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2025 Trusts and Foundations Insights Survey

A Report on the Key Findings

From a survey conducted to determine key insights relating to application success rates and broader trends in the Trusts and Foundations sector. Results are reflective of a 12 month period through to December 2024.

Executive Summary

In November and December 2024, Konna Beeson, Senior Fundraising Consultant at Gifted, conducted a Trusts and Foundations Insights Survey, to explore factors relating to application success rates, current trends and challenges.

The survey was shared with Trusts and Foundations fundraisers working with a wide range of charities across the Third Sector. The results shared in this report represent the responses of 155 participants from organisations associated with 25 different charitable causes, namely:

- Health and Wellbeing (22.56%)
- Disability (16.54%)
- Education/Training/Employment (14.29%)
- Arts and Culture (9.02%)
- Heritage (4.51%)
- Overseas (4.51%)
- Other types of causes (28.57%)

In terms of each charity's size, the survey attracted participation from those with very small annual incomes, right through to organisations reporting revenues of over £100m. The overall breakdown of charities represented was:

- Up to £1m (45%)
- £1m-£5m (32%)
- £5m-£20m (15%)
- £20m+ (8%)

The headline findings

This report provides an interesting snapshot of the Trusts and Foundations fundraising landscape as it stands. Whilst 80% of participants worked with charities that had an established Trusts programme (3 years or more), supported by regular staffing, other respondents were only just beginning their Trusts journey. Here the expectations around success are necessarily different. A fundraiser starting up a Trusts programme from scratch, would need to spend more time on researching a first pipeline and setting up internal processes for information gathering, case for support writing, finance and M&E. As far as possible, we have approached these additional considerations as potential outliers and accounted for them when compiling the results.

In summary, the data gathered points to the following headline findings:

- Applications to repeat funders tend to significantly increase income and success rates in comparison with those to cold or new funders. There is a clear case for investing less time on writing applications and researching new funders, the greater

your pipeline of established funders is. This should provide some quantitative insight to senior managers and board members who may be seeking to increase income simply by submitting more applications.

- There is a clear drop in success rates based on the total number of applications sent, similar to our 2023 survey results. Again, this provides quantitative insights to help maximise growth and accurate forecasting, showing how quality decreases the more quantity increases.
- By achieving the right workload balance, prioritizing quality over quantity of applications (within reason) and focusing on establishing long-term or multi-year relationships with grant-makers, fundraisers have an opportunity to reduce the impact of being in such a competitive space.
- Those funders operating grant schemes capped at £5,000 are often facing a disproportionately high volume of applications from across the sector. This increased competition for grants means fundraisers should try to mitigate the risks by planning for a much more diverse pipeline of grant sizes.
- It's possible that 2025-26 may herald less volatility in the sector, making for cautious optimism when it comes to growing Trusts and Foundations income.
- In terms of AI, there seems to be a learning gap across the fundraising sector, especially when it comes to training tools like ChatGPT to deliver better and more accurate results over time.

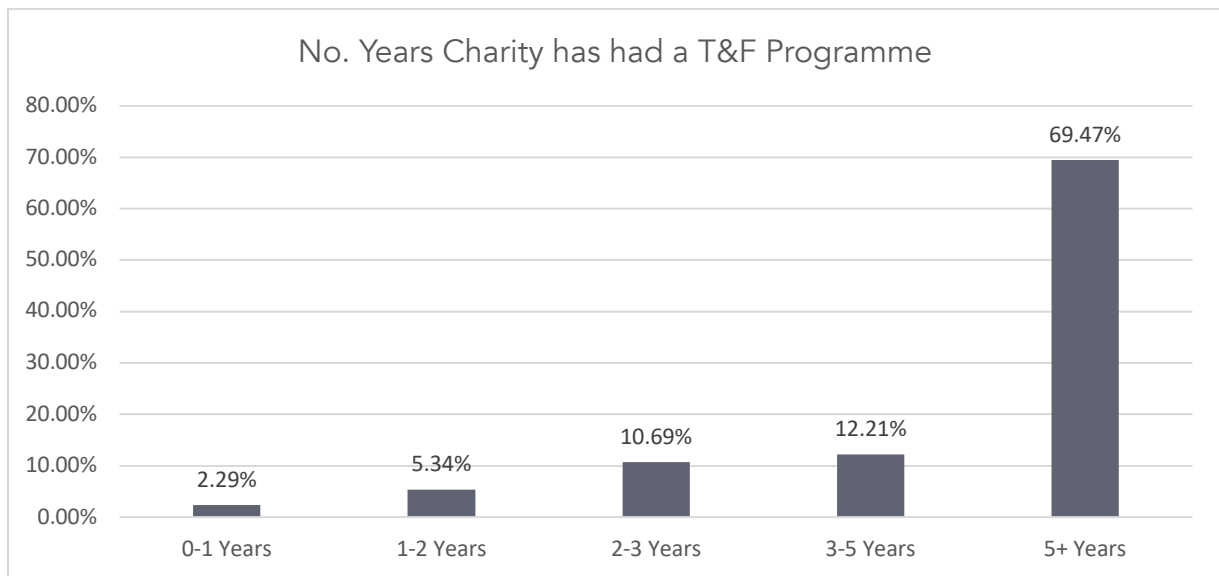
We are grateful to everyone who helped shape this year's survey and to those who gave up precious time to share their experiences. Thanks to the information and insights they provided, you may find this report offers a useful reference in terms of planning or refining your Trusts and Foundations fundraising strategy for 2025-26. Hopefully, one that helps you achieve not just greater success with applications, but improved visibility and more confident, closer relationships with grant funders.

Overall results

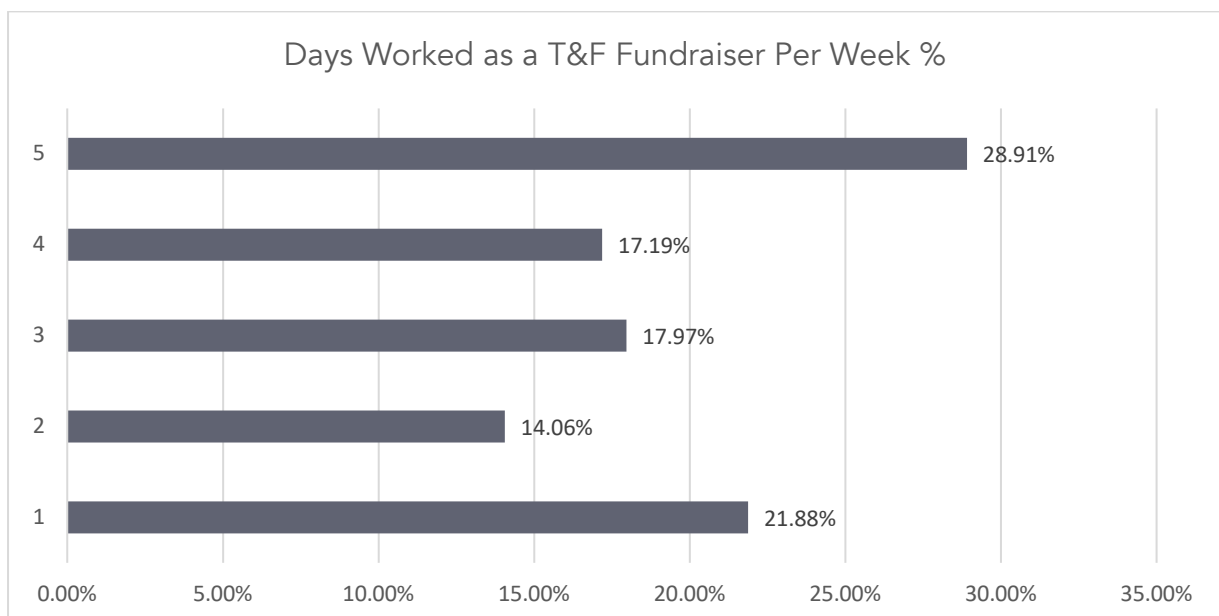
The compiled results were as follows:

