

The Resilient Fundraising Toolkit



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Introduction

Civil society organisations across Europe are operating in an **increasingly constrained funding environment**. Access to EU funding is becoming more competitive and administratively demanding, while targeted attacks on CSOs and the broader shrinking of civic space are creating additional barriers to resource mobilisation. Many organisations, including SOLIDAR and SOLIDAR+ members, remain highly dependent on a limited number of public funding sources, a vulnerability made more acute by the ongoing negotiations on the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and a shift in EU political priorities towards competitiveness, security and defence, which leave the future of funding for education, social inclusion, civic space and international cooperation increasingly uncertain.

It is in this context that SOLIDAR+ organised the **Fundraising Training Academy**, held on 26–27 May 2026 in Brussels, and brought the SOLIDAR and SOLIDAR+ Secretariat and member organisations together. The Academy was designed to strengthen members' capacity to understand the funding landscape and diversify their funding base and to build a more strategic, less reactive approach to fundraising. Ahead of the training, member organisations were asked to complete a short survey mapping their current fundraising capacity, the external and internal challenges they face, and the topics they most wanted the training to address, so that the two days could be tailored to the real starting points and needs of the network.

This toolkit is the direct output of that training. It has been developed to give SOLIDAR and SOLIDAR+ members a resource they can return to after the Academy, to revisit key concepts, apply strategies to their own organisational contexts, and take steps towards a more diversified and resilient funding base.

Objectives

The toolkit aims to:

- Help the SOLIDAR Secretariat and its members to understand the funding landscape they are operating in and the trends shaping it.
- Support the development of a strategic, multi-annual approach to fundraising.
- Provide practical guidance and tools for fundraising from private philanthropic funders, corporate partners and individual donors, including on more difficult causes.

- Strengthen the organisational capacity and infrastructure needed to sustain fundraising efforts over time.

Who is the Toolkit for?

The toolkit is intended primarily for SOLIDAR and SOLIDAR+ member organisations, particularly staff involved in fundraising, resource mobilisation or organisational development, regardless of how advanced their current fundraising practice is. It is written to be useful both to organisations just beginning to structure their fundraising and to those with more established, diversified income strategies looking to refine their approach.

How is the Toolkit structured?

The toolkit is organised into four parts:

- **Part I – Fundraising Amid Unprecedented Times** situates fundraising within the 2026 funding context: the key trends reshaping the European and global landscape, the impact of reduced funding on civil society and how organisations can begin to adapt.
- **Part II – Strategic Planning to Unlock Fundraising Success** moves from context to strategy, covering income diversification, a ten-step framework for building a multi-annual fundraising strategy and how to translate that into an annual work plan.
- **Part III – Bringing Your Strategy to Life** turns to fundraising in practice, with dedicated guidance on private philanthropic funders, corporate giving and partnerships, individual giving and fundraising for difficult causes.
- **Part IV – Additional Resources** brings together further material on organisational readiness, fundraising infrastructure, relevant networks and events and other useful resources.

How to navigate the Toolkit

The toolkit is designed to be used alongside a companion **PowerPoint presentation**: each page references the specific slides that expand on that topic, so the two resources can be used together. A separate set of **practical exercises** is also provided, allowing organisations to apply what is covered in each section directly to their own context.

Each section also includes a table of **linked external resources** to complement the toolkit, ranging from articles and reports to practical materials such as guides, templates and other useful tools.

Where should I start?

You do not need to read this toolkit from beginning to end. You can use it according to your organisation's needs, fundraising experience and priorities.

- **If you are new to funding diversification:** Start with Part I to understand the current funding challenges and opportunities, then continue to Part II to explore how to develop a fundraising strategy.
- **If your organisation wants to review its fundraising strategy:** Go to Part II for guidance on assessing funding dependencies, diversifying income and developing a fundraising plan.
- **If you are looking for alternative funding sources:** Explore Part III for practical guidance on approaching private foundations, corporate partners and individual donors.
- **If you need additional tools or support:** Consult Part IV for resources on organisational capacity, fundraising systems, networks and further learning.

Each section includes references to the relevant Training Academy presentation slides and links to additional resources. Practical exercises are also available separately to help you apply the learning to your organisation.

A suggested approach: Begin by reviewing your organisation's current funding sources and dependencies. Then identify one or two funding opportunities you would like to explore and use the practical tools to plan your next steps.

PART I. Fundraising Amid Unprecedented Times

Understanding the 2026 Context

Insights into the trends shaping the European and global funding landscape, their implications for CSOs active on European (and global) level complemented by examples of concrete mitigation strategies, case studies and sustainable funding models helping CSOs to sustain their mission in a changing world.

1.1 Key Trends Shaping the Rapidly Evolving European and Global Funding Landscape

(Reference: See slides 6–22)

In recent years, the funding landscape has become increasingly hostile to CSOs, eroding their ability to carry out their missions effectively. The 90-day freeze on US foreign development funding in January 2025 started a period of deep uncertainty, followed by the dismantling of USAID and further cuts to US support for civil society and democracy work. The UK and other Global North donors have also reduced their aid budgets, while US private foundations face growing political and regulatory pressure that could limit their international giving. At the same time, the rise of right and far-right forces in Europe and worldwide has added political pressure on civil society. Together, these shifts have made funding harder to secure for CSOs working on human rights, social and environmental justice and minority rights, and have made diversifying income more urgent than ever.

Adding to this pressure, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) are restructuring. For over 30 years, OSF has been one of the largest and most important private funders of independent civil society actors in Europe, supporting work on human rights, justice, democratic principles and open societies. Its new operating model, with a reduced scope of work and a notably lower focus on traditional grant making in the EU, is still unfolding, and its full impact is yet to be seen.

Together, these changes weaken CSOs and democratic participation, and increase pressure and competition for the resources that remain.

LINKED RESOURCES

[Shifting Resources Landscapes: Building resilience against challenging and changing contexts](#) by CIVICUS explores how changing funding landscapes are affecting civil society and how organisations are adapting.

