

EVIDENCE BASED INSIGHTS

FUNDRAISING WITHOUT EXPLOITING SUFFERING



COMPASSION. EVIDENCE. CHANGE.
The Stray Dog Solidarity Alliance

A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR ANIMAL-WELFARE ORGANISATIONS

How to communicate
urgent cases effectively
while retaining dignity,
building trust and
accounting for the
money raised.



PEOPLE



PRACTICE



PROGRESS

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SHARING KNOWLEDGE
STRENGTHENING PRACTICE
IMPROVING LIVES



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FOR STRAY DOGS

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00 | IMPORTANT DISCLAIMER

Please read before using this guide

DOGS
DESERVE
BETTER

This publication is provided for general educational and informational purposes only. It does not constitute legal, regulatory, accounting, fundraising, data-protection or other professional advice and should not be treated as a substitute for advice based on the circumstances of a particular organisation or fundraising campaign.

Fundraising laws, financial reporting requirements, charitable solicitation rules, data-protection obligations and the treatment of restricted donations differ between countries and jurisdictions and may change over time. Organisations should obtain appropriate professional advice where necessary.

This guide does not suggest that animal-welfare organisations should hide suffering or avoid emotional fundraising. Serious injury, disease, neglect, cruelty and death are realities of animal-welfare work. Showing those realities can help people understand why intervention is necessary.

The purpose of this guide is to help organisations communicate that need accurately and proportionately, explain what donations will support, maintain appropriate records and keep supporters informed about the outcome.

Members of the Stray Dog Solidarity Alliance are independent individuals and organisations. The Alliance does not direct, control or supervise their activities and is not responsible for their independent fundraising, financial decisions, statements or omissions.



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00 | ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Raising money without turning suffering into a product

Animal-welfare organisations often fundraise in circumstances that are difficult to communicate calmly. A dog may need surgery immediately. Several animals may arrive at once. Treatment costs can change overnight. Photographs may be upsetting because the condition of the animal is upsetting.

Emotion is therefore not the problem.

The risk arises when the pressure to raise money begins to change how a case is presented: uncertainty becomes certainty, the most distressing photograph becomes the permanent image of the animal, deadlines are created without a genuine basis or supporters are left unclear about what happened to the money or the animal afterwards.

Small organisations can be particularly exposed. The same person may rescue the dog, speak to the veterinarian, take photographs, write the appeal, answer messages and manage the donations. Formal fundraising procedures may seem remote from the immediate task of getting an animal into treatment.

This guide provides a practical framework that can be used in exactly those circumstances.

*Trust today.
More lives tomorrow.*

*Real dogs.
Real care.
A better future.*



THE PURPOSE OF THIS PUBLICATION

To help animal-welfare organisations raise funds urgently and effectively while protecting accuracy, animal dignity, donor trust and financial accountability.



PUBLICATION AND USE

Published by the Stray Dog Solidarity Alliance. This resource is free to download, use and share with attribution. Organisations may adapt the templates for their own operations and jurisdiction.



A STRONGER FUTURE

By fundraising responsibly, we protect the animals, respect our supporters and build a fairer, safer and kinder world for stray dogs.



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*Real dogs.
Real care.
A better future.*

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A practical guide to responsible and transparent animal-welfare fundraising.

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*Real stories.
Real change.*

01 | WHY FUNDRAISING ETHICS MATTER

The particular pressures of animal-welfare fundraising

Animal-welfare fundraising combines several things that make careful communication difficult: distress, urgency, uncertainty and money.

An animal may arrive with no known history. Treatment may begin before a full diagnosis is available. Costs can rise as new problems are discovered. Meanwhile, the organisation may need to raise money immediately.

Social media adds another pressure. Graphic photographs, dramatic stories and urgent appeals can travel further than routine updates about rehabilitation, food, vaccinations or continuing care. This can unintentionally reward organisations for presenting every case at its most distressing.

The answer is not to remove emotion from fundraising. Compassion is one of the reasons people donate. The objective is to make sure that the emotional power of a case does not overtake the evidence.