1. PROFILE, INCOME GENERATED AND PERCEPTIONS

- How long has your charity had a Trusts and Foundations programme

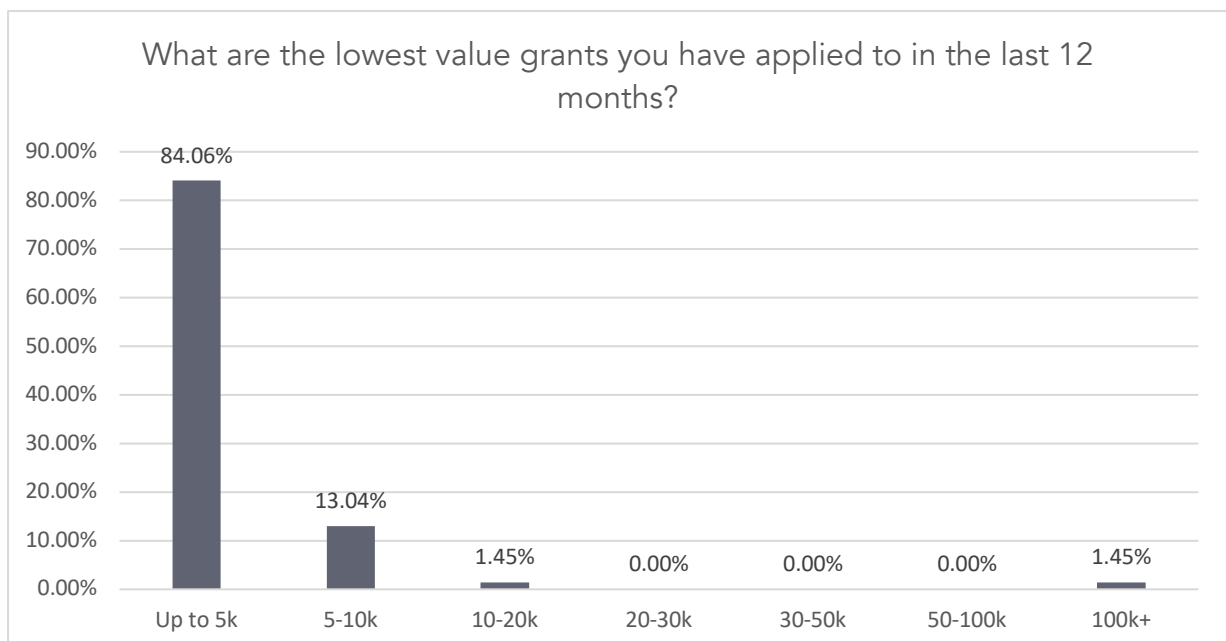


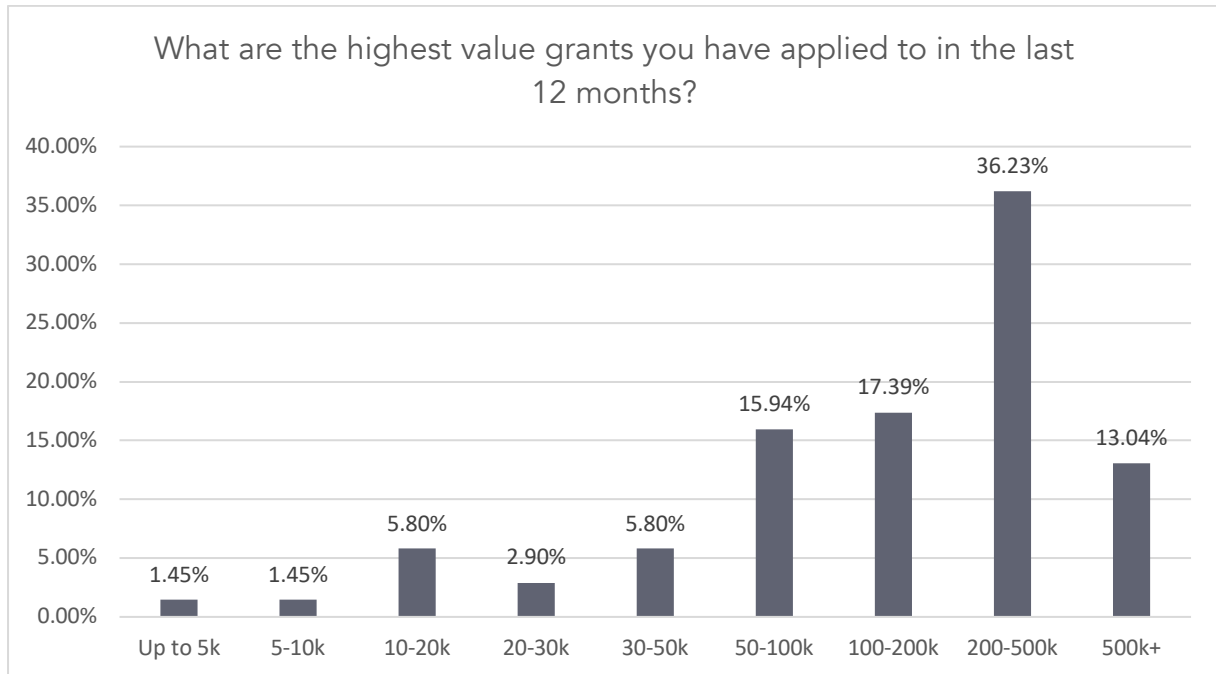
- How many days a week do you work as a Trusts fundraiser?



Reflections

- These two questions were included to account for variances in workload, and the existence of historic Trust programmes. We were keen to identify if fundraising success was clearly affected by these factors as well as providing useful insights into the number of applications sent per day on average to benchmark workload with.
 - 80% of participants worked for a charity who have had a Trusts programme in place for at least 3 years, with a relatively equal spread in terms of number of days worked per week.
 - A charity starting up a Trusts programme will face different challenges than those with a programme in place for 3 years or more. For example, there will be an expectation to spend more time on researching a first pipeline and setting up internal processes for information gathering, case for support writing, finance and M&E. **The reflections in this brief report approach these considerations as possible outliers and account for them in the findings.**
- What are the lowest and highest value grants you have applied for in the last 12 months?