[Navigating uncertainty: the impact of US funding freezes on global civil society](#) by EU SEE looks at how US funding freezes are affecting civil society organisations and their funding resilience.

[Here](#) you can read about Open Society Foundations' funding and work across Europe and Central Asia, including its key thematic priorities and regional programmes.

The [2026 State of Civil Society Report](#) by CIVICUS examines major global trends affecting civil society, democracy, human rights and civic action.

[New era for NGOs: Reimagining civil society's role and possibilities - Prospects for Children in 2026](#) by UNICEF Innocenti explores how funding cuts, shrinking civic space and declining trust are reshaping the NGO sector and driving new organisational models.

EU Funding & Civil Society

Closer to home, Europe is facing its own set of challenges. Civil society organisations are facing growing attacks, including attempts to question the legitimacy, role and public funding of NGOs, just as the EU is redefining its own funding priorities. The debate on the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and proposals such as AgoraEU will shape how and where civil society can access resources in the coming years. The EU's MFF sets the EU's long-term budget and determines how funding is allocated across different priorities and programmes.

The negotiations on the 2028–2034 MFF are particularly relevant to CSOs, as decisions on future programmes and funding allocations will influence the opportunities available for activities related to education, social inclusion, democracy, civic space and international cooperation.

The European Commission's proposal for Agora EU brings together several funding areas, including culture, media, democracy, citizenship, equality, rights and values (CERV). The final structure and budget remain subject to negotiations.

For CSOs, it is important to follow these developments, understand how funding priorities may change and assess how these changes could affect their existing and potential funding sources.

What can your organisation do?

- Identify the EU programmes on which your organisation currently depends.
- Follow developments in the MFF negotiations and relevant funding programmes.
- Consider which changes could affect your organisation's funding opportunities.
- Explore alternative funding sources alongside existing EU programmes.

EU external funding is part of this debate too, with concerns about how little of it reaches civil society and about a shift towards blended finance and away from grants. The readings below help make sense of what is at stake and how to prepare.

LINKED RESOURCES	
Civic Space in the EU	• European Democracy Shield and EU Strategy for Civil Society pave the way for stronger and more resilient democracies by the European Commission
The future of EU and development funding	• Who Still Holds the Lion's Share? Funding Concentration, Shrinking Access and the Narrowing Space for Civil Society by CONCORD • Blended finance and the illusion of development: Lessons from the EFSD+ for the next EU budget by CONCORD • Future-proofing your EU funding strategy for the post-2027 period by EU Funding Consulting
Practical tools to search for EU programmes, project calls and agencies.	• EUknow.it • EU Funding Overview – handy overview of EC's programmes & agencies • EU Funding & Tenders Portal

1.2 The Impact of Reduced Funding on Civil Society in Europe (and Globally)

(Reference: See slides 23–32)

Funding cuts affect more than organisations' budgets. They can force CSOs to reduce activities, suspend programmes, reduce staff or, in some cases, close altogether. They can also limit organisations' ability to engage in advocacy, participate in policymaking and respond to the needs of the communities they work with and live in.

Across Europe, almost half of the civil society organisations that responded to a survey by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights reported unexpected funding cuts or freezes, and many have little financial reserve to absorb the shock. These challenges also affect organisations' long-term planning and independence. When funding becomes increasingly scarce or competitive, CSOs may face difficult decisions about which activities to prioritise and how to sustain their work without compromising their mission.

The readings below show what this looks like on the ground, from the human cost of the USAID closure to the strain on organisations in Brussels, and point to ways of adapting.

LINKED RESOURCES

[Europe's Civic Space is Shrinking faster than ever](#) by the Good Lobby summarises the FRA's 2026 report on rising attacks, smear campaigns and funding cuts against civil society, and links it to the EU's new Civil Society Strategy.

[New Approaches to Defending Global Civil Society](#) by the European Democracy Hub explores new ways to protect civil society, from civic diplomacy and narratives to non-donor funding, relocated activists, independent media and transparency.

[What USAID did, and the effects of Trump's cuts on lifesaving aid](#) by Oxfam UA explains what USAID delivered and the knock-on effects of its closure, with the worst impact in crisis countries like the DRC, Ethiopia and Syria.

[Think tanks in Brussels The EU market of ideas under strain](#) by HCSP Brussels Office maps Brussels think tanks and their funders, showing US dominance, a growing Hungarian-funded Eurosceptic ecosystem, and a funding base weakened by cuts.

[Fundraising in Europe: 2025 in review & expectations for the year ahead](#) by the European Fundraising Association explores 2025's challenges (funding cuts, Meta ad limits, political attacks on nonprofits) and what to expect in 2026.

1.3 Now What? Adapting to the New Reality

(Reference: See slides 33–56)

Adapting to the new reality starts with strategy: strategy first, fundraising follows. That means moving from a mindset of scarcity to one of abundance, diversifying income beyond traditional sources, and trying new approaches such as collaborative fundraising, which can also be a chance for growth, innovation and creativity. It also means looking beyond money. Organisations are strengthening their roots in the communities they serve, since legitimacy in the eyes of citizens is one of the best protections against political attacks and unstable funding. They are investing in the hubs, networks and foundations that multiply influence and resilience, through services, re-granting and joint advocacy. And they are claiming their political space, as democratic and development actors, not just service providers.

Before exploring alternative funding opportunities, it is useful to understand your organisation's current funding situation. Consider answering some of the sample questions below:

- What are your organisation's main funding sources?
- How dependent is your organisation on one donor, funding programme or type of funding?
- What would happen if one of your main funding sources were reduced or discontinued?
- Have you already explored alternative funding opportunities? If so, what challenges have you encountered?

These questions can help you identify funding dependencies and risks. You can use your answers as a starting point for developing a more strategic approach to fundraising in Part II.

The resources below show how, from turning political pressure into community-driven campaigns to building support beyond traditional grants, with real examples from across Europe and ideas for strengthening fundraising skills and leadership.

LINKED RESOURCES

[Key takeaways from EFA's European Fundraising4Democracy Tour 2025](#) by the European Fundraising Association on lessons from European campaigns on defending democracy through fundraising.

