Paper title:- Making presents: exploring the impact of fundraisers’ storytelling on NPO practice
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Abstract
Storytelling is widely recognised as central to effective fundraising, both in terms of attracting new, as well as establishing long-term gifting relationships with donors (e.g. Merchant et al, 2009; Burnett, 2002). This paper argues, however, that whilst we understand the effect storytelling has on donors’ giving behaviour, there remains little understanding of the processes involved in creating such stories, and the impact that these narrative constructions may have on non-profit (NPO) practice. This paper employs a theoretical partnership utilising Krause’s (2014) concept of “projectization” through which to explore how fundraisers transform core elements of NPO strategies into commodities that can be purchased by donors. These arguments are progressed using theories of gift making employed by Mauss ([1954] 2011) & Chevalier (2014) to demonstrate how through a process of re-framing these commodities are transformed by fundraisers into the “presents” that are appropriated and given by individual donors and that are central to the ongoing gift exchange. Drawing on primary and secondary qualitative data from interviews with fundraisers, donors and non-profit staff, this paper explores the tensions that emerge within the philanthropic field between fundraisers and donors, as well as fundraisers and their non-fundraising colleagues, as fundraisers try to construct what is identified as contested reciprocal gift relationships between donor and NPO.

What emerges is a picture of fundraising not only as storytelling, but as a process where fundraisers seek to create meaning and connection where it did not previously exist between givers and distance recipients. At the heart of the process is the evocation of an object to which the language of the gift adds meaning and which the donor can be seen to appropriate on behalf of the end recipient. However, this is not an unproblematic undertaking. Whilst this gift-making process delineates meaning for the donor it does so in ways that do not align with the NPO’s wider strategy by emphasizing particular pieces of work above others. This has implications for how individual organisations may conduct their work on behalf of their beneficiaries when donors restrict funding and thus the types of work the organisation has the resources to implement. Additionally, by reframing the meaning of the gift to fit that which the fundraiser perceives the donor feels is most valuable, the solidaristic nature of the gift exchange is fundamentally altered leading to the exclusion of some beneficiaries and their stories from the gift relationship. The paper concludes by considering the implications these findings have on current understandings of the uneven distribution of funding that a reliance on philanthropic gift giving can produce.

Introduction
This paper builds on research conducted and published by the author (see Alborough, 2017) that discusses the reciprocal nature of the philanthropic gift to charitable organisations and the variegated reciprocal gift relationships that fundraisers aim to actively construct and maintain. The paper will further develop the concept of the actively constructed reciprocal gift relationship and consider the ways in which fundraisers create and define the corresponding constructed gift cycle identified in paper 5.3 (p. 127) using the resources and narratives available to them within the mediated gift field in a bid to construct the “ideal” reciprocal relationship. In doing so, this paper will consider how fundraisers seek to make complex organisational strategies and distant beneficiaries accessible to donors, and how this process provides for reciprocal interaction and narrative construction that transmutes what presents externally like an economic transaction into a gift that has value, purpose and meaning above and beyond that of the monetary donation. Finally, this paper begins to explore the tensions that emerge within the field both between fundraisers and donors, as well as fundraisers and their non-fundraising colleagues, as fundraisers try to construct what this thesis acknowledges are cognitively defined as “ideal”, and thus, contested reciprocal relationships.

The literature: fundraising and the gift
Research outlined in the preceding paper identified above has highlighted the problem of what Lainer-Vos (2014) terms “the want of a tangible return for handing over money” to charitable organisations (p. 475). This is coupled with the reality that direct reciprocation between the giver and the ultimate recipient – the organisation’s beneficiary – is often neither possible nor desirable within the context of giving to charitable organisations. Yet reciprocity has been found to induce repeat gifts (Mauss [1954] 2011; Komter, 2007); and research such as that conducted by McDonald et al (2011) and Bekkers & Wiepking (2007) has found that donors do attach reciprocal expectations to their gifts, whilst seeking to satisfy their desire to act altruistically. At the very least, studies on donor behaviour, suggest that givers need to know that their gift has been received; will reach their intended recipient; and achieve the outcome for beneficiaries that they have envisaged. In addition to this confirmation of receipt and the ultimate impact of their gift, donors express needing to know that their gift will satisfy the more elusive social and psychological needs that may have motivated their gift (McDonald et al, 2011; Barman, 2007). Findings from these studies are supported by the secondary donor data, where donors accounts suggest expectations of feedback, as well as displays of gratitude and regard for their gifting. There, therefore, emerges a clear obligation placed on the recipient organisation to provide a tangible and clear form of reciprocation to donors if they are to be encouraged to remain committed to a repeat giving relationship with an organisation. In short, their continued commitment needs to be repeatedly validated and affirmed. However, according to studies such as that conducted by Breeze & Lloyd (2013), and Harrison (2017), this reciprocation is unlikely to be identified or expressed as being necessary or desirable by the donor, who also wishes their giving to appear unprompted, altruistic and free of expectations of return. In reciprocating the gift, fundraisers must be careful to avoid any insult towards the donor by not undermining their more benevolent intentions with an inappropriate level of recognition and feedback if future channels of interaction are to remain open and positive. And, as McDonald et al (2011) point out, it is up to the organisation’s fundraisers to determine how much, when, where and which formats constitute appropriate levels of reciprocation (p. 177).
The aim, therefore, of the rest of this paper is to demonstrate the ways in which fundraisers seek to create more tangible means of providing a reciprocal gift for donors that moves beyond relying on Andreoni’s (1990) “warm-glow” effect, whilst maintaining the narrative of the altruistic, obligation-free gift, as they encourage donors to remain loyal, long-term supporters. In order to accomplish this, the paper builds on the concept identified in the literature that fundraisers need to be both explicit and specific about what a donor’s monetary gift will acquire on behalf of the beneficiary. There is an attempt to illustrate, that whilst the charitable gift exchange presents as a transfer of money from the donor to the non-profit organisation, what emerges from this research, from both donors’ and fundraiser’s perspectives, is that the more important element of the gift is the outcome or gift that the donor is seeking to appropriate on behalf of the beneficiary. In doing so, this paper draws on the literature and gift theory to frame its central argument. Firstly, it centralises Mauss’s ([1954] 2011) assertion that “for a gift to be made, there must be presupposed an object or service which creates an obligation” (p. 49). Secondly, the paper builds on Krause’s (2014) concept of “projectization” to provide a lens through which to explore how non-profits transform core elements of organisational strategies such as materials, labour, desired outcomes and beneficiaries into “projects” or commodities that can be paid for or purchased by institutional donors. However, this paper will progress these arguments to demonstrate how through a process of re-interpretation and re-framing these commodities are transformed by fundraisers into the “presents” that are appropriated and given by individual donors and that are central to the gift exchange (Chevalier, 2014; Mauss [1954]/2011). The argument is, that once it is recognised that givers are seeking to use their donation to appropriate a gift to be given we can examine these as presents and their constitutive parts in those terms. At the heart of this argument is the idea present in the gift literature that the gift is cognitively defined as such by those participating in the gift exchange (Komter, 2007; Chevalier, 2014; Ungureanu, 2013). What is being appropriated by givers are not, as Krause (2014) observes “pots and pans, or tents and food, but the act of giving” and what they receive in return is the affirmation that their giving has contributed to the achievement of their own understandings of better outcomes for recipients (p. 876). Thus, what we see emerging is a process of reframing by fundraisers that leads to the transformation of the organisation’s activities and beneficiaries into personalised presents, which are used to make corporeal the reciprocal gift relationship they seek to establish.