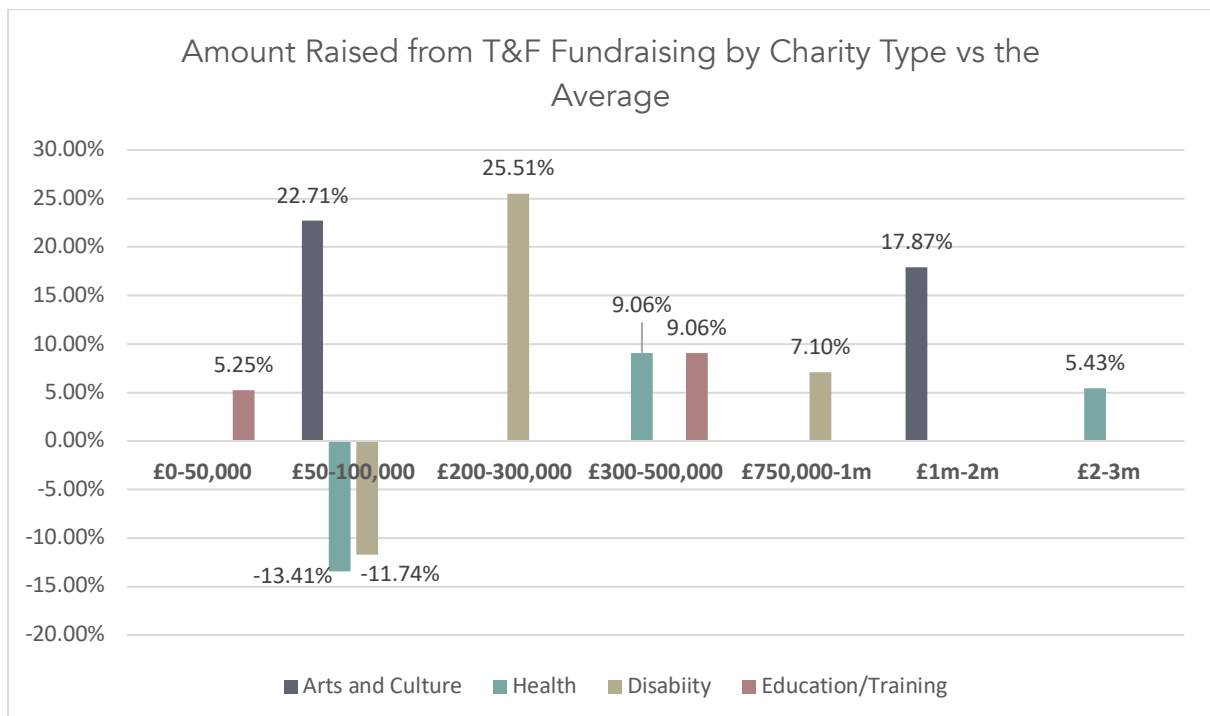
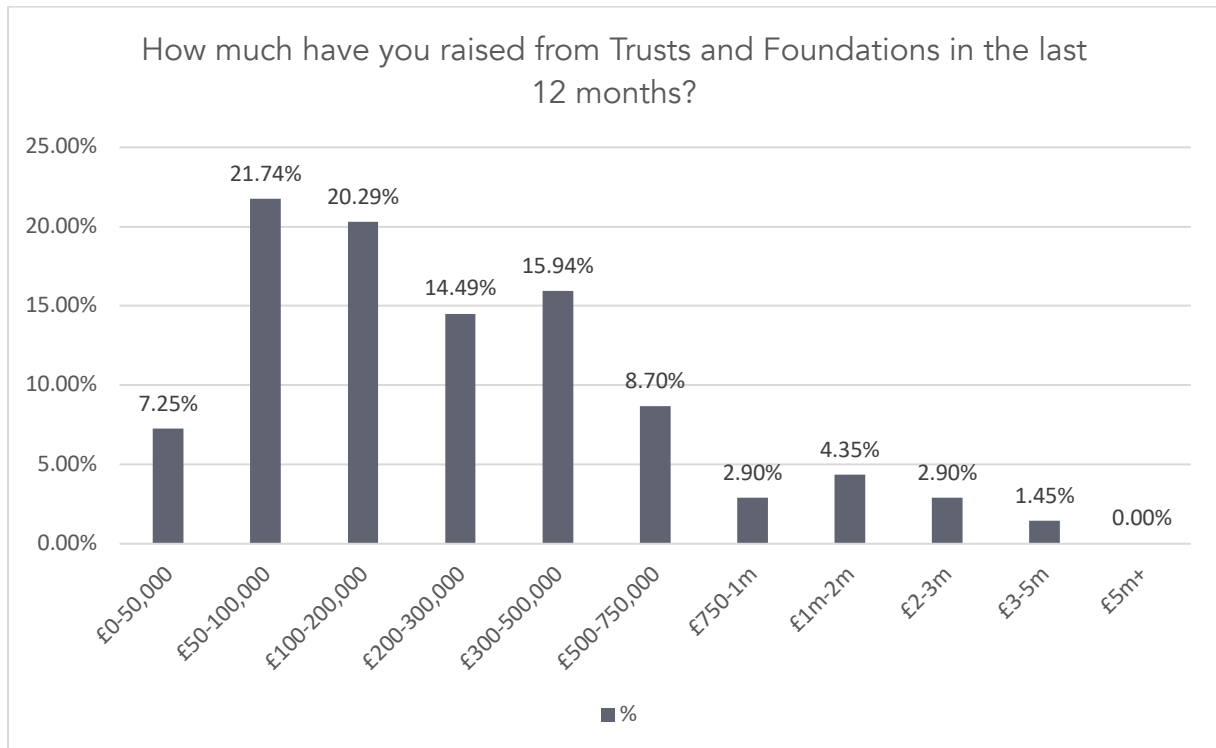




Reflections

- To give us a clearer picture of where competition for funding lies, we asked fundraisers for the lowest and highest value grant sizes they applied for in the last 12 months. The results were clear – 97% of fundraisers had applied for grants up to £10,000 as their lowest value. 84% of this was up to the level of £5,000. **Given that this survey represented charities from every size and type, it's clear that funders with grant schemes capped at £5,000 are facing a disproportionately high volume of applications from across the sector.**
- Conversely, the highest value grants applied for had more variety, with 36% of respondents stating they had most often applied for grants between £200k-£500k, 17% applied for £100k-£200k, 15% for £50k-100k, and 13% had submitted applications for £500k+. This large range of £50k-£500k represents 82% of fundraisers highest grant applications. **The question here, is whether Trust fundraisers should plan for a more diverse pipeline of grant sizes to mitigate increasing competitiveness within the sector.**

- How much have you raised from Trusts and Foundations in the last 12 months?