[Fundraising4Democracy Resource Hub](#) by the European Fundraising Association explores how fundraising, crowdfunding and public mobilisation can help civil society organisations across Europe defend democracy, protect civic space and sustain their work amid growing political and financial pressures.

[From funding cuts to collective strength: Stories of financial resilience for turbulent times](#) by SPRING Strategies shares stories and practical lessons from civil society organisations on building financial resilience and adapting their funding strategies to navigate uncertainty and turbulent times.

[Reimagining Resilience: Sustaining our mission in a changing world 2025](#) by SPRING Strategies is a webinar series on financial and organisational resilience after aid cuts.

[Reimagining learning & leadership in fundraising: Key insights from the EFA Learning Symposium 2026](#) by the European Fundraising Association on fundraiser training matters, with peer learning and AI as key themes.

[The European Nonprofit Pulse 2025](#) by the European Fundraising Association, the UK's Chartered Institute of Fundraising, and Salesforce presents a survey of nonprofits on rising demand, funding pressure and AI adoption.

PART II. Strategic Planning to Unlock Fundraising Success

Understanding the 2026 Context

Fundamentals, role and integration of strategic approach to finance in fundraising planning and the two fundamental pillars of fundraising success: the multi-annual fundraising strategy & annual fundraising work plan.

2.1 Strategic Approach to Finance, Income Diversification & Resource Mobilisation

(Reference: See slides 59–74)

Relying on one main source of funding, or on one dominant funder, is risky. Diversifying your income reduces that risk, so it should be built into your fundraising strategy. There are two main ways to do it:

- Introduce new income streams.
- Add more funders within an existing income stream.

What does funding diversification look like in practice?

Funding diversification does not necessarily mean pursuing every available funding opportunity. It means identifying a combination of funding sources that is suitable for your organisation's mission, activities and capacity. For example, an organisation like SOLIDAR that receives most of its funding through EU project grants could consider:

- Diversifying within public funding: Exploring additional EU, national or local funding programmes.
- Exploring private philanthropic funding: Identifying foundations whose priorities align with the organisation's mission.
- Developing individual giving: Encouraging regular contributions from individual supporters or members.

- Seeking more flexible funding: Exploring opportunities for core or multi-annual funding that can support organisational needs beyond individual projects.

Diversification is about more than the number of funders or income sources. It also means spreading funding across geographic regions, balancing restricted project funding with unrestricted or core funding, and aiming for multi-year commitments.

Diversifying is not always the right answer, though. It only helps if it makes you more resilient, and every new income stream takes know-how and capacity to run. Watch for signs of over-diversification: high costs and low returns, high management costs and fees, and activities that take a disproportionate amount of time.

LINKED RESOURCES

[Concentration Instead of Diversification: Why NGOs Should Focus on Fewer Revenue Streams](#) by Fundraising Box examines research on whether NGOs can strengthen fundraising by focusing on fewer, more reliable revenue streams rather than diversifying their funding sources.

[How the Biggest US Nonprofits Are Funded](#) by Stanford Social Innovation Review analyses the main revenue sources of large US nonprofits and how their funding models differ.

The following indicators can help organisations assess their financial position, identify potential risks and monitor progress over time. They are intended as reference points rather than fixed requirements. The appropriate targets will depend on factors such as organisational size, funding structure, operating costs and available resources.

Organisations do not need to use all **six indicators**. They can begin with those most relevant to their current situation, such as dependency on a single donor or the availability of operating reserves. Where possible, these indicators should be reviewed together with colleagues responsible for financial management.

1. **Donor dependency:** How dependent is the organisation on a single donor?
Calculation: income from the largest donor divided by total income.
Suggested goal: 10% or less.
2. **Months of operating reserves:** Does the organisation have enough resources to deliver its programmes and stay stable?

Calculation: liquid unrestricted net assets divided by average monthly expenses.

Suggested goal: 6 months or more.

3. **Change capital:** Does the organisation have the resources to grow, innovate, rebuild reserves or invest in fixed assets?

Calculation: change capital funds available divided by the budget for the specific purpose.

Suggested goal: 50 to 100%.

4. **Investment in resource mobilisation and external communications:** Has the organisation invested enough in raising funds?

Calculation: resource mobilisation and external communications expenses divided by total contributed income.

Suggested goal: 15 to 20%.

5. **Core mission support investment:** Is the organisation investing in the foundations it needs to stay stable and grow?

Calculation: total indirect programme expenses divided by total expenses.

Suggested goal: 15 to 25%.

6. **Budget variances:** How closely does the organisation stay on track with its budget?

Calculation: (actual minus budgeted income or expenses) divided by budgeted income or expenses.

Suggested goal: 10% or less.

LINKED RESOURCES

These resources offer practical guidance for CSOs looking to strengthen their financial management and build longer-term financial sustainability. They include hands-on tools, checklists, templates and guides covering areas such as budgeting, financial planning, cost recovery, reserves, risk management and assessing an organisation's financial health. Most are particularly relevant to small and medium-sized NGOs and can be used to review current practices, identify gaps and develop concrete action plans. Together, they provide both accessible introductions to core financial management concepts and more targeted tools to support organisations in making their finances more resilient and sustainable:

[Financial Sustainability Health Check](#) by Humentum

[Estimating Financial Reserves: A Practical Tool for NGOs and Nonprofits](#) by Humentum

[Managing risk: A practical guide for nonprofits](#) by Humentum

[Cost-Recovery-Checklist](#) by Humentum

[Financial Sustainability Action Plan](#)

[Infinite Giving | The Basics of Nonprofit Financial Management: Start Here](#) by Infinite Giving

[Nonprofit Budgeting: How to Get Started + Template](#) by Jitasa

[Financial Planning and Budgeting](#)

2.2 Multi-Annual Fundraising Strategy: 10-Step Implementation Framework

(Reference: See slides 75-118)

A multi-annual fundraising strategy must come in a clear and actionable short form, which is a living document that evolves and responds to change. It works best when it is built in stages, moving from who the organisation is to how it will track results. Each of the ten steps below feeds into the next.