**Research Method**

The main body of empirical data for this article consists of semi-structured interviews with 26 fundraising professionals working in 14 non-profit organisations. Data collection centred on qualitative in-depth interviews which are widely recognised as a mechanism through which to gain information about how subjects perceive their world and to gain accounts of their day-to-day practice (Silverman, 2013). However, whilst these interviews provided a rich dataset on how fundraisers perceive their role, as well as the processes and networks of relations involved in soliciting repeat charitable gifts, there remained significant questions about how fundraising and gift management is perceived by other actors within philanthropic relationships and non-profit organisations. Thus, 14 non-fundraising staff were included in the study, with a view to gaining insight into the gift management processes that fundraisers themselves were less able to shed light on. These interviews are complemented
by a secondary analysis of donor’s descriptions (n=79) of their gift from previous studies of donor behaviour.

The want of a tangible gift
Chevalier (2014) argues that “objects given as presents are already involved in a process of appropriation: from the moment a donor chooses an object” (p.61). However, this argument presupposes the existence of “an object” that can be appropriated. Yet, the problem with the third-party gifting characteristic of philanthropic giving is that in many respects, the physical thing that exchanges hands is the monetary gift that the donor gives to the recipient organisation. However, a concept that emerges from the literature reviewed is that the giver is appropriating a gift that is delivered by a third party, the charitable organisation, that is not necessarily an object, but rather the donor’s vision of the public or specific beneficiary’s good (Payton & Moody, 2008, p.13). Cluff (2009) observes donors want “to be part of shaping the solution” (her emphasis) to the beneficiaries’ perceived problems (p.373). This view is reflected in the donors’ secondary accounts accessed for this research repeatedly express a desire to “make some kind of difference”, “tackle a problem”, or “affect many lives”. Yet, as one major gifts fundraiser observes, these expressed ambitions are fundamentally not a tangible object the donor can hand over to the recipient, but rather an idea – a set of feelings about a good outcome secured and passed onto a third party - thereby making the act of giving to charity a tricky task: -

“It is quite hard to give - it is more about feelings because it is not a product. You don’t have a physical thing you can hold, so you can’t feel yes I have spent my money well.”

To overcome this inherent intangibility of the gift, fundraisers in this research consistently expressed a necessity to establish and maintain a sense of what that gift appropriated and then given is, in ways that can be measured and more clearly delineated.

Notably, previous studies on donor behaviour (Breeze, 2012; Breeze & Lloyd, 2013; Harrison, 2017) as well the secondary analysis of donors’ interviews, highlight donors’ descriptions of the strategies they adopt for satisfying these criteria. These include making a clear decision for themselves about what social, physical, economic and psychological outcomes they are seeking and for what types of recipients. Donors’ decisions about how these are likely to be most effectively met are influenced by various elements ranging from cause to size of the charity, as well as the issues that most interest and motivate the donor. What this and other similar studies in the donor data demonstrate is that donors’ giving decisions are largely interest-based and reflect the donor’s own passions and aspirations and agency, rather than the needs of specific beneficiaries.

At a secondary level givers express wanting to support a specific piece of work or activity that has distinct boundaries and in which they can identify the specific impact their giving will make within a specific time-frame for a particular recipient beneficiary or group of recipients (Sargeant, 2001; Nichols, 2004). Philanthropist, Mary Cornish provides some examples of what donors may be looking for: -

“We don’t give unrestricted funding, we prefer to fund projects with an identifiable price tag - like a summer playscheme for example. If an applicant can’t show the project is separately run and controlled within the umbrella of
their organisation, then we’d say no - however good it looks.” (quoted in Breeze, 2011, p. 3).

This, of course, varies as donors are motivated and driven by the differing tastes and interests identified above. However, the quote above provides a rather apt summary of the expectations many donors express associating with their gift (see for example McDonald et al, 2011).

The fundraisers interviewed for the current study generally recounted an acute sensitivity to givers’ desires to understand what charities actually do with their gift. For example, Caroline, head of fundraising from Forces for All frames this sensitivity as a moral obligation and constitutive of two different types of communication:

“Well, I have a very strong view that any charity does have a moral obligation to tell people where their money is going. And I don’t think it actually should matter whether the gift is £10 or £10,000 or £100,000; there’s still a moral obligation to be transparent about where the money is going... But I think that's slightly different to having that knowledge in place before you perhaps approach a donor with a very specific request.”

In this extract Caroline points out that donors need to be provided with two distinct pieces of information. The first is the detail of what their gift will purchase in the first place. The second, is confirmation that the acquisition of the proposed item or service has actually taken place and has served its intended purpose.

As such, this research reveals a common narrative thread within fundraisers’ accounts of a perceived obligation, as Hyde (1979] 2012) suggests, to “differentiate what is undifferentiated” and communicate the worth of the gift as a means to provide substance to any gift solicitation and potential long-term gift relationship. In doing so, they describe “the project” or “theme” as the most appropriate means of creating this understanding and developing the “pieces of work”, to cite the phrase used by Ben Goldsmith in Breeze (2009, p. 16), that many donors themselves express wanting to support. The aim of the following sections in this paper is to explore and demonstrate what fundraisers do to develop these “projects” and “themes” with a view to understanding how fundraisers perceive these processes as contributing to the goal of establishing and maintaining the reciprocal gift relationship and ongoing gift cycles.