*Emotion brings people to the cause.
Evidence keeps their trust.
Both are essential.*

WHERE PROBLEMS BEGIN

Common risks include:

-  assuming how an injury occurred
-  presenting an initial suspicion as a veterinary diagnosis
-  choosing imagery primarily because it is shocking
-  creating urgency that has no identifiable basis
-  failing to explain what donations will support
-  continuing to fundraise after circumstances have materially changed
-  failing to decide how surplus funds will be used
-  ending communication once the fundraising target has been reached

Most of these problems can be reduced before an appeal is published.



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02 | NEED, EMOTION OR EXPLOITATION?

A decision framework

Emotional fundraising is not automatically exploitative. The relevant question is how the animal, the evidence and the financial need are being presented.

RESPONSIBLE FUNDRAISING	POTENTIAL EXPLOITATION
 Shows an animal's condition to explain the need	 Selects imagery primarily for shock value
 States what is known	 Adds an unverified story about how suffering occurred
 Attributes veterinary information appropriately	 Presents assumptions as clinical fact
 Explains what donations will support	 Makes an emotional appeal without a clear financial purpose
 Uses a genuine deadline	 Creates artificial countdowns
 Updates the appeal when circumstances change	 Continues using information known to be outdated
 Shows recovery as well as initial suffering	 Repeatedly circulates the animal's worst images
 Maintains records of income and expenditure	 Cannot establish how case-specific funds were used
 Reports unsuccessful outcomes	 Stops reporting when the outcome is difficult



A NECESSARY SAFEGUARD

A disturbing photograph is not evidence of unethical fundraising. There will be circumstances in which showing the severity of an injury, disease or neglect is necessary to explain what an organisation has encountered.

The test is purpose and proportionality, not whether an image makes people uncomfortable.



FIVE QUESTIONS BEFORE PUBLISHING

- 1 What do we know, and how do we know it?
- 2 Does the material we are publishing help explain the case?
- 3 Can a supporter understand what their donation will fund?
- 4 Is any urgency or deadline genuine?
- 5 Can we account for the money and report the outcome?



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03 | TELL THE CASE ACCURATELY

Facts, diagnosis, uncertainty and attribution

An animal cannot explain how they became injured, ill or abandoned. In many cases the organisation will never know.

That gap should remain a gap.

If a dog is found with a fractured leg, the fracture can be reported. If a veterinarian believes the injury is consistent with a particular cause, that opinion can be attributed appropriately. If a witness provides information, it can be described as a witness account where publication is appropriate.

What should not happen is the creation of a more dramatic history simply because it makes the fundraising appeal stronger.



Separate four things



OBSERVED

What the organisation can directly establish: where the animal was found, visible condition, weight, behaviour or other recorded circumstances.



REPORTED

Information supplied by a witness, finder, owner, shelter, municipality or another organisation.



CLINICALLY ESTABLISHED

Diagnosis, prognosis and treatment information provided by an appropriately qualified veterinary professional.



UNKNOWN

Anything that cannot currently be established. "Unknown" is a legitimate answer.



Update when the evidence changes

Early information is sometimes wrong. A suspected fracture may prove to be something else. An apparently abandoned dog may have an owner. A treatment plan may change after diagnostic tests.

Where the change is significant to the fundraising appeal, update the appeal rather than leaving the original account uncorrected.



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04 | CHOOSING WHAT TO SHOW

Images, video, graphic content and dignity

Photographs are often evidence. They record the condition in which an animal was found, demonstrate the seriousness of a case and allow supporters to see what their help is addressing.

Graphic material nevertheless requires judgement.

Before publishing, ask what the image contributes. A photograph that documents a wound may be necessary. Five close-up photographs of the same wound may add nothing except additional distress.

Where less graphic material communicates the same information adequately, consider using it.

REAL STORIES
REAL NEEDS
RESPONSIBLE
FUNDRAISING

As the animal changes, the story should change

An emergency appeal may understandably begin with photographs taken at intake. If the animal subsequently improves, later communication should reflect that progress.

Continuing to use the original distressing photograph long after recovery can leave supporters with an inaccurate impression of the animal's current condition.

It also risks turning one moment of vulnerability into a permanent fundraising asset.



AT INTAKE



DURING TREATMENT



IN RECOVERY

Use up-to-date images to show progress where possible.

Graphic content checklist

Before publishing highly distressing material, consider:



Is it necessary to understand the case?



Is the amount shown proportionate?



Would a warning be appropriate?



Does it expose identifying information about another person?