- 1. Vision, mission and values.** Define the future the organisation wants to contribute to, why it exists, and the principles that shape its culture.
- 2. Organisational objectives.** Set SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based) goals for what the organisation wants to achieve overall. These give the team a clear direction.
- 3. Fundraising audit.** Assess the context from four angles: external factors (political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental), competitors and potential collaborators, the wider funding market and donor behaviour, and the organisation's own capacity, leadership support and past performance. The audit encourages an abundance mindset, treating other organisations in the ecosystem as potential partners rather than rivals.
- 4. SWOT analysis.** Turn the audit findings into internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats, each linked to action steps.
- 5. Fundraising objectives.** Set SMART targets that answer three questions: how much will be raised, when, and from where. For example: raise at least €555,000 between 2026 and 2028, split across private foundations, individual donors and corporate donors.

6. Strategic approaches. Choose a general direction: “much from a few” relies on institutional and foundation grants, corporate donations, major gifts and legacies, while “few from many” relies on individual donations and membership fees.

7. Segmentation and strategy by donor type. Plan concrete actions, campaigns and projects for each donor group, such as foundations, institutional donors, individual donors, corporate donors and earned income.

8. Fundraising budget. Draw up a realistic summary of expected expenses (staff, web development, advertising, events, travel) and revenues (donations, grants, subsidies, sales). Ideally, include a line for investment and testing.

9. Schedule. Map key activities across months and years, with exact timing set out in annual work plans. Most strategies cover three to five years, align with the organisation’s overall strategy, and are updated regularly.

10. Monitoring, evaluation and learning. Compare actual income and expenses against the budget, review how well the tools and the strategy itself are working, and capture lessons learned. Quarterly reviews are ideal, with half-yearly or yearly as the minimum.

Behind every successful fundraising effort sits a solid foundation: a realistic view of what it costs to run an organisation, a clear understanding of why donors give, proof that your work makes a difference, and systems that keep it all organised. These resources provide practical guidance for putting those foundations in place. They cover fundraising planning and donor motivation, understanding and communicating organisational costs, developing simple monitoring and evaluation frameworks to demonstrate impact, and using donor management tools to track progress and organise fundraising activities. Together, they can help organisations turn broader fundraising goals into more structured and manageable practices.

LINKED RESOURCES

These resources cover the financial sustainability and organisational management of NGOs, from understanding the risks of underfunding core costs and developing effective fundraising strategies to measuring impact and using data to monitor performance.

- [The Nonprofit Starvation Cycle](#)
- [Fundraising Principles and Practice](#)
- [How to Build an M&E Framework for Small NGOs: A Complete Step-by-Step Guide](#)
- [The DonorPerfect Dashboards](#)

Knowing where you stand is the first step to getting stronger. These three self-assessment tools help you take an honest look at your organisation: from which areas of fundraising need attention, with next steps on people, practices and process to a checklist that lets you compare yourself against a recognised code of good practice for nonprofit governance and management.	• Fundraising self-assessment tool Freedom Fund • Nonprofit Self-Assessment Checklist • Online NGO Assessment Tool The NGO Academy
This section brings together guides, strategic frameworks, and practical templates to help you build a clear, realistic fundraising strategy. Use these resources to shift toward an abundance mindset, adopt flexible strategy mapping, leverage 2026 digital and AI tactics, and map out your revenue targets on paper.	• The Ultimate Fundraising Strategy Guide for 2026 by Engaging Networks • From Scarcity to Strategy: Reframing Your Nonprofit's Fundraising Mindset by Giving USA • Why strategy maps beat strategic plans for NGOs and INGOs by MC Consulting • Fundraising Strategy Template.pdf • Nonprofit Development Plan Template: Free Annual Plan by Funraise
Good monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) helps you show your work is making a difference and helps you learn from it along the way. These resources start with the basics, explaining what MEL is and how to build a framework, and present some approaches to MEL, such as Climate KIC's use of outcome stories.	• Empowering Grassroots Leaders through Monitoring & Evaluation Training by Lightup Impact • MEL Guide by Migration Partnership Facility • What is Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)? By Resonance Global • Our approach to MEL by Climate KIC • Adaptive Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Approaches in Complex Environments by Peace Training

2.3 Annual Fundraising Work Plan

(Reference: See slides 119-123)

Practical Resources

A fundraising strategy only becomes useful when you can turn it into a **clear plan of action**. The resources below can help you map out your fundraising activities, set realistic goals, organise responsibilities and plan your year around key dates and opportunities. They include practical templates, step-by-step guides and fundraising calendars that you can adapt to your organisation's priorities and capacity.

Before diving into these detailed resources, you could consult the simple example for annual fundraising workplan below. This is created for stimulating your thoughts around the workplan.

2.3.1. Turning your fundraising strategy into an annual work plan

A fundraising strategy identifies your organisation's longer-term priorities. An annual fundraising work plan translates these priorities into specific activities, responsibilities and deadlines.

Your work plan does not need to be complicated. It can be a simple table (excel, word etc.) that helps your team organise and monitor fundraising activities.

For each priority, consider:

- Funding opportunity: Which funding source or potential donor will you explore? How often they publish calls? Annually, twice a year, bi-monthly etc?
- Planned activity: What action is needed, such as researching a foundation, contacting a potential donor or preparing or drafting a proposal?
- Responsibility: Who will coordinate the activity? Who involves in drafting a proposal?
- Timeline: When should the action be completed? What are the timeline for defined actions?
- Progress: What has been completed, and what still needs attention?

Reviewing the plan regularly will help your organisation assess progress and adjust priorities when circumstances change.

LINKED RESOURCES

[NGO Strategic Fundraising Action Plan PPT Presentation](#) by Slide Team

[Annual Fundraising Template](#) by Story Point Consulting

[5 Steps to Your Easy, DIY Annual Fundraising Plan](#) by Moceanic

[Charity Fundraising Calendar 2026](#) by iRaiser

[Create Your Annual Fundraising Plan in 5 Simple Steps](#) by Funding for Good

PART III. Bringing Your Strategy to Life

Fundraising in Practice

Building blocks and practical approaches to building relationships with and engaging private philanthropic funders, corporate partners, and individual donors – tailored to their distinct motivations and giving practices – while strengthening a diversified fundraising portfolio, including dedicated strategies for fundraising for difficult causes.