The Gift Package

Whilst previous research, highlights how donors rationalise, control and place boundaries around their own giving, findings from this study reveal a corresponding process of framing and boundary setting at the level of gift solicitation by fundraisers both in response to what they believe donors are seeking to give to and as a way to shape and solicit gifting that will support the organisation’s complex and ongoing needs. This invites us to reconsider existing assumptions about the degree to which non-profit operational strategies, fundraising practices and donors’ own philanthropic activities coalesce, as well as work at cross-purposes to each other. Additionally, this allows for an analysis of the tensions and conflicts that may arise within the mediated gift field as a result, which is discussed later in this and subsequent papers.

Almost all the fundraisers interviewed for this research described a process of reframing and
breaking down the work of an organisation into blocks of manageable information for the giver, beyond those set out within each of their non-profit organisations’ respective strategies. Many fundraisers argued that the complexity, size and ongoing strategic work of these organisations could be overwhelming and inaccessible to potential givers. For example, head of individual fundraising at St. Sebastian’s Hospice, notes of their annual income targets: -

“Because actually I think going out saying we need to raise £11 million per year doesn’t cut it for people, because it sounds too big. They want to know what their little bit will do.”

Other fundraisers suggest that the long-term, ongoing nature of many of their charity’s services do not lend themselves to providing donors with a sense of contributing to a piece of work or a specific outcome for particular beneficiaries. Victoria, major donor and legacies fundraiser at sight loss charity, See Again, tries to explain the difficulty: -

“A lot of the support services we supply are ongoing and we have been doing them for years. Which is good, so they have got that tried and tested longevity. We know that they work. But to package that up, if you like, to a major donor and say: ‘would you like to put £50,000 into our helpline?’ They would be saying to us, ‘well what’s new, what new thing are you going to do? What difference is that £50,000 going to make?’”

More specifically fundraisers seemed consistently concerned with the idea that givers are often not very familiar with the work that is being carried out by the organisation and need guidance as to where to place their gifts. These expressed concerns reflect Barman’s (2007) findings that whilst donors may have a clear vision of what they consider to be the public good, they often “do not possess a clear sense of how to best facilitate [their version of] the public good” (p. 1445). As noted previously, givers often claim to be overwhelmed by the volume of and, at times conflicting, information available regarding charities and engage in their own strategies to overcome this; drawing on their own personal preferences, passions and social backgrounds to shape their gift purchases (Breeze, 2010).

Yet, even once a donor has chosen a cause or charity to support, how, when and where their gift is needed and may be utilised by the non-profit organisation is not always self-evident. To address this, fundraisers explain how they offer ways to reduce and manage the decision-making processes for the donor by breaking down larger existing and previously planned operational programmes and projects into smaller blocks of work and delineating what each block will achieve. In this way, fundraisers explain aiming to build up and assign specific meaning and value for smaller pieces of work that can be presented as complete projects with a set price tag and tangible outcomes. The purpose of these projects is to give the donor an “in” - a way of wading through and categorising all the work that the organisation does and can achieve. The project provides the donor with a story about what he/she will be appropriating and, thus, giving to the recipient, as well as what it will achieve or address in the beneficiary’s life in practical and tangible ways. In other words, the project enables the fundraiser to delineate where and how the donor’s monetary contribution will add value to the work of the non-profit organisation. In many respects, the packaging of work into what Cluff (2009) terms “chunks” (p. 373) aims to save the giver in terms of mental labour by reducing the amount of information he/ she has to grapple with in order to make a giving decision. What is important to note is that these projects differ from those
in organisational strategies and business plans, in that they represent the story, developed ex-post, about the organisation and beneficiaries that fundraisers feel will appeal most to particular types of donor whether they be specific donors or a segment of the organisation’s supporter base. By doing this, fundraisers use stories in a similar fashion as Chevalier (2014) describes gift appropriation between closely tied individuals to “highlight certain ‘objective’ aspects of the gift, donor or context”, as means to allow the donor to transform their monetary donation into a personal gift to a distant recipient (p.59).

This research identified that approaches to such story-based “projectization” (see Krause, 2014) differed both across the sample of organisations, as well as within organisations. Four of these approaches are explored more in depth here. These activities were closely related to the gift relationship type and size of gift being sought and whether the organisation was strategically more focused on securing restricted or unrestricted funds.

1. Where organisations are dependent on a large number of smaller gifts from multiple individual donors and seek to secure largely unrestricted funds or funds for ongoing or difficult work, fundraisers describe working with non-fundraising colleagues to identify what donors’ smaller financial gifts will secure in terms of actual items, staff time or specific expertise. For example, Evelyn, fundraiser from Clear Passage, which runs a telephone helpline, explains:

“So, we know how much running our helpline costs... We have been able to allocate those costs, which is brilliant. We have been able to put together projects. I am, at the moment, working on calls that we took in the last financial year and all our costs associated with that. It costs £9 per call pretty much. Just to be able to have that number [to give to donors].”

A similar approach is adopted by several of the organisations in the sample, especially those with ongoing services such as helplines, skills training, support groups and health care that may prove difficult to differentiate and objectify.

2. An alternative strategy and second example approach is adopted by organisations who run several programmes of work or projects in several locations. For example, Catherine, high value gifts fundraiser at St. Sebastian’s Hospice, describes creating what she has named the “bedside fund” which provides funds for ad hoc equipment repairs and furniture for the hospice for which she raises money. By creating a fund with a name and a specific purpose, Catherine aligns donors’ general and often smaller gifts, that would not ordinarily cover an entire project or object, with a specific desired outcome that does not necessarily have to be met within the short term or have a specified monetary value but is not a nameless gift. Thus, what the donor is purchasing is not a specific tangible object but a contribution to softer outcomes such as skills acquisition; personal development and empowerment – or in the case of St Sebastian’s the comfort of their patients. In this way Catherine has created an object that can be named and given and has both meaning and value that is not purely economic, thus transforming a monetary donation into a gift or “object” that can be appropriated by the donor. The fundraiser seeks to not only distinguish the gift by attaching it to a specific outcome or difference, but also by creating a direct link between the value of the monetary gift with the value of the “thing” appropriated.
Thereby directly linking giving activity with an outcome that fundraisers perceive the donor envisaging.

3. The most common approach is to break down larger distinct, timebound organisational programmes or projects into smaller sections or phases of work with their own associated tangible outcomes. Penny, head of fundraising at conservation charity, Free Space, explains:

“So somewhere like the [river name], for instance, we [Free Space] can then go ok in the next five years we want to achieve a higher percentage over that acreage of land rich for wildlife. And so, we have measurements like that which is fine because it means that we can either buy land when it comes up or we can influence landowners.... So, from a fundraising point of view, we can be creative, and we can take a section of land and go right these are the changes that we are going to physically make. So, you will see physical change [within a specified period of time].”