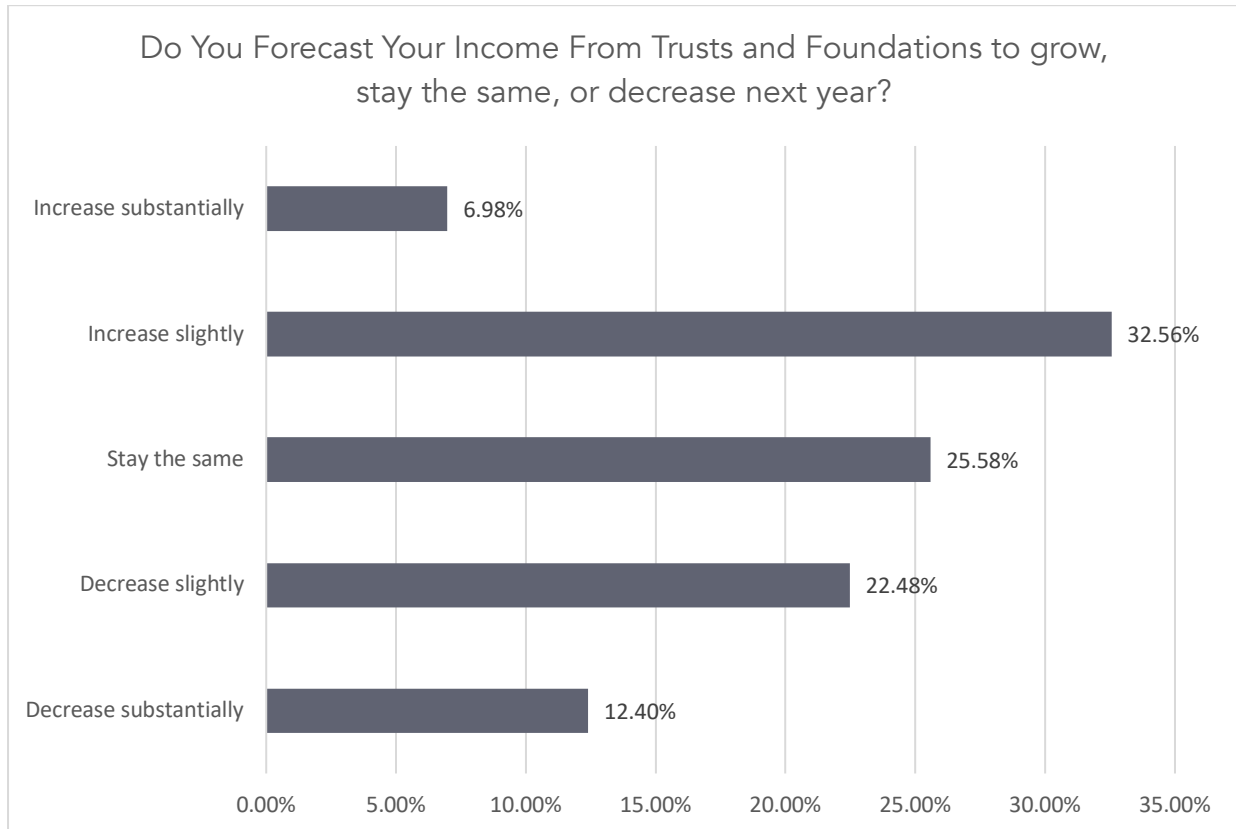


Reflections

- The most common ranges raised were between £50,000-£200,000 (42%), and £200,000 - £300,000 (30%). 20% of fundraisers raised more than £500,000 in the last 12 months up to £5m, and only 7.25% raised under £50,000. **This provides an interesting benchmark for 'most' Trusts fundraisers, with natural variances being on the extreme ends of very small or very large charities as the main variable.**
 - There was quite a large range for total income raised. This was partly linked to total charity size as you would expect but was more significantly associated with cause type.
 - By looking again at the table of the 4 most common charity types and their income raised vs the average, you can see some clear differences. Namely, Arts and Culture secured significantly more income at the £50k-£100k level (+22.71%), and at the £1m-£2m level (+17.87%). Disability secured 25.51% more at the £200k-£300k range vs the average. and Education/Training secured 12.86% more at the £300k-£750k than the average. Interestingly, Health charities secured more at the higher levels of £300-500k (+9%) and £2-3m (+5%) but 13% less at the lower range of £50,000 - £100,000, representing the still dominant focus of many funders in the health space.
- **What causes do you think funders are focusing on most?**
 - Cost of living, poverty, and basic needs
 - Health and mental health
 - Children and young people
 - Equality, diversity & inclusion (ED&I) and marginalized groups
 - Environment and climate
 - Local, community-led, or grassroots projects
 - Systemic / policy change vs. direct service tensions
 - Support for "most in need" and smaller charities

2. TRENDS/INSIGHTS

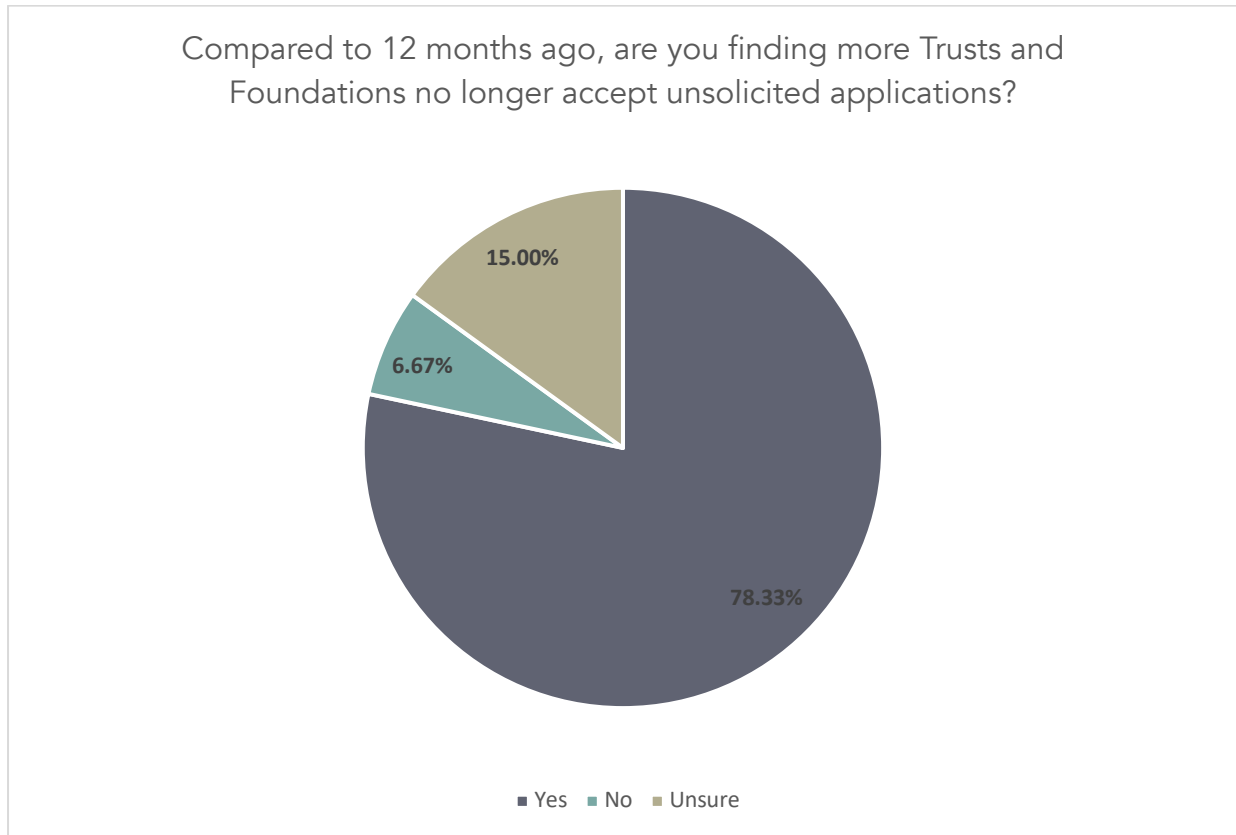
- Do you forecast your income from Trusts and Foundations to grow, stay the same, or decrease next year?



Reflections

- Interestingly, despite the doom and gloom of high competition, most fundraisers (58%) expected their income to either grow, or stay the same in 2025. In fact, slightly more fundraisers expected their income to grow (39.53%) than decrease (34.88%).
- However, there were also more fundraisers who expected a substantial decrease (12.4%) as opposed to a substantial increase (6.98%). **If we were to take this an accurate representation of where the sector is going in 2025-26, we could expect there to be less volatility and grounds for more cautious optimism ahead.**

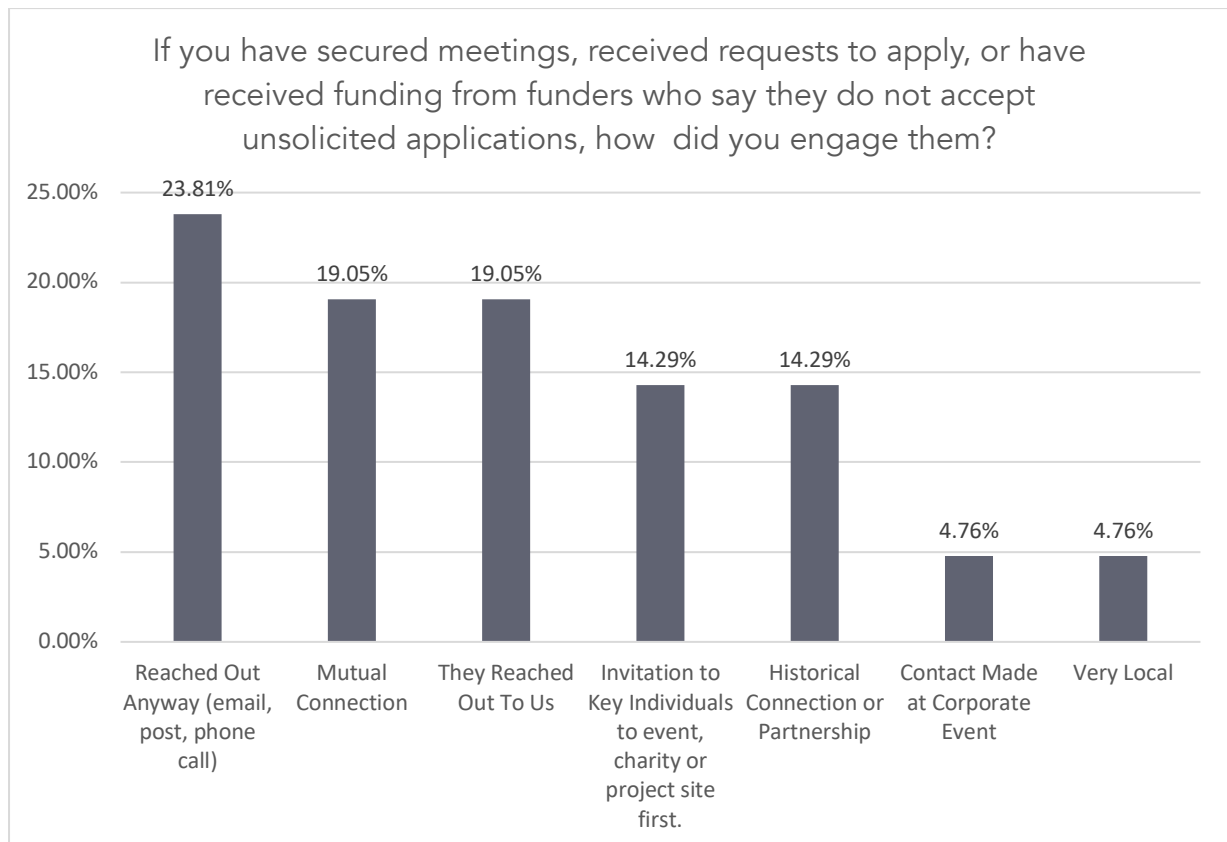
- Compared to 12 months ago, are you finding more Trusts and Foundations no longer accept unsolicited applications?