3.1 Beyond the Proposal: Raising Funds from Private Philanthropic Funders

(Reference: See slides 126-199)

Private philanthropy is evolving, and CSOs need to navigate not only traditional grant applications but also new funding models, changing funder priorities and increasingly relationship-based approaches to fundraising.

Understand the changing funding landscape

Two funding models are particularly relevant for CSOs:

Pooled funds bring together several foundations and other funders around shared priorities, allowing them to coordinate their resources and support longer-term or systemic change. For CSOs, they can provide access to multiple funders through a single funding mechanism, although funding from individual foundations behind a pooled fund may not always be available separately.

Participatory grantmaking involves communities and people with lived experience in funding decisions, shifting some decision-making power from foundations to the communities they aim to support. This approach can be particularly relevant for CSOs working on rights, social justice and community-led change.

The following funds and initiatives illustrate different models of collaborative and participatory philanthropy. They can also serve as starting points for exploring potential funding opportunities.

LINKED RESOURCES	
European pooled funds	• European AI & Society Fund • Civitates • Alliance for Gender Equality • EPIM – European Programme for Integration and Migration • FundAction • Alliance for Socially Engaged Arts • European Fund for the Balkans • Balkan Trust for Democracy
Funds supporting organisations in the Global Majority	• CIVICUS Solidarity Fund • Global Fund for Women • Global Greengrants Fund • Global Resilience Fund • African Women's Development Fund
Participatory grant making	• Mama Cash • Red Umbrella Fund • European Digital Rights (EDRi) • Digital Freedom Fund

Do you want to know the latest progress from the Network of European Foundations? Read their latest report: [State of Play of NEF Collaboratives, March 2026](#).

Move beyond grant applications

Writing strong applications is only one part of fundraising. **Grant writing is reactive:** you respond to funding opportunities that are already open and adapt your proposal to a funder's priorities. It can be competitive and often comes with restrictions and administrative requirements, but it remains an important way to build funding access, visibility and knowledge of the funding landscape.

Grant fundraising is proactive: it starts before a funding call opens and focuses on researching funders, building relationships and making a case for support that fits your organisation's long-term strategy. This can create opportunities for multi-annual, unrestricted or core funding.

The two approaches can complement each other. A diversified fundraising strategy combines responding to relevant opportunities with actively developing longer-term relationships with funders.

Find the right funders

Before approaching a funder, research whether there is a genuine fit between their priorities and your organisation's work. Look beyond the thematic focus: consider their geographic priorities, typical grant size, funding model, existing grantees and approach to partnerships.

You can also monitor funders' websites, strategies, annual reports and announcements about their existing grantees. These can reveal emerging priorities and help you understand what a funder is actually supporting, rather than relying only on their published thematic areas.

Know who you are approaching

Different types of funders operate in different ways.

Public-benefit foundations can include independent, family, community and corporate foundations. They may support social causes and systemic change and, depending on the funder, may provide multi-annual, unrestricted or core funding. Their priorities can change with new strategies or leadership, so it is important to keep monitoring the relationship over time.

International NGOs (iNGOs) may fund larger or multi-country programmes and can sometimes channel government or philanthropic funding to smaller organisations. The sector is increasingly moving towards more direct funding of local actors in the Global Majority, making it important to understand each organisation's approach to partnerships and power-sharing.

Follow the fundraising cycle

Fundraising is an ongoing process rather than a single funding application. The following cycle can help structure your work:

1. **Identify:** Research potential funders, their priorities, interests and giving patterns.
2. **Qualify:** Assess whether there is a realistic fit and identify the best way to approach them.

3. **Cultivate:** Build relationships and trust before making an ask.
4. **Solicit:** Make a tailored proposal that connects your organisation's work with the funder's priorities.
5. **Close:** Secure the commitment and complete the necessary agreements and administrative steps.
6. **Steward:** Thank funders, keep them informed about your work and maintain the relationship beyond individual grants.

The relationship does not end when a grant is secured. Good stewardship can help build trust and create opportunities for longer-term support.

Build and manage a funders pipeline

A funders pipeline helps you keep track of potential and existing funders and turn relationship-building into a manageable process. It can include information such as: funder name and contact details; thematic and geographic priorities; potential funding opportunities; estimated grant size and funding period; current relationship and last contact; next steps and follow-up dates; application deadlines; status of the funding opportunity.

A simple spreadsheet can be enough. Larger organisations may use a CRM or other project-management tools, but the important thing is to have a system that your team can actually maintain.

Make the case for core funding

Core funding, also known as general operating support or unrestricted funding, gives organisations greater flexibility to decide how resources are used according to their own priorities. For CSOs, it can strengthen organisational resilience, long-term planning and capacity while reducing dependence on restricted project funding.

When approaching funders for core or unrestricted support:

- Explain your organisation's long-term goals and the change you are working towards.
- Show how flexible funding would strengthen your ability to deliver that work.
- Demonstrate your track record and impact through concrete examples.
- Explain how your funding model contributes to organisational sustainability.
- Mention relevant existing core or unrestricted funding, where appropriate.

- Make it easy for funders to understand who you are, what you do and what distinguishes your organisation.

Have a concise set of supporting materials ready, adapted to the funder's requirements. This could include: organisational strategy and annual workplan; summary budget and, where relevant, audited accounts; annual report or organisational factsheet; evidence of impact, such as an evaluation, impact journey or examples of concrete change; relevant governance, financial management and accountability policies. Keep these materials up to date so that you can respond quickly when an opportunity or relationship develops.

Approach invitation-only funders

Some foundations fund organisations by invitation rather than through open calls. This may be due to limited staff capacity, a preference for identifying grantees through their own research, or a decision to focus on existing grantees.

An invitation-only approach does not necessarily mean that a funder is inaccessible. It does, however, make relationship-building and research particularly important.