The point is to distinguish the gift that can be appropriated by demonstrating what is unique and noteworthy about the piece of work that fundraisers are seeking a gift for, how much it will cost, when success will be achieved and what that may look like in a way that reflects what is known about the donor’s perception as closely as possible.

4. The use of packaging a non-profit organisation’s work into smaller “chunks” or distinct projects, as described in the examples above, is not a finding unique to this study. This tactic is observed as good practice in many fundraising management texts ranging from Cluff (2009) to Sargeant & Jay (2014). This may indicate that “projectization” forms a dominant logic within the mediated gift field and shapes its overall income generation practice, whether seeking gifts from institutional donors, or individuals. Many fundraisers certainly felt, as did some staff, on the back of what they perceived fundraisers tell them, that this is what made for good fundraising. For instance, Karl, CEO at Forces for All, observes:

“I am told people like supporting projects and this is the way we have to go.”

Laura, frontline service delivery manager at international development charity Save the World, expands on this idea:

“We are told by fundraising that our supporters want to know where the money goes and that they want stories of impact. Because it’s not sufficient anymore to say we built sixty toilets. What we need to show is that six months later that they were being properly used, and that it is has actually reduced open defecation long-term. Because building a toilet doesn’t mean to say that anybody is going to use it.”

In the extract above and her continued discussions regarding fundraisers’ push towards developing bespoke projects to present to donors, Laura, also identifies that funding secured on the back of these projects tends to be more restrictive in terms of where and how donors’ gifts may be spent. Additionally, project-based funding is more demanding in terms of providing feedback to donors over extended periods who
are expecting evidence of particular, and often long-term, outcomes and impact. In this regard, this research reveals that the apparent loss of control and flexibility that projectization, thus, represents is often resisted by non-profit leadership and service delivery practitioners seeking to maintain the autonomy and independence of their organisations to spend incoming resources where they see fit, whilst limiting the influence over strategy of any one donor. This finding chimes with both academic and practitioner research and literature that suggests that unrestricted funding is viewed as far more desirable and sought after by non-profit organisations, as they maintain control over where and how income is spent and, thus, the implementation of organisational strategies (see for example Saxton & Wallace, 2018; Barman, 2007).

This reticence to “hand over” too much control to donors, on the part of non-fundraising staff, requires creative approaches by fundraisers who still wish to build long-term gift cycles with donors, yet without losing the autonomy to spend funds as needed. For example, Karl from Forces for All above, goes on to note:-

“We always make the unrestricted ask, but they [donors] often ask well what is it that you have got that we can support. So, it largely comes down to interpretation. I usually look to Anna [major donor fundraiser], who is a pro at this sort of thing. We used to worry that we needed to come up with lots and lots of projects, but we just don’t have them. And I was resisting it. I would rather turn the conversation to how you can help our work generally.”

In this extract Karl, highlights the competing demands from charities for the flexibility and autonomy that unrestricted income provides; with those of donors who wish to support an identifiable piece of work and have their own influence in determining and contributing to outcomes for beneficiaries through restricting their giving to specific projects or programmes of work. Karl expresses the desire to maintain the organisation’s autonomy, whilst finding a mechanism to continue the conversation and relationship with donors. However, Karl also notes that the aim to balance autonomy with continuing to engage donors has required the organisation’s fundraisers to develop an alternative approach to satisfying donors’ perceived demand to support “projects”.

Yet, in spite of staff like Karl’s desire to avoid projectization, there remained a perceived obligation from the fundraisers at Forces for All, and similar organisations within the sample, to produce a coherent story or set of stories that replicate the structure of projects for the donor out of the organisational mass of work. In these instances, fundraisers adopted an approach to projectization in which they sought to delineate meaning either from identifying specific themes or streams of work to which donors’ gifts could be assigned, or to raise money around the social value the organisation claims to bring to a specific group of beneficiaries. For example, in the case of arts organisation Tunes, fundraisers talk about the orchestra being a community education facility, thereby portraying the cost of running the orchestra and maintaining its buildings as assets that benefit a wider community other than just their audience members or players. In the case of organisations such as Forces for All and Roofs, thematic outcomes for beneficiaries are the focus. Thus, fundraisers focus on concepts such as reducing social isolation for veterans, or providing access to
employment for homeless individuals, rather than the cost of purchasing specific items and/or services like the toilets mentioned by Laura above. Consequently, what becomes the thing offered for appropriation is the change, and the social transformation of the beneficiary or their circumstances in a way that matches up with what fundraisers interpret is the kind of gift the giver wishes to give. As Odette, grants manager at Forces for All, puts it:
“We have to sell them the difference we want to make and that we need them [donors] to come on the journey with us.”

No matter the approach to dividing the organisation’s work up taken by fundraisers, what results overall is a process of fundraisers seeking to the materialise - or as Gouldner (1973) terms it the “thingafication” of the - gift through a clear narrative relayed by the fundraiser. For Diane, a major donor fundraiser at See Again, it’s about identifying what the donor’s aspirations are and outlining how the work that the organisation is doing will meet those aspirations. This means making clear decisions about what stories and narratives with regards to the value and meaning of the work they are funding, are relayed to donors:-
“Again, it's inspirational. If people think that their donation might fund a really important stem cell or genetic research project, it's quite inspiring for them. I suppose it is also slightly more difficult to make a compelling ask out of a support service.”

Thus, the value of the gift options presented for appropriation are not necessarily determined by their economic value, but rather in terms of the meaning that fundraisers hope donors will assign to them.