Reflections

- 78% of fundraisers believed more funders are no longer accepting unsolicited applications. To make this insight more helpful, we then asked the fundraisers who had secured income from 'no unsolicited request' funders, how they fared.

- If you have secured meetings, received requests to apply, or have received funding from funders who say they do not accept unsolicited applications, how did you engage them?



Reflections

- Here, we can see the importance of connections and networking in impacting 52% of all success. 19% found funders reached out to them directly which also emphasises the need for charities to be visible to funders, whether online or in person at events such as conferences. This is especially important as funders will continue to seek new ways to reduce the time it takes them to find and process applications.

3. SUCCESS RATES

We looked at total success rates, as well as for cold/new funders and repeat funders, and then broke this down further by the number of applications sent, as well as other variables.

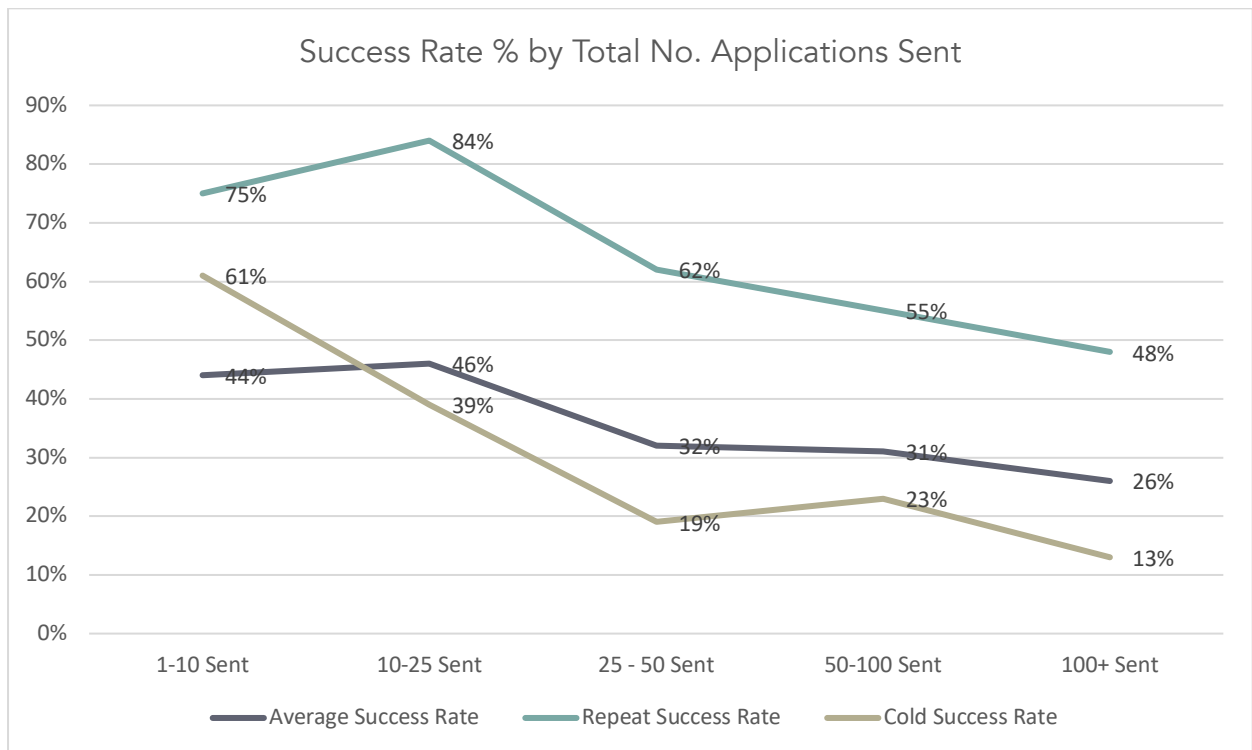
New vs Repeat Funders Breakdown (Averages)				
Funder Type	No. Sent	% of Pipeline	Success Rate	Amount Raised
New/Cold	33	68%	24.50%	120000
Repeat	15	32%	63.39%	207000