- Research the funder's priorities, strategy and existing grantees.
- Identify people or organisations in your network who already have a relationship with the funder.
- Ask current or former grantees about their experience where appropriate.
- Look for opportunities to meet funders through thematic events, sector networks and philanthropy conferences.
- Approach funders with a clear and tailored explanation of why your organisation's work is relevant to their priorities.
- Think beyond the immediate funding request: relationships with funders can take time to develop.

Where possible, avoid generic outreach. A well-researched, personalised approach is more useful than sending the same pitch to multiple funders.

Key takeaway

Successful private fundraising is about more than finding an open call and writing a strong proposal. It involves understanding the funding landscape, identifying funders that genuinely fit

your work, building relationships over time and developing a diversified portfolio that supports your organisation's longer-term sustainability.

LINKED RESOURCES	
Grant databases can help you identify potential funders and funding opportunities.	• Candid's Foundation Directory • FundsforNGOs
Funder and fundraising networks can provide access to funder directories, sector knowledge and networking opportunities.	• European Fundraising Association • Ariadne • Philea – Philanthropy Europe Association
Explore Philea’s resources to learn more about public-benefit foundations across 34 European countries and discover the latest trends, challenges and funding priorities in climate philanthropy .	• The Fabric of Giving 2025 - Public-Benefit Foundation Data in Europe Philanthropy for Climate – State of the Movement Report 2026
These resources explain the value of core and flexible funding in strengthening organisational capacity and enabling CSOs to respond to changing needs.	• Flexible Funding Isn’t the Point. What It Makes Possible Is. Humentum • How Philanthropy Creates Stronger Results Through Core Funding – Impact Insider
CSOs can choose an approach to donor pipeline management that fits their needs and resources. This can range from a simple Excel template combined with calendar reminders to a more advanced system integrating CRM software, project management and collaboration tools, and AI fundraising tools.	• More advanced: combine several tools, such as a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system (CiviCRM), project management software, collaboration tools, calendar reminders and AI fundraising tools (Microsoft guidance on managing the donor pipeline). • Less advanced: an Excel template combined with calendar reminders.

3.2 Leveraging Corporate Giving and Partnerships

(Reference: See slides 200-314)

The potential of corporate giving and partnerships as a source of non-profit income, together with the diverse motivations that drive corporate philanthropy. Practical approaches to developing successful corporate partnerships, navigating ethical and reputational considerations, and building a sustainable corporate giving programme.

This section looks at corporate giving as a source of non-profit income, what motivates companies to give, and how to build corporate partnerships that are credible, ethical and sustainable.

Corporate giving is support a company provides to a cause without expecting a direct commercial return, such as donations, in-kind contributions, employee volunteering or matched giving.

Corporate partnerships go a step further: they are longer-term collaborations in which both the company and the organisation work toward shared goals and benefit from the relationship.

Some NGOs draw a firm line and do not accept corporate support, and we understand why. But with funding under extreme pressure, it may be necessary to consider it. Corporate giving is also more frequent and dynamic than ever.

Fundraising or partnership?

Corporate fundraising aims at short-term financial targets, such as event sponsorship or emergency funding. A corporate partnership is more strategic and built on a long-term relationship. Companies are moving from ad-hoc donations to more structured approaches. They increasingly favour long-term collaboration with values-aligned NGOs that are engaging, credible and clear about their impact, and they can help amplify NGOs' impact stories.

Why companies give

Corporate motivations are rarely purely altruistic. They usually combine a wish to do good with business interests. Common motivations include:

- Visibility and reputation.

- Closer relationships with the communities where the company operates.
- Stronger stakeholder engagement and loyalty.
- Contributing to positive change

Two questions to answer first

- Can you align your project, cause or mission with the motivations and interests of potential corporate donors?
- Which unique elements of your project or organisation will you highlight, and why?

What NGOs bring

NGOs should present themselves as equal, strategic partners, not just funding recipients. What they offer includes credibility and legitimacy, field expertise, evidence-based solutions and impact measurement, policy and advocacy insight, delivery experience, the trust of affected communities, and authentic storytelling grounded in real impact.

Risks and challenges

- *Reputational*: partnering with a company linked to controversial practices or scandals can cost trust, credibility and advocacy legitimacy.
- *Purpose-washing*: greenwashing, whitewashing or similar misuse of the NGO's credibility for corporate image-building.
- *Loss of strategic focus*: corporate funding priorities can pull an NGO away from its mission and core values.
- *Burdensome conditions and requirements*.
- *Power imbalances* between partners.

What a good partnership looks like

- It is mutually beneficial, and the NGO's integrity and independence are protected.
- Values are aligned and both sides are committed to the same positive outcome.
- Both sides prioritise open communication and relationship building.

Corporate foundations

A corporate foundation is a legally separate entity set up by a parent company, which is also its main source of income. Its purpose and funding priorities reflect the company's values and strategy, and grant making is its main activity. It is a more structured and sustained form of corporate giving. Foundations must follow the legal frameworks of their country of registration.

Some of the most prolific philanthropic foundations with corporate roots in Europe:

- Hans Wilsdorf Foundation (Rolex)
- IKEA Foundation
- Novo Nordisk Foundation
- Robert Bosch Stiftung
- Wellcome Trust
- "la Caixa" Foundation
- RAG-Stiftung
- Else Kröner-Fresenius-Stiftung

Forms of corporate support

Financial: donations, grants, payroll giving, donation matching, event sponsorship, cause-related marketing.

Non-financial: in-kind donations, strategic advice, know-how sharing, mentoring, capacity building, employee involvement and volunteering, sharing contacts, and visibility and access to new audiences through the company's communication channels.

Finding potential corporate donors

Start with the people and sources already around you:

- Ask your existing corporate donors for tips and introductions.
- Attend conferences, events, fairs and business leaders' fora.
- Search databases, lists, rankings, traditional and digital media, and LinkedIn.
- Look at the corporate donors of other NGOs and actors active in your work area.

Also look beyond your usual bubble. Companies outside your sector or comfort zone can turn out to be a good match.