The Personalised Gift – Selecting stories for inclusion or exclusion
The discussion and exploration of the strategies fundraisers adopt in creating packages of work for donors to fund in the preceding sections identify not just how fundraisers reframe and reinterpret organisational needs, but also allows for an exploration of the ways in which they actively select for inclusion or exclusion which organisational and beneficiary “stories” donors hear and, thus, fund. Fundraisers in this research consistently expressed the notion that some work and beneficiaries are understood to be more attractive to donors and, therefore, easier to fundraise for than others, often terming this “fundraisable work”. Body and Breeze (2016) note that there is a general perception within the non-profit sector that some causes are more difficult to engage donors with and propose that organisations have several means to overcome this problem through re-framing the cause and its beneficiaries to “both capture donors’ sympathies and appeal directly to donors’ personal tastes” (p.67). This is supported by Hansen (2020) who finds far more agency on the part of charitable organisations with regards to the ways in which fundraisers choose to depict and frame opinions of beneficiary groups, as they seek to anticipate or mitigate any perceived stigma with which beneficiaries would be approached or described when writing appeals. However, this research reveals not only how meaning is reframed, but also finds an active process of exclusion or inclusion of certain beneficiary groups and activities from interactions with donors. This appears to be based not only on how fundraisers perceive that donors imagine beneficiaries, but, additionally on whether they will be able to access the corresponding material and ongoing co-operation of staff and access to beneficiaries with which to construct the packages of work needed to stimulate a longer-term relationship and affirm this image.
Frieda, major gifts fundraiser at Save the World provides a description of what her and her team look for in a project:-

“So fundraisable work - something that we can really measure the outcomes. I think, sometimes we [fundraisers] can see work is absolutely brilliant, but unless we know how we are going to collect the information afterwards, then it raises a question about what you can feed back to your supporter [donor]. Somewhere where we know we have got good communications. So, a country representative who responds to us with updates and stories and prayer points. That’s a winner for us, because that actually means we can communicate that to our supporters effectively and they know what’s happened. It’s about keeping people in the loop. Those [front line staff] that are happy to do meetings... where possible, we want to know that there is a track record so that we’re not exposing our supporters to too much risk in terms of where their money is going.”

What Frieda highlights here is the primacy fundraisers place on establishing and cultivating the gift relationship. Thus, fundraisers will present donors with organisational work that they feel will engage the giver over a longer period of time than just that of the lifetime of any current organisational project or annual budget round. This results at times, in the exclusion of certain projects or in other instances, pushing for the inclusion into certain gift packages the donor’s input or elements that the fundraiser feels will appeal to a particular donor or group of donors. This is justified by fundraisers within the parameters of the language of the reciprocal gift relationship where success is the securing of the gift, the gift relationship and ongoing gift cycle. As Anne-Marie, major donor fundraiser at Roofs explains, when talking about her previous fundraising experience at a local theatre:

“Initially there was some resistance to do that from the theatre director because he was like, no these are the plans. You can’t have a donor coming in and saying, well I prefer that colour on the wall. But actually, there were times when that worked really well, and we secured a major donation from that person because they had been listened to and they had been part of evolving the plans.”

For Anne-Marie, what was most important was not only that the funding for that particular project was secured, but also that she had the material with which to establish a potential reciprocal and ongoing gift relationship. She goes on to explain how this initial gift relationship, where there had been a sense of give and take in the process in which she could engage the donor, had led to a long-term giving relationship between that particular donor and the theatre with multiple large monetary gifts over several years. However, Anne-Marie’s story also identifies the tension that this process generates between front-line staff and fundraisers over how fundraising best serves the needs of the organisation; and what is often interpreted by non-fundraising staff as the undue power and influence donors are often perceived to have. Fundraisers often expressed a recognition of this tension and felt pressure to address these issues in ways that constrain and/ or limit their capacity to build relationships with donors. As Anne-Marie goes on to note:

“I think in that sense, it would be great if you could work [with donors] in that way all the time. The reality is that there are needs of the organisation that must be met. It’s a quite delicate balance, isn’t it?”
However, what becomes clear from accounts such as Anne-Marie’s, is that fundraisers take a longer time horizon than non-fundraising staff with regards to gift solicitation. Whereas operational staff are focussed on funding current programmes of work or annual organisational strategies and budgets, fundraisers, who have their eyes set on establishing the long-term gift cycle in which several gifts will be given over several years and which may also take several years to establish, will accept or even encourage smaller gifts and/or funding of a less urgent project in order to set reciprocal interactions in motion. This may even include the exclusion of work that they feel will not appeal to donors. In this research, a certain level of conflict between fundraisers and staff was revealed. The latter were concerned that certain work goes unfunded and unrecognised, and that often too much control and influence was ceded to individual donors as a result. Laura, frontline services delivery manager, provides as example from Save the World:-

“Partnerships [the major gifts fundraising team] when they are going to an individual donor, even if they’re not asking for that particular country, that’s what is at the top of their minds. And so, they [the donor] will go for: ‘I would like my money to go to India, because I’ve seen this great article [in organisation’s donor newsletter] about trafficking.’ Trafficking is not our core business but ignited somebody within the global fundraising group to talk about it, to feature it. But there are repercussions to that, because it also shifts the budget or shifts the funding in a way that we have not decided on strategically. And so, what I constantly battle with is that fundraisers go out, get excited by a project. They’ve seen it. And they, therefore, want to bring in the money for that project. But that doesn’t necessarily look at the funding as a whole and how it’s disenfranchising other projects.”

Fundraisers are not oblivious to this problem and, at times, expressed concern that their focus on one stream of work versus another may lead to skewed understandings of the work of the organisation and leave some projects, even the organisation’s main focus, under-recognised and underfunded. An example from Diane at See Again highlights this concern:-

“There’s a slight misconception out there about what we do. I met one of our pledgee’s [legacy donor] the other day who had, had a conversation with a colleague on the telephone and I followed it up with a face to face meeting. The conversation that she had, had with my colleague was focussed on research and how brilliant she thought research was. When I went to meet her, I said:- ‘I understand the gift is for research’. And she said:- ‘Well I haven’t actually specified that, but I had assumed that it would go to research’. So I think there is a slight misconception on the part of our donors, which I don’t think we have done very much to redress specifically, that all the donations they give us go to research. ... rather than our support services and the helpline and our counselling, and obviously our running costs and our groups and that sort of thing.”

Yet despite the awareness of the risk of misconception, fundraisers’ accounts such as Diane’s suggest that fundraisers struggle to overcome this tension. As such fundraisers’ perceived obligations to provide donors with suitable gift packages that will continue to engage the donor’s interest in the organisation to stimulate repeat gifts remains the
overriding driver of their selection and refinement of gifts for donors, rather than the meeting organisational desire for securing unrestricted, flexible funding that can be spent “where the need is greatest” (Karl, Forces for All). In doing so, this paper begins to question the capacity of fundraising and thus, non-profit organisations, to provide a neutral conduit for the transfer of gifts from giver to intended, but unknown beneficiary identified as a primary role for NPO’s within the literature (see for example Steinberg & Powell, 2006; Titmuss, 1973; Healy, 2014).