Reflections

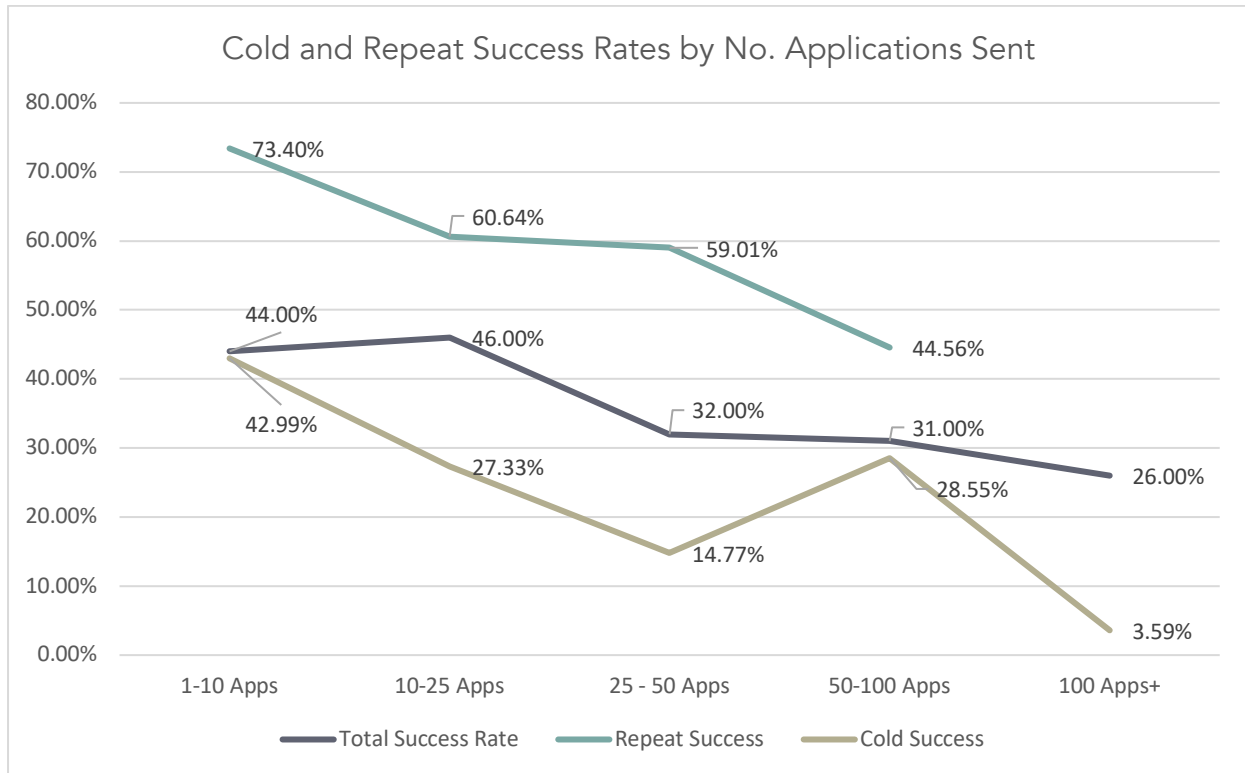
- The **total average success rate was 35.59%**, with the average value of pipelines at just over £1m with a range of £5000 to £7m. The average total number of applications sent was 52, for repeat applications this was 15 and for cold/new it was 33.
- While it's worth noting there may be a slight bias towards more 'successful' fundraisers taking part in the survey, we discovered that the vast differences in success rates from variables such as whether they were cold or repeat applications, means that this total average success rate of 35.59% should not be used as a benchmark by itself.
- First, there is a clear difference between cold and repeat funders for success rates (24.5% vs 63.39%) as well as income raised (£120k vs £207k). This represents warm/repeat applications having a 2.58x greater success rate vs cold, and 1.72x greater income vs cold applications, despite cold applications representing 68% of pipelines.
- Additionally, a very high correlation of 0.9 for repeat applications sent vs how many were successful provides high reliability when forecasting income from warm sources. This was not the case with cold applications, indicating the higher volatility and competition in this approach. It also points to the increased likelihood of applying to a fund which is not fully eligible or applicable. The Barratt Foundation recently cited that 45% of applicants to a £300k grant fund were not eligible and have amended their programme as a result. This is less likely to do with 'poor fundraising' and more likely to be a result of pressure to continue to grow income and apply to more funders, in a more competitive market since the pre-covid years. This raises an important topic for discussion which is not often talked about – the extent to which we as fundraisers are contributing to the high competition and burden on funders by not restricting our pipelines to funders who are fully eligible and most relevant.
- Secondly, we broke this down by the most common charity types who took part which highlighted some significant differences. Heritage causes had a

50% average success rate with the lowest number of applications sent (6.6). Disability had the highest repeat funder success rate of 75%. However, they also had the lowest cold success rate coupled with the highest numbers of applications sent. Arts and Culture had the highest cold funder success rate of 34%.