Key supporting materials

Have these ready before approaching corporate partners:

- **Strategy and vision:** multi-annual organisational strategy; theory of change or positive vision.
- **Track record:** victories timeline or impact journey; external impact assessment; annual reports.

- **Transparency and accountability:** audited annual financials; ethical fundraising and gift acceptance policy.
- **Outreach materials:** summary of the current year's workplan; case for support; a section of your website for corporate partners.

The case for support

The case for support is used in in-person outreach and is adapted to each corporate partner. It is not a stand-alone document. It should be compelling and well designed, and its key element is emotion: show the impact and the positive change your organisation contributes to. It answers three questions:

1. **Why us?** What are we doing for the world that makes a corporate partner want more of it and want to support our plans?
2. **Why now?** What has changed, and why is it urgent?
3. **Why should the corporate partner care?** How relevant is this to the company?

Gift acceptance and ethical fundraising policy

This is a written policy stating which gifts (financial or in kind) and which donors your NGO will not accept. Typical grounds are: the donor's values conflict with yours; the gift is unlikely to be of value to the organisation; the donor attaches unacceptable conditions; the donor intends to exploit the NGO, its brand or its reputation.

Transparency and credibility

Regular updates on your finances and work show donors and the public that you can be trusted. Make these available:

- Annual reports and audited yearly financials.
- Up-to-date information on funding and donors for the current year on your website.
- Your statutes and code of conduct.
- Your ethical fundraising and gift acceptance policy.
- Ratings and verification "stamps" from trusted sources.

You can also build credibility through:

- Quality communication materials with consistent branding.
- Solid coverage in relevant media outlets.

- Impact evaluations or assessments by third parties.
- Awards.
- Memberships in associations or alliances.
- Endorsements from celebrities, VIPs or experts.

LINKED RESOURCES

This document explores the main motivations from philanthropic giving globally from 2005 to 2025: [Motivations for Philanthropic Giving: A 20-Year Global Review \(2005–2025\)](#).

[Analysing the legal environment for philanthropy in Europe](#) by Philea examines the legal and regulatory conditions shaping philanthropy across Europe.

[Mission Minded on why good design strengthens a case for support](#) explains how clear, compelling design can make a case for support more persuasive and engaging for potential donors.

[This study](#) explores the relationship between nonprofit transparency and donor contributions, reporting a 62% increase in contributions associated with transparency.

3.3 The Power of Individual Giving

(Reference: See slides 315-410)

Individual giving is the largest source of charitable giving worldwide, yet many NGOs do not treat it as a priority. It can be a predictable and sustainable source of unrestricted income, which makes it one of the strongest ways to diversify your funding. It also brings more than money: relationships, community and movement building, mobilisation, and greater visibility and legitimacy for your organisation.

It also demands resources, time and energy. Building an individual giving programme is a long-term effort that needs a consistent strategy, management of the fundraising cycle and regular communication. Competition for donors is strong, and comes not only from other NGOs but from a wide range of other causes and institutions.

[Giving Europe](#), established in 1995, is a network of philanthropic institutions active in 19 countries. It allows individual and corporate donors to support CSOs in other EU countries while benefiting from tax advantages in their own country.

The individual giving methods most relevant for SOLIDAR members are money transfers, membership fees, payroll giving, crowdfunding, peer-to-peer fundraising, public collections, high-net-worth individuals, board membership, and VIP, celebrity or influencer endorsement.

Donors stop giving for many reasons, and communication is the best protection. Share your results and impact clearly and on time, keep communication channels open and regular, thank donors after every contribution, and explain where the money goes and what it achieves.

If you consider launching an individual giving campaign for your organisation in the near future, you can consult to the following illustrative example (hypothetical scenario) and learn more about the individual giving examples, tips and strategies in the Linked Resources section.

Example of individual giving campaign:

An organisation working on social inclusion wants to explore individual giving as an additional source of funding. Rather than launching a large fundraising campaign immediately, it could start with a small initiative targeting people who are already familiar with its work.

The organisation could consider the following steps, but not limited to:

1. Identify a specific activity or organisational need for which it is seeking support.
2. Define the audience it wants to reach, such as existing supporters, members or people who have participated in its activities.
3. Prepare a clear message or a compelling story so your supporters identify with your campaign.
4. Choose an accessible donation methods (donation forms, a variety of payment methods, giving amounts & descriptions) and communicate it through dedicated or existing channels.
5. Thank contributors and share updates on how their support has been used.
6. Review the results and decide whether to develop a longer-term individual giving approach.

Important note: Individual giving requires sustained communication and relationship-building. Even a small campaign should be planned according to the organisation's available time, resources and capacity.

LINKED RESOURCES

These guides and examples show how to turn first-time supporters into loyal donors. They cover mapping the donor journey, setting up regular giving, writing appeals that get read, and what makes a campaign stand out, with practical tips and templates along the way.

[Unleash Generosity with Smart Fundraising Journeys](#) by iRaiser

[9 Tips to increase regular giving donations for your charity](#) by iRaiser

[The Donor Engagement & Retention Playbook](#) by Causevox

[5 Secrets to Write Fruitful Fundraising Appeals](#) by Bloomerang

[Special focus: Successful fundraising campaigns – & what makes them stand out](#) by EFA

[Donor Journeys: What They Are & How To Personalize Them](#) by Donorperfect

[Donor journey mapping guide \(+ steps and template\)](#) by Kindsight

3.4 Fundraising for Difficult Causes

(Reference: See slides 411-454)

Difficult causes are complex or controversial topics. They can be political, polarising, unpopular or niche. Examples include the rights of workers and a fair living wage, the rights of people seeking asylum or living without papers, support for people experiencing homelessness, the rights of people with disabilities and of LGBTQI+ people, and work on climate justice or anti-corruption.

Fundraising for these causes comes with specific challenges. It is hard to explain complex issues to the general public without watering them down. The target audience is often smaller, donors may fear being associated with the cause, and organisations can face threats or attacks. Competition is high, and donors often want their money to go directly to the cause rather than to salaries and operational costs.