Impact, Gratitude, Regard and Time as Reciprocation
Following on from the question above, this research demonstrates how the packaging of the gift becomes a central feature of fundraisers’ reciprocal activities, whilst interrogating the effect of these activities beyond their efficacy in maintaining relationships with donors and generating repeat gifts. The tools of reciprocation are easily identified within fundraisers’ descriptions of what they do to “steward” gifts given to the organisation as well as in the “how-to” fundraising literature to encourage reciprocal interaction between the donor and the organisation (e.g. Burnett, 2002; CASE, 2013; Sargeant & Jay, 2014). In these texts good stewardship and donor retention is a process in which gratitude for the donor’s gift is displayed, regard for the donor is expressed and the value of the gift to the intended recipient repeatedly confirmed through a series of actions and activities similar to the “courtesies, entertainments, rituals... and feasts” Mauss ([1954]2011) describes as an integral part of the reciprocation of the gift given (p. 3).

In terms of providing opportunities for reciprocation, the constructed gift package, from the fundraiser’s perspective, provides the material needed to meet the giver’s desires to achieve impact and transformation from the donor’s perspective. The gift package allows for regular feedback on the donor’s gifts in the form of written reports and newsletters that can be tailored to meet specific donors’ – both individuals or segments – needs and expectations. The gift package additionally provides opportunities around which donors can be engaged directly at events to hear and see what the organisation has achieved, in visits with staff members, and opportunities to meet with beneficiaries. These visits, events and reports are structured around the original story included in the gift package. In this respect, the gift package provides the narrative material used to both discursively and tangibly convey the gratitude, regard and feedback that the donor seeks, which further enables and entrenches the discourse of relationship and connection that fundraisers utilise as a means to maintain the narrative of the reciprocal gift, with varying degrees of success.

Nevertheless, a tension emerges between meeting the obligations of the gift set up in creating the gift package and displaying gratitude and regard whilst maintaining the idea of the altruistically given gift, reflecting the “cultural conflict” at heart of any gift exchange of that between “altruism and reciprocity”, within the narratives of both donors and fundraisers (Moody, 2008, p. 141). Two clear findings transpire from analysis of interviews with donors conducted by other researchers regarding this tension. The first is that donors seek to make a significant difference and a real impact for which they desire evidence and acknowledgement from the charity to whom they give. The second is the desire for their donations to be understood as gifts freely given without any expectation of return either in terms of physical or status benefits.
These two desires provide an example of the paradoxical nature of the gift or what Derrida (1994) terms the impossibility of the gift (see also Barman, 2017; Ungureanu, 2013; Hyde [1979]2012). Derrida (1994) argues that a gift cannot occur without a reciprocal interaction of some sort, but as soon as reciprocity does occur, and the gift is acknowledged, the altruistic intentions at the heart of the gift are annulled as the giver is now gaining both recognition and the status of being altruistic from his or her giving. Similarly, Mauss ([1954] 2011), in his original conception of the gift cycle suggests that for the giver or donor to feel that it is worth their while to remain within the gift relationship he or she needs be assured that gifts are received in the spirit in which they are given in terms of what the donor sought to achieve with their gift. In response to these contradictory demands placed on the gift, fundraisers in this study focussed heavily on trying to balance out this paradoxical need to develop a means to capture the spirit of each donor’s gift by demonstrating the ways in which the donor’s intentions for the gift had been met, whilst continuing to honour the altruistic tendencies behind the gift. This manifests in the struggle to ensure that fundraisers maintain the narrative of ongoing relationship, whilst addressing the more transactional need to provide evidence of the material outcomes the donor has appropriated and gifted to the beneficiary identified in section 6.2.

As such, the research reveals a conflict between meeting what can be seen as the contractual obligations that the gift package sets up – for example the purchase and supply of a tangible item or service - versus meeting and addressing the social, psychological and emotional ambitions donors have for their gifts. Philanthropist, Mary Cornish, provides an example of what this conflict may look like:-

“We always ask recipients how they will measure the impact of the grant: we don’t want to know about bums on seats, we want to know what difference it will make. There are so many immeasurables but organisations have to try and find some way to measure what they’re doing. For example, we fund a project that cares for people who live on the streets and they define success as their users still being alive in the morning, which puts it into stark relief. To some extent we all know we’re playing a little game. We’re asking for information that we know is almost impossible to give and they know that too, but they know they’ve got to give it to us.”

This extract illustrates what both donors and fundraisers in this study acknowledge - that what donors no matter the size of their actually want to know at some point about is how their visions of the public good have been achieved and how that services their need to feel connected, special and contributing to some greater good; and for their gift to be acknowledged as having been given with no expectation of a “material return” (Rosso [1991] 2016, p. 235). A rather simple and effective way of demonstrating both types of impact is the provision of regular feedback and reports, whether highly individualised or for wider segments of donors, that demonstrate what has been purchased in terms of material objects, services and the time of experts, as well as how these elements have contributed to achieving outcomes such as more empowered beneficiaries; more secure livelihoods; better community relationships; safer environments and so forth.

However, participants in this research expressed concerns about the increasing reliance within the sector on reports containing only what Simon, CEO from Dreams, describes as “hard data”. Whilst, it was acknowledged that the collection and evaluation of such data
may well be contributing to greater efficiency, transparency and accountability within the
non-profit sector, it is often perceived to be misunderstood and does little to provide an
adequate reflection of the “good” or “something greater” that has been achieved. More
importantly, in the context of creating and maintaining ongoing gift cycles, hard data and
impact measurements may even provide donors with the opportunities to exit the gift
relationship either feeling that they have not achieved their goals or that the organisation is
not capable of delivering the impacts that they are seeking. Simon from Dreams goes on to
provide an example of how this may play out:

“This is a very small example. So, we had a recent evaluation of a particular
project that said there wasn’t any impact on attainment for this particular
project. There was impact on all the softer skills, but there wasn’t any impact on
attainment. And because of that - so I am really transparent about that, which is
a good thing - the donor that we were talking to stopped talking to us.”

Philanthropist, Mary Cornish, provides an example from a donor’s perspective:

“It’s just about keeping an eye open, not so much for people spinning a yarn but
for where the impact might be pretty minimal – like reaching just one person,
and then it’s up to us to decide if that’s still worth funding.”

