The Premiership Rugby case study is **not** an isolated incident, it reflects a systemic issue across corporate partnerships. Time and time again, charities are expected to invest significant time, money, and staff resources into application processes that offer little transparency, shifting expectations, and minimal feedback.

The result? Frustration, wasted effort, and fundraisers burning out in pursuit of opportunities that may never have been viable in the first place. Not to mention the financial impact, and wasted resource.

This isn't just about inefficiency. It is about respecting the resources of the charity sector.

Every hour spent on a poorly designed application is an hour not spent delivering services, supporting beneficiaries, or securing more viable funding. When corporate partners fail to design fair and transparent selection processes, charities pay the price.

If we want corporate-charity partnerships to truly create impact, they must be built on mutual respect, transparency, and strategic alignment. It's time for both sides to do better.



PRACTICAL STEPS FOR CHARITIES: MAKING SMARTER DECISIONS ON CHARITY OF THE YEAR OPPORTUNITIES

Charity of the Year (COTY) partnerships can bring incredible opportunities for charities, but only when they are built on genuine alignment, mutual benefit, and a fair application process. Before committing valuable time and resources to an application, charities should consider the following steps to improve decision-making and focus on the right opportunities:

1. BE CLEAR ON HOW YOU MEET (OR DON'T MEET) THE CRITERIA

Don't reshape your charity to fit a brief that isn't a natural match.

Do clearly articulate how your cause aligns with the company's priorities.

Many businesses look for causes that resonate with their staff and customers. If your charity doesn't fully meet the criteria, this opportunity isn't for you - no matter how much you believe you're aligned and can add value. Too often charities are trying to force their cause into a brief - we need to be honest with ourselves to save valuable time and money.

2. CONSIDER THE MATCH BEYOND THE MONEY

Look beyond financial support and assess whether the company is the right cultural and strategic fit for your organisation.

Ask yourself:

- Do the company's values align with our mission?
- Will their employees actively engage with our cause?
- Does their customer base connect with our beneficiaries?

If the answers aren't clear, your time may be better invested in other fundraising opportunities.

3. RESEARCH THE COMPANY'S PARTNERSHIP HISTORY

Look into the company's previous COTY selections.

Do they tend to support a particular type of cause? How much have past partners actually raised? Ensure you're looking at £££ numbers unless the pro-bono opportunities presented are truly valuable.

Is there evidence of long-term support beyond the year?

Understanding the company's track record will help you determine whether your charity has a realistic chance of success. If past partnerships haven't delivered meaningful impact, you may want to reconsider your investment of time and resources.

4. ASSESS THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

Before committing, weigh the potential value of the partnership against the effort required and staff time invested, not just in applying but in delivering the partnership if you win.

If the partnership could significantly advance your charity's mission, and you fully meet the criteria, it may be worth the investment. If the application is highly demanding but the expected return is vague, reconsider whether this is the best use of time and resources.

5. CHALLENGE THE PROCESS WHERE NEEDED

If the criteria is unclear, ask questions (or email me - becky@beckyfrancisfundraising.co.uk).

A transparent and fair selection process is essential. If a company isn't upfront about their expectations, or if you're unsure what they're truly looking for, don't be afraid to seek clarification before applying.

Red Flag: If the company is vague, inconsistent, or unwilling to provide clear answers, this may indicate deeper issues with the partnership. A good Charity of the Year programme should be open and clear from the start.

6. KNOW WHEN TO WALK AWAY

Not every opportunity is worth chasing.

If the process lacks transparency, expectations seem unrealistic, or the company doesn't seem genuinely invested, be confident in walking away.

Focus on partnerships that:

- Respect your time and effort
- Align with your charity's mission and values
- Create real impact beyond just a title

Saying no to the wrong opportunities allows you to focus on those that truly support your charity's goals.

By taking a strategic, thoughtful approach, charities can avoid wasted effort and focus on securing partnerships that are truly meaningful, sustainable, and beneficial.

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT ON FUNDRAISERS OF CHARITY OF THE YEAR

The impact of corporate fundraising extends far beyond securing financial support, it deeply affects the morale, wellbeing, and retention of fundraisers. For many, rejection feels personal, especially after investing extensive time, effort, and emotional energy into applications.

Corporate fundraisers often experience self-doubt, stress, and burnout when bids are unsuccessful. Many describe rejections as “soul-destroying,” particularly when they believe their charity was a strong fit for the opportunity. Without clear feedback, fundraisers are left wondering whether the issue was their approach, the organisation's profile, or an external factor beyond their control. The result is often frustration, exhaustion, and in some cases, professionals leaving the sector entirely.

The role of leadership in supporting fundraisers

Senior leaders play a critical role in ensuring their teams feel valued, supported, and resilient in the face of corporate fundraising challenges.

HERE'S HOW YOU CAN HELP:

Leaders should recognise that rejections are not just professional setbacks but can take a personal toll. Creating a safe space for fundraisers to express their frustrations and process disappointments can help prevent burnout.

Encourage strategic applications. Rather than chasing every corporate opportunity, senior leaders should work with fundraisers to prioritise the best-fit partnerships. Ensuring clear internal criteria for applications can help reduce wasted effort and improve morale. Moving away from charity of the year can be the first step in this process.

When a bid is unsuccessful, take time to review what worked, what didn't, and what can be improved. Ensure you are implementing a thorough 360 degree evaluation process. Utilise this evaluation to inform strategic decision making moving forward. Rather than seeing it as a failure, frame it as a learning opportunity that informs future strategy.

Leaders should push for corporate partners to provide clearer criteria, honest feedback, and structured selection processes to reduce uncertainty and frustration for fundraisers. Empower and equip your teams with the confidence to feedback constructively.

Investing in training, mentoring, and networking opportunities can help fundraisers build confidence and resilience in handling corporate partnerships.

A healthy fundraising culture is organisation wide. Setting realistic expectations and celebrating fundraisers' efforts, not just their wins, can help maintain motivation. Recognising that securing partnerships is a long-term effort, rather than a numbers game, is key. Create KPIs that focus on quality over quantity. By creating a supportive environment where fundraisers feel empowered, understood, and valued, leaders can help prevent burnout, boost retention, and build a stronger, more resilient fundraising team.

**8 OUT OF 10
FUNDRAISERS SAID
REJECTION NEGATIVELY
IMPACTS THEIR MENTAL
HEALTH.**

**92%
OF FUNDRAISERS HAVE FELT
PRESSURED TO APPLY FOR A
CHARITY OF THE YEAR BY
SENIOR LEADERSHIP OR
TRUSTEES.**

UNLOCKING THE **NEXT** **CHAPTER** OF FUNDRAISING.



Becky Francis is an award winning corporate fundraising consultant and the founder of Next Chapter Fundraising.

A straight talking strategist and relationship builder, Becky specialises in designing smart, creative corporate partnership strategies that deliver sustainable income and real organisational impact. With a strong track record of helping charities punch above their weight, she brings clarity, pace, and commercial insight to income generation, supporting organisations to unlock new opportunities, rethink their approach to corporate fundraising, and move confidently into their next chapter.

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