Principles for success

The first step is to plan strategically for long-term impact, with a multi-annual fundraising strategy and an annual work plan. Alongside this, diversify your income and explore alternative funding sources.

Know your audience. There is an audience for niche causes, but not everyone will care, so focus your time on people who show interest. Keep your approach donor-centred rather than driven by your own organisational needs, and tell compelling stories, since emotion drives action and giving. Fundraising and communication go hand in hand. To stand out, highlight what makes you distinctive: your positioning in the field, your impact journey and your victories. Be open to testing new and emerging tools, methods and unconventional ideas.

Transparency and accountability are what make an NGO credible and trustworthy. Annual reports, audited accounts, MEL frameworks, external impact evaluations and an ethical fundraising policy all contribute.

Fundraising also needs to be built into the whole organisation. It should be part of strategic planning, understood and encouraged at every level, and backed by all team members, leadership and the board, with the executive director personally involved.

Finally, mindset matters. Move from scarcity to abundance, and think about what is possible rather than what is not.

LINKED RESOURCES

These resources provide practical guidance on strengthening fundraising strategies and building long-term organisational capacity. They explore the role of leadership and boards in embedding fundraising into organisational strategy, alongside approaches to individual giving, supporter recruitment, audience engagement and fundraising for niche or controversial causes. ChangeStar's wider resource library also offers materials on communication, strategic planning and other aspects of organisational development to support charities and civil society organisations in their fundraising and change-making efforts.

[Jane Trenaman: The true value of the board in empowering fundraising](#) by EFA

[5 fundraising lessons that could help 99% of charities – Toolkit](#) by ChangeStar

[Resources](#) by ChangeStar

PART IV. Additional Resources

This section brings together further materials to help organisations develop their fundraising capacities, improve internal systems and connect with relevant networks.

You do not need to explore every resource. Start by identifying the area where your organisation needs the most support.

- **Strengthening organisational capacity and Readiness for Fundraising:** Section 4.1 includes resources on strengthening fundraising teams, leadership and organisational readiness.
- **Fundraising systems and digital tools:** Section 4.2 provides information on donor management systems, CRM tools and the responsible use of AI in fundraising.
- **Professional networks and further learning:** Section 4.3 includes fundraising associations, platforms, events and opportunities to connect with other practitioners.

Some resources may be more suitable for organisations with established fundraising teams, while others provide introductory guidance. Consider your organisation's needs and capacity when deciding which tools to explore.

4.1 Strengthening Organisational Capacity and Readiness for Fundraising

(Reference: See slides 456-457)

LINKED RESOURCES

These resources focus on developing fundraising professionals, strengthening teams and leadership, and supporting career progression and wellbeing. Together, they cover both the organisational conditions needed for effective fundraising and the skills, competencies and resilience that individuals need to succeed in the sector.

They cover competency-based professional development, identifying skills gaps, building clear career pathways, strengthening team management and board support, and developing emotional resilience to manage the pressures of fundraising and prevent burnout.

[From talent to competence: Building stronger fundraising teams through competency-based development](#) by EFA

[Developing strong fundraising teams & leaders — lessons for success](#) by EFA

[Jane Trenaman: The true value of the board in empowering fundraising](#) by EFA

[Avoid Avoidance: Mental Health and Emotional Endurance for Fundraising Professionals](#) by Association for Fundraising Professionals

[Special Focus: Progressing a career in fundraising](#) by EFA

4.2 Building Essential Fundraising Infrastructure

(Reference: See slides 458-474)

Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

Before looking at any product, work out what you and your colleagues need it for, whether that is donor and grant management, e-newsletters or something else. Then look for a CRM built for non-profits, with dedicated fundraising tools and features that support GDPR compliance.

Ease of use matters more than advanced features, because a CRM only helps if your team actually uses it. Check that the interface is simple and ask what training is available. Also check how well it connects with your website, accounting software, payment processors and other tools you rely on. Finally, compare pricing, ask about NGO discounts, and look into the reputation of the company behind the product.

The following resources introduce CiviCRM as a tool for managing fundraising activities and supporter relationships within civil society organisations.

LINKED RESOURCES

Fundraising with CiviCRM

- [CiviCRM Success Stories](#)
- [How Amnesty International Vlaanderen Optimized CiviCRM for Fundraising](#)
- [Greenpeace in Central and Eastern Europe - CiviCRM Success Story](#)

	• Fundraising with CiviCRM CiviCRM
Engage with the CiviCRM community	• Blogs CiviCRM • CiviCRM Youtube Channel • Schedule a demo to learn more about CiviCRM • Work with a CiviCRM Partner

Applying AI in fundraising – Ethical dilemmas

AI is most often used in fundraising to improve written communications, such as drafting proposals and reports and creating content, as well as to select data for campaigns and to support prospect research.

Human oversight is essential. Fundraisers need to make sure AI is used ethically, in line with best practice and regulatory codes, which requires a good level of ethical and data literacy. Decisions must always remain a human responsibility.

The main barriers to using AI are ethical concerns, above all cybersecurity risks, privacy and data breaches. Data bias and discrimination come next, followed by the difficulty of keeping up with legal and regulatory requirements. Transparency is a further issue: donors and partners should be able to tell when and how AI has been used.

If your organisation plans to use AI, put clear guidelines in place, along with review processes and training for staff. Review all AI-generated content for accuracy, and check that it respects copyright and data protection rules. Don't overlook the environmental impact of AI use.

4.3 Where to Connect: Fundraising Events, Associations, Philanthropy Platforms and Networks

(Reference: See slides 475-476)

LINKED RESOURCES

These resources help civil society organisations and fundraising professionals stay informed about upcoming events, training opportunities and developments in the fundraising and philanthropy sectors.

[Events Calendar – EFA | European Fundraising Association](#)

[European Philanthropy Calendar - Philea](#)

[Content & events | Resource Alliance](#)

[Fundraising Training & Virtual Events | Fundraising Everywhere](#)

Upcoming events in 2026:

[EFA European Fundraising Forum](#)

[SOFII · Everything IWITOT](#)