- In line with our research in 2023, we also observed success rates broken down by the number of applications sent. Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, we again found a clear drop-off in success rates, and income raised, after approximately 30 applications sent per year. The importance of this is that it enables fundraisers, senior management, and board members, to quantify success vs time spent with a higher degree of accuracy.
- The graph below represents success rates vs the total average no. applications sent.



- Additionally, the graph below represents success rates vs the no. applications sent of that type i.e. repeat applications sent, not the grand average of all types of applications.



- It is important to mention that the number of fundraisers who sent more than 65 applications was very small, and therefore this surprise jump in success rate appeared to be largely attributable to variability rather than a clear trend to benchmark. What is clear to observe, is that overall, the more applications sent, the lower the success rate. This was the same regardless of the application value, total charity size and indeed every other variable measured.
- It is up to the individual and charity to decide what the 'optimal' range is, and we recommend this to have a measured approach taken to it based on the data available. For example, the type of cause you are by comparing to success rate differences shown above per cause, or the pipeline potential you have. Fundraisers with a cause or project which has a lot more potential and eligible funders for it will have a naturally easier time in restricting a pipeline to improve the quality and therefore success of applications, compared to a charity with a limited pool of potential funders.

- We also looked further for any other variables affecting success rates between causes and found one stand-out finding. For charities between £300k-£1m in size specifically, spending 20-30% of time on research resulted in a 44% success rate and £105k income from cold funders vs a 20% success rate and £55k income for those spending less than 20% of time on research, or too much. Of course, the time spent on research is not possible to measure wholly accurately but given the higher sample size and the stark differences in these variables, we feel confident that this insight can be used reliably.
- **Clearly, the Trust sector is more competitive and unpredictable than it has been in many years. Only by getting the right workload balance, prioritizing quality over quantity (within reason as referenced above) and focusing on establishing long-term/multi-year relationships with funders where possible, will fundraisers have the power to mitigate the effects of this.**

4. ACTIVITY

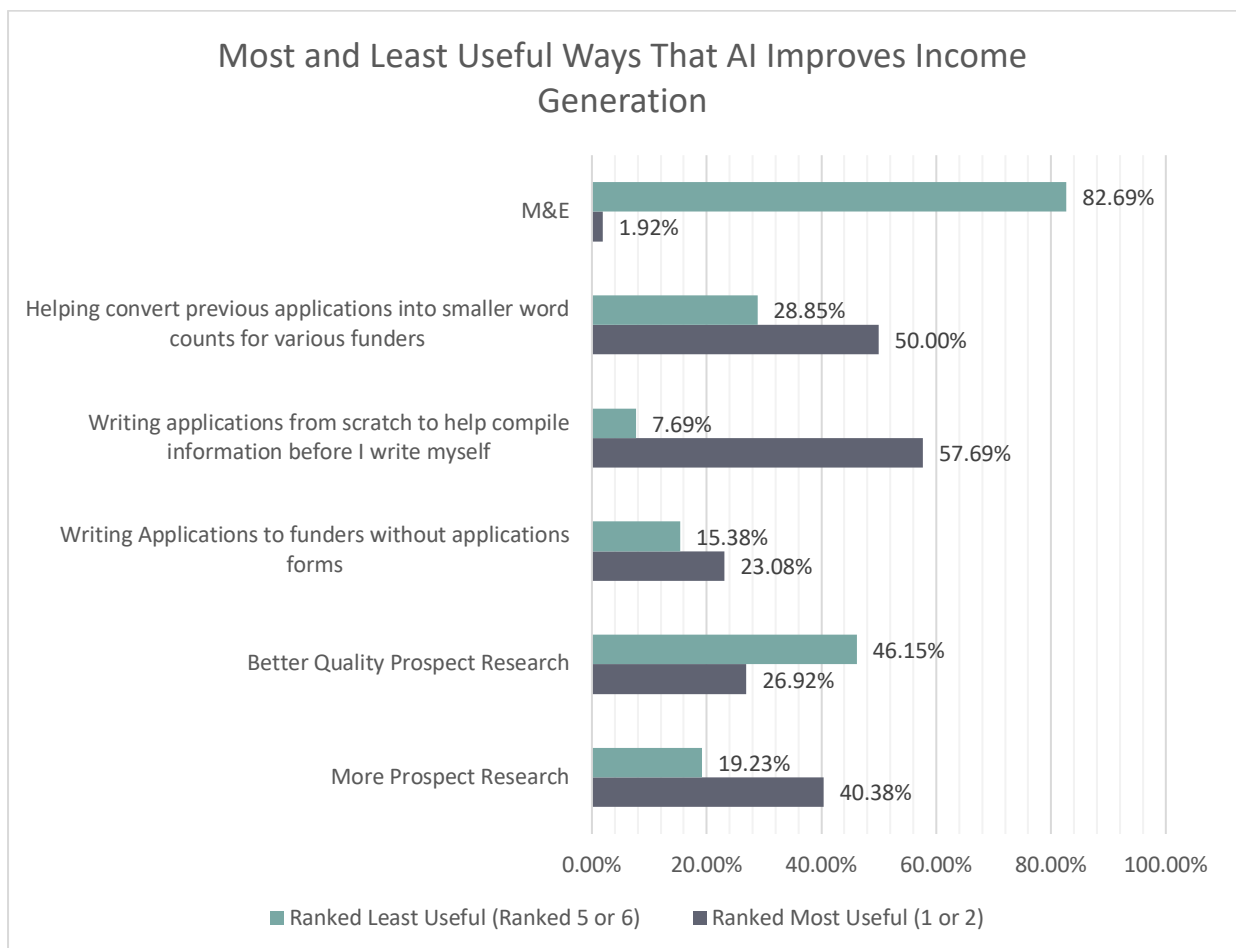
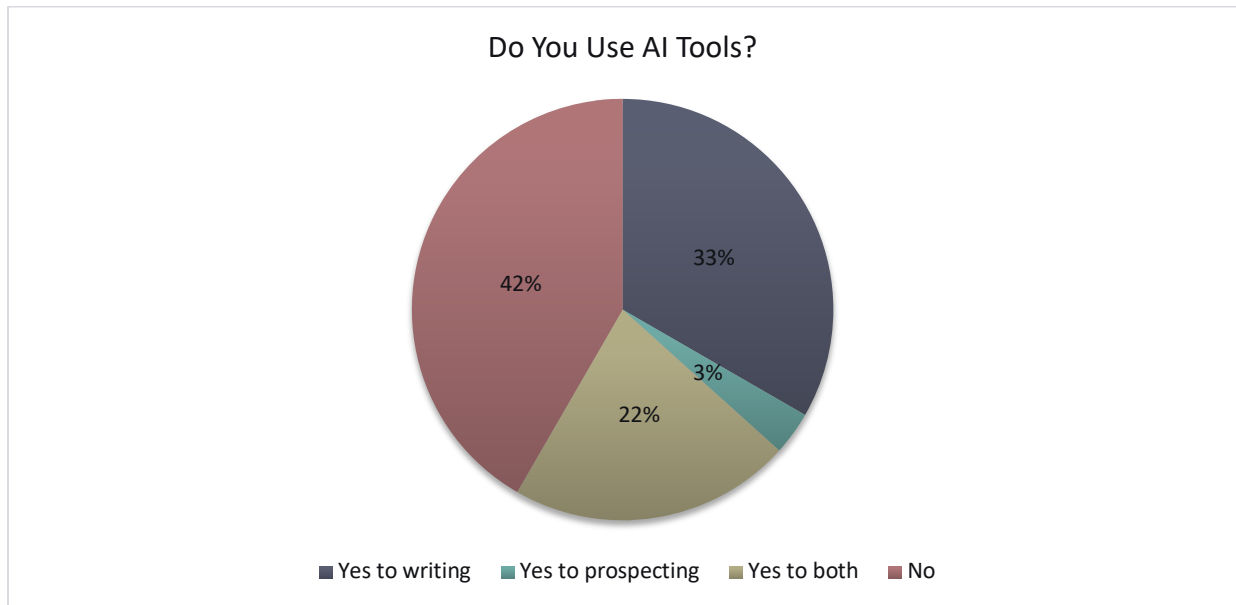
- How much time was spent on key activities?