Thus, whilst feedback and impact reporting remain an important element of reciprocation,
 fundraisers in this study described a reticence to rely on hard data and impact
measurements as a sole means to provide suitable and adequate reciprocation of the
donor’s gift. Instead fundraisers subtly seek to manipulate and utilise the time in between
reports to engage the donor in interactions in which gratitude for the gift received and
regard for the donor’s actions, rather than impact, are displayed. These are tied up with
what appeared to be fundraisers’ implicit understanding of the role of adequate expressions
of gratitude and regard in engendering more gifting, and more importantly the “right” or
permission to seek additional gifts from the donor.¹ Expressions of gratitude and regard are
identified as key drivers of gifting behaviour within both the philanthropic and gifting
literature (e.g. Simmel [1950]1996; Sargeant & Shang, 2012). Additionally, previous research
has highlighted the expectation on donors’ behalf that such gratitude and regard will be
offered to them in some format (Breeze & Lloyd, 2014; McDonald et al, 2011). What is
interesting in this research is how fundraisers take the expression of this gratitude and
regard on as both a moral obligation, as well as instrumentally necessary in order to keep
the gift cycle going. For example, Becky, proposal writer from international development
organisation, Save the World, provides a good explanation of the complex nature of
expressions of gratitude and the difficulty in determining what these expressions should
contain:

“I think the thing is if you give a gift to somebody, you give it to the person and you
know the person and you get that sense of not gratitude - I don’t know. But that
sense of feeling that: ‘well I can see the joy that, that’s given, or I can see the
difference that has made to somebody’. But when that gift is given from a donor to
beneficiaries that they are never going to meet - probably never going to meet - it is
so far removed that I think some kind of thanks [is needed]. Somebody somewhere

¹ This is outside of meeting the regulatory requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to
seek permission to use an individual’s personal details to contact them or send them information regarding the
charity. Rather this “right” to ask refers to the permission granted and created through social interaction and
the nature of the relationship (Fundraising Regulator, 2018b).
along that line still needs to acknowledge that gift and give something back. Something like: ‘here is this person who has been delighted with the money that has been given because it has changed their life in some way’. They need to have a sense of impact, I think. And so that’s [the fundraiser’s] role because they are the first person in line.”

Thus, as Becky’s quote above reflects, when trying to create ongoing reciprocal gift relationships fundraisers’ stories of gift solicitation imply that they seek to take care that the gratitude and regard expressed produces the impetus for the donor to remain interested in seeking out any further positive affect their gift may produce for both themselves and the intended recipients of the gift. Derrida (1994), in describing the paradox of the gift, proposes that the expression of gratitude and regard risks cancelling out the obligation to continue the gift cycle. Thus, both he and Hyde ([1979] 2012) argue once gratitude for a gift has been displayed, any reciprocal obligations on the recipient have been addressed and the gift adequately acknowledged. However, other gift theorists such as Simmel ([1950]1996) and Gouldner (1973) suggest that it is unrequited gratitude and/ or regard that drives the continuation of the gift cycle. As such, fundraisers implicitly seek not to dispense of the imbalance in obligation that an unequal gift exchange would generate, but rather to maintain it as a means to encourage further gifting from individual donors. Fundraisers thus describe using the notion of unequal reciprocity displayed over time, of which many were acutely aware, to induce “a certain amount of ambiguity as to whether indebtedness has been repaid”, as well as to develop a relationship with donors (Gouldner, 1973, p.248).

In this way, we see fundraisers trying to actively engage donors in cycles of ritual exchange that as noted in the introduction to this section resemble Mauss’s ([1954]2011) description of the multiple rounds of prestation and counter-prestation within a gift cycle. The fundraiser as exchange partner (see Paper 5.4) expresses verbal or written gratitude at the point of receiving the gift; then will host the giver; will praise the generosity of the giver publicly, and expound the virtues of the gift given; will offer other small tokens of gratitude to the giver; and most importantly offer the donor opportunities to engage with staff, experts in the field, beneficiaries and other donors. Derrida (1994) notes that it is in this ritualistic exchange of pleasantries over time that the cycle of economic exchange is disrupted, and the gift becomes recognised as possible. It is in this time that fundraisers describe actively constructing and maintaining the narrative of the gift. A successful mediated gift exchange is, thus, not merely an exchange of two equivalent objects of value, but a reiterative process or series of social exchanges that takes place over time in which the recipient organisation and beneficiary’s regard for the donor is communicated, and hopefully the donor’s trust in the organisation to deliver his/ her particular vision of the public good is built. Consequently, the mediated gift exchange becomes a cycle that is increasingly difficult for the donor to extract themself from if they are not to be seen to be reneging on their commitment to the organisation and the beneficiary. Thus, in this way, the strategy of simulating a reciprocal gift relationship seeks to secure the “holy” grail of the long-term, committed supporter.
However, a further tension emerges in the data between the differences in perspective adopted by fundraisers and donors regarding the perceived commitments and benefits sought by the donor from their philanthropic giving; and the balance fundraisers seek between maintaining an ongoing gift cycle and meeting the donor’s needs and interests. Secondary analysis of donors’ interviews identifies the idea that givers may be loath to fund work that would enter them into long term ongoing gift cycles from which there is no obvious exit point and in which they would be obliged to continue giving to the same project or programme. Whilst many of the major donors expressed a desire in interviews to develop long-term relationships with recipients of their gifts, most expressed a corresponding desire for time-bound projects or programmes, coupled with expectations that their giving to those projects will stop at some point and that they will move on to give to a different project or different organisation. This offers an advance on the theory proposed by Andreoni et. al. (2011) that not only do givers avoid being asked for a charitable gift, but once they have given avoid continuing the relationship by maintaining as much control over the types of gift given and the obligations that a long-term reciprocal gift relationship would tie them to. In other words, there is a need to balance donors’ desire to acquire the status and symbolic benefits that the narrative of the gift relationship provides, without the obligations that a long-term gift relationship would require. What remains is the desire on the part of donors to have an understanding of, and to control the boundaries of their giving. Within this context the project or packaging up of the work gives a distinct time-boundary to the gift that is employed in differing and often competing ways by donors and fundraisers respectively.

To reiterate, a gift package is framed as a piece of work that will be completed within a certain time period and the outcome will be the purchase of an item or a service which will result in the difference sought by the donor within that period. However, and of note for this study, the framing of the gift as being completed within a certain time frame is utilised as a signalling tool, from the fundraisers’ perspective, that the gift has a limited life span and time-limited value; and that another gift will be sought. Thus, whilst donors appear to be using time-bounded packages of work to find ways of limiting or controlling the obligations involved in longer-term gift relationships, fundraisers seek to utilise these as a means to encourage the donor to remain within the relationship and seek out opportunities to solicit further gifts. Eugene, major gifts fundraiser from Save the World, provides an example of this thinking:

“Because if we've got a donor who wants to give £10,000 and, obviously, that donor wants a relationship, and if we can report back on that relationship at three months and then at six months and say look here's a story and here's an update, then we know that our relationship with the supporter is only going to increase and their giving is going to increase in time. Or it's not going increase, but it is going to keep with us. “

Eugene speaks here about how the packaging of work not only imbues a gift with a sense of timing – there will be something to report on in three and six months’ time - thereby overcoming the problem of givers needing to see the impact of their giving within a shorter time period than ongoing services provide, but also that there is an expectation of an ongoing gift relationship in which reciprocal gift exchanges are committed to. Additionally, this builds in opportunities for reciprocal interactions, as well as times and events at which to express and display gratitude and regard.
It is worth noting at this juncture is the attempt by fundraisers within the sample engaging with greater numbers of donors and with donors from a distance, to situate the gift within similar gift cycles. Fundraisers working with large numbers of lower-level givers describe establishing cyclical communications alternating between solicitation, expressions of thanks and gratitude, both written and verbal, and regular feedback. The mechanisms for this vary from annual fundraising events to a cycle of regular appeals and newsletters. What is central to these approaches is an attempt to replicate the process outlined by Eugene above, whereby givers are asked to give and then receive feedback at regular intervals of what their gifts have been assigned to and the impact that these gifts may have had. Thereby, instituting the cycle of communications that Waters (2016) and Burnett (2002) identify as vital to the establishment of long-term reciprocal gifts relationships with donors across the spectrum. Fundraiser, Victoria, provides an example of the approach taken at See Again:

“So, we've got generic thank you letters that say 200 people get diagnosed every day, but we manage to help this many people through our helpline; this many people through our support groups; you know that sort of thing. So it’s a little bit about how your money has been used. So regular donors, four times a year, they get [newsletter name], but there's also a magazine .... called [magazine name], so what's new in research and the things we have funded. So that's the sort of thing we might send once a year.”

What remains noteworthy for this research, and is a key finding, is that these cyclical communications are used to manipulate timelines as a means to engage donors in longer term gift relationships, which both previous studies on giving behaviour as well as some of the donors’ accounts in this study, suggest donors may resist entering into (Burnett, 2002; Nichols, 2004; Andreoni, et al, 2011) . Reciprocity within these relationships, thus, resemble what Moody (2008) describes as “expressive performances” or “communicative acts” (Ungureanu, 2013) of each party’s current status and expectations from within the mediated gift cycle.

**Concluding comments – limited donor choice and philanthropic particularism**

This paper has demonstrated how fundraisers actively and intentionally construct “objects of the gift” from the resources available within the mediated gift field as a means to “materialise” the reciprocal gift relationship they seek to establish with donors (Chevalier, 2014, p.60). Krause (2014), whose argument is employed to demonstrate this process, outlines how non-profit organisations create projects or packages of work as commodities that can be presented to institutional donors for purchase. She notes that whilst these packages are not things in and of themselves, “they can be treated as things” (p. 40) (her emphasis), that arguably can be appropriated and given to a third party. In this paper we find fundraisers who work with individual donors engaging in similar processes to create gift packages that serve two purposes. In the first instance, they serve to produce a defined piece of work or project that the giver can identify with from the complex mass that is a charitable organisation’s work. More importantly, the gift package provides the base material with which the reciprocal gift relationship can be constructed by producing a narrative around which the gift relationship can be structured. In creating smaller chunks of work with distinct values, the fundraiser creates an object which a donor can appropriate and give to a distant recipient, whether it be tangible items or services, or the softer
outcomes donors repeatedly express wanting to give or achieve for beneficiaries. Further, by setting up a gift package with an agreed outcome to be reached within a given time-frame, the fundraiser puts in place the objects around which the means to reciprocate the donor’s gift and then re-engage the donor in the next, overlapping round of gifting. In this way, the idea of a gift relationship that is not just centred around the exchange of money or a single gift purchase is established. The economic transaction at the heart of the charitable gift becomes less important, and the narrative of the gift can take hold.

What emerges is a picture of fundraising as not only gift solicitation but, as a process where fundraisers seek to create meaning and connection where it did not previously exist between givers and distance recipients. At the heart of the process is the evocation of an object to which the language of the gift adds meaning and which the donor can be seen to appropriate on behalf of the end recipient. In this way, this paper argues, fundraisers assist donors and organisations in discursively and narratively transmuting the economic exchange of the donation into a gift.

Two consequences of this transmutation are identified here, which we suggest may have wider implications for our understandings of philanthropic choice and its impact on the non-profit sector and merit further consideration. In the first instance, fundraisers make choices about which elements of the non-profit organisation’s work are most suited to “making presents” and suitable gift packages, and actively exclude those elements and stories that they feel will not appeal to donors. This results, as this research finds, in donors being presented with a limited number of reinterpreted and reframed narratives of the work of the organisation that fundraisers seek to control. The argument presented here is that this undoubtedly contributes to constraining donor choice, as donors rely in part on the incomplete information and re-framed narratives thus presented to them to make their gifting and re-gifting choices. It also, in many instances, mediates donor influence to those aspects of the organisation’s work that donors fund; and only in terms of the specific impact that donors seek to achieve. This is particularly so for those donors who may give less or who have established distant reciprocal relationships with organisations, as reciprocal interaction, as well as donor involvement, is both limited and highly routinised.

The second and related consequence of “making presents” has a dual impact of contributing to uneven distribution of philanthropic resources, whilst entrenching misconceptions amongst givers of the nature and parameters of non-profit organisations’ work and missions, and, thus the nature and distribution of beneficiary need. As fundraisers become more selective about which organisational narratives will appeal to donors, the findings from this study suggest that the result is the skewing of philanthropic gifting towards those causes and projects contained within the narratives with which donors are made most familiar, as a result of fundraisers’ efforts. Simultaneously, as both fundraisers and staff from a number of charities in this research observed, over time the entrenchment of existing or development of new misconceptions amongst givers as to the breadth, depth and primary focus of organisation’s work, has often led to excess funding for some strategic programmes and beneficiaries; and depleted, or in some cases no, budget for subsequently less visible programmes.
Arguably these findings provide further evidence for the already recognised and theorised problem of the uneven distribution of funding that a reliance on philanthropic gift giving can produce (Salamon, 1987; Reich, 2018; MacKenzie, 2012; Coltfelter, 1992). However, whilst previous research considers the effects of distribution that philanthropic particularism – i.e. donor preference and control as to where donations are placed - inflicts across the non-profit sector (e.g. Barman, 2007; Ostrander; 2007; Daly, 2011; Kendall, 2003), this research suggests that fundraising practice may contribute to these processes from within non-profit organisations, as some organisational and beneficiary stories simply get told more than others.

References