Reflections

- There was no significant change in the amount of time spent on each activity vs the previous year. Interestingly, a moderate correlation (0.56) between time spent on admin vs the success and income raised from repeat applications was found.
- Conversely, the income raised from repeat funders was negatively correlated with total time spent on research and writing (-0.3 avg). Perhaps unsurprising, this provides evidence relating to the needs of funders and the requirements of retaining longer term relationships with them. Given that applications to repeat funders have significantly increased income and success rates vs cold/new, we provide here a case for investing less time on writing applications and researching new funders, the greater your pipeline of established funders is. **This should provide some quantitative insight to senior managers and board members who may seek to increase income simply through submitting more applications.**

• Do you use any AI tools and how do you rate its impact?

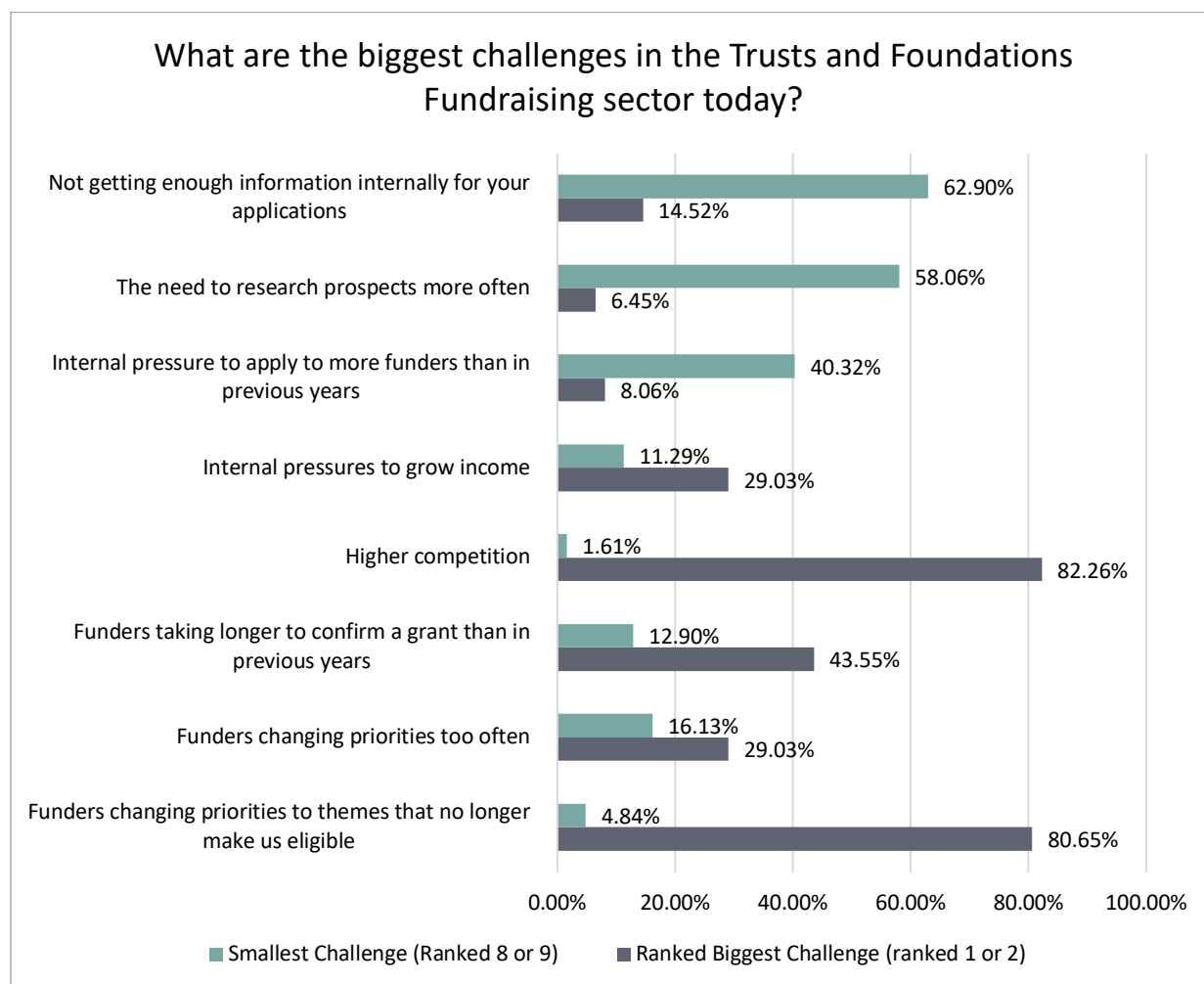


Reflections

- Surprisingly, almost half of the fundraisers surveyed are not currently using AI tools for their work, with only 21% using it for both prospecting and writing.
- Further investigation broke this down by asking fundraisers to rank how useful they found 6 alternative ways of using AI which led to some clear differences.
- 57% of fundraisers said that choosing AI to help compile information was the most useful. 50% also said it was valuable for converting previous applications into smaller word counts for various funders. Given that 38% of time spent is on writing, this presents a potential opportunity to increase efficiency.
- It's also worth noting that 40% of fundraisers found AI most useful for providing *more* prospect research, but 46% found it least useful for *better quality* prospect research. Clearly, we need to tread lightly when using AI tools for prospecting, especially with tools such as ChatGPT which can sometimes provide fictional results. However, we expect this statistic to rapidly change over the coming years. New tools such as ChatGPT's Deep Research which launched February 2025, or Google Gemini's research tool of the same name, use the same processes that a skilled human researcher would use when conducting complex, lengthy research online. Whilst these advances will inevitably make it easier to use AI tools to gather quality prospect research in real-time, there is also the risk for the learning gap across the fundraising sector to widen. We expect that over the next couple of years, it will be commonplace to see training sessions and conference talks focused on how Trusts Fundraisers can best use the latest AI tools to conduct complex and quality research. We also expect this to help overcome the issue of funders changing their priorities more frequently, as accurate real-time research in rapid time will be able to spot these changes and help prevent time being wasted on no longer eligible applications.
- With major funding organisations like the National Lottery now providing guidance on the use of AI within its funding applications too, it's clear that AI is here to stay. Those who are not up skilled will likely fall behind other fundraisers.

5. CHALLENGES

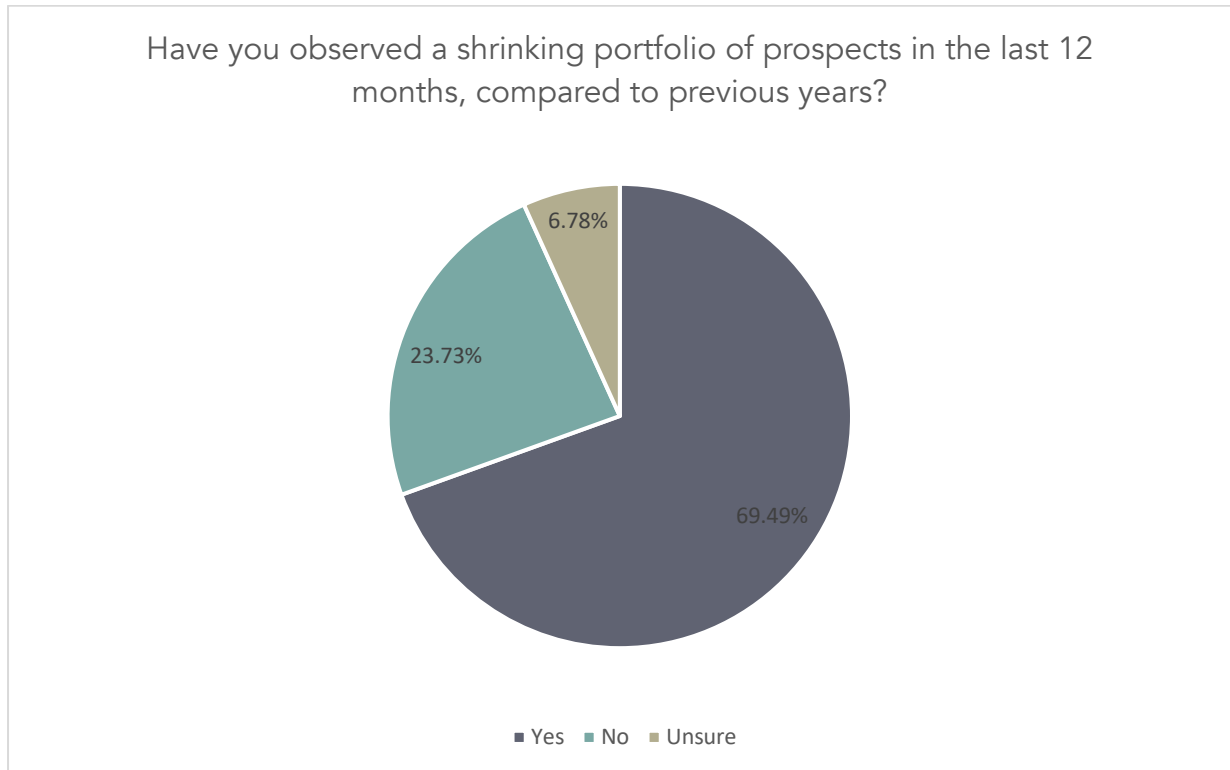
- What are the biggest challenges in the sector today?



Reflections

- Most fundraisers believe that the greatest challenges are higher competition and funders changing their priorities to themes which are no longer eligible to them. The focus here, is in having a larger pipeline which has the flexibility to shrink down to an optimal number of applications sent to maximise success rates. Returning to the problem of higher competition, this is evident in our research highlighting how almost all fundraisers are applying to grants worth up to £5,000, and in the growing trend of funders accepting unsolicited applications less.

- Have you observed a shrinking portfolio of prospects in the last 12 months, compared to previous years?



Reflections

- Most fundraisers (69.49%) have seen a shrinking prospect list compared with previous years. Whilst this is unsurprising given other insights of higher competition and less funders accepting unsolicited applications, there are clear recommendations we can take forward. That is, in refocusing efforts to build a smaller but stronger pipeline of highly relevant funders.
- Not only have we shown that this improves success rates, but it will help mitigate the issue of high competition by spending more time nurturing long-term relationships, developing those repeat funding sources, and writing higher quality applications.

- What would make the biggest difference in your ability to raise more income from Trusts and Foundations?

Reflections

We asked fundraisers for their thoughts and comments on this and compiled them thematically leading to 6 recurring themes.

1. **Clarity and Communication:** A desire for funders to be more open and transparent regarding their eligibility and funding criteria, with more feedback loops and quicker “no” responses.
2. **Flexibility in Funding:** Widespread calls for more unrestricted support, core funding, and support of broader or larger projects.
3. **Application Processes and Competition:** An emphasis on simpler, more relationship-driven methods, and frustration with high competition and long (or overlapping) closures.
4. **Organizational Capacity and Internal Readiness:** Many charities feel limited by staff capacity and organisational buy-in, including the need for better internal planning and data.
5. **Eligibility Constraints:** A concern that different income or turnover-based caps exclude either small or large organizations from certain trusts.
6. **Innovation and Future Needs:** Suggestions for new shared portals or more nuanced, forward-thinking funder strategies that address the realities charities face (e.g., climate crisis, shifting funding cycles).

Get in touch

Our work with charities across the Third Sector, whether creating robust strategies for growth or managing multi-million-pound fundraising campaigns, almost always involves a forensic analysis of the evolving Trusts and Foundations landscape. So, if you'd like a no-obligations conversation about how best to fund your next development programme or fundraising project, why not [get in touch](#).

"We appointed Gifted to help us with some strategic planning and to understand how we might better serve and communicate with our supporters. The work Gifted has completed for us has given us real clarity and confidence for the way forward - we now have a direct plan for both the short and medium-long term, with realistic and achievable goals. We are sure that the deliverable recommendations in the report Gifted produced will have a huge benefit to us as we grow the charity over the coming years"

Amy Heritage, Director of Marketing and Communications, akt, national LGBTQ+ youth homelessness charity

"We have a small team here at The London Clinic, so the support of Gifted has been invaluable to ensure we progress fundraising plans at pace. The Gifted teams experience mixed with their approachable nature ensures it's always a pleasure to work with them on achieving our ambitious goals."

Rachael Church, Former Executive Director, The London Clinic

"We always knew that our project had the capacity to transform the Lord Leycester Hospital into a compelling heritage educational and cultural centre in Warwick" says Dr Meyer. "But convincing others securing step-change funding and approaching major givers is always more tightly focused when there's a trusted partner by your side. We have appreciated Gifted's professional support timely advice and lasting friendship along the way."

Dr Heidi Meyer Master, The Lord Leycester Hospital

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