Is there a later image that more accurately represents the animal now?



Are we documenting suffering or simply amplifying it?

Show the reality when there is a reason to show it. Choose images with care, context and compassion.



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*Real needs
real support
real change*

05 | MAKING THE ASK

Costs, targets, urgency and purpose

A supporter should be able to understand what help is being requested.

That does not require an organisation to know the final cost of treatment before fundraising begins. Emergency cases rarely work that neatly.

An appeal can explain that funds are being raised towards examination, diagnostic tests, surgery, hospitalisation, medication, rehabilitation, transport or continuing care. If the full cost is unknown, say so.



TARGETS

Set a realistic and evidence-based target

A fundraising target should have a reasonable basis. This might be a veterinary estimate, quotation, anticipated period of hospitalisation or a calculated programme cost.

If the estimate changes substantially, the public information should change with it.

Be clear whether the target covers an individual animal or a broader programme of work.



URGENCY

Let the circumstances set the timeline

Urgency should come from the circumstances.

A veterinary procedure scheduled for the following morning creates a real deadline. A hospital requiring payment before treatment can continue creates a real deadline.

A food supply that will run out on a known date may create a real deadline.

A social-media countdown created simply to increase conversion does not.

Use clear, honest language about why funds are needed now.



LONG-TERM COSTS

Ongoing care is legitimate and important

Routine and continuing expenditure is legitimate fundraising.

Food, medication, rehabilitation, mobility equipment, boarding, sanctuary care and follow-up treatment may lack the drama of emergency surgery but can represent a substantial part of the actual cost of protecting an animal.

Still show it. It is an important part of rescue work.

Dogs need more than emergency treatment. Your support helps with the care that comes next.



BE CLEAR ABOUT PURPOSE

Supporters are more likely to give when they understand what their donation will achieve.

Clear, honest communication builds trust, encourages longer-term support and ultimately helps more dogs.

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*Real
accountability.
Real change.*

06 | RESTRICTED AND SURPLUS FUNDS

When circumstances or costs change

In animal welfare, circumstances can change. A case may be more complex than first thought. Costs may be higher or lower than estimated. An animal may recover more quickly than expected or, despite treatment, may not survive.

It is important to plan for these possibilities, be clear with supporters and follow the terms of any restricted donations.



RESTRICTED FUNDS

If a donation is made for a specific animal or purpose and it is described as restricted, it must be used for that purpose, in line with the terms set out to donors and any applicable legal requirements.



WHEN COSTS CHANGE

Keep supporters informed if costs are significantly higher or lower than expected. Explain the reason for the change and how any shortfall will be met or surplus will be handled.



SURPLUS FUNDS

Do not assume surplus funds can be redirected. State clearly in advance how any surplus will be used. If this was not explained when donations were made, check the applicable rules and, where required, obtain donor consent before using the funds for another purpose.



KEEP SUPPORTERS INFORMED

Be transparent about outcomes. If the original need has changed or the fundraising target has been met, let supporters know what will happen to any remaining funds and how they will be used.

KEY POINTS

- ✓ Be clear from the start if donations are restricted.
- ✓ Explain any changes in costs or circumstances.
- ✓ State in advance how surplus funds will be used.
- ✓ Follow applicable laws and platform rules.
- ✓ Keep supporters informed.



IMPORTANT

You must tell your donors if the situation changes significantly. Surplus funds should only be used for another purpose if this was explained when donations were made, or if you have checked the applicable rules and, where required, obtained donor consent. Keep a record of all decisions and communications.



GOOD PRACTICE

Clear communication builds trust. When supporters understand how their donations are used, they are more likely to continue supporting your work.

*Transparency today.
Continued support tomorrow.*



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*Transparency
builds trust*

07 | KEEP THE FINANCIAL TRAIL

Records, reconciliation and accountability

Public accountability does not require publishing an organisation's entire accounting system online. It does require records.

For a significant case-specific appeal, an organisation should be able to reconstruct what happened financially: what was requested, what was received, what was spent and how any remaining funds were treated.

Keep together

For each case-specific appeal, keep together:

-  the original fundraising appeal;
-  later amendments to the appeal;
-  fundraising-platform reports;
-  veterinary estimates and invoices;
-  receipts and payment records;
-  relevant transport or care costs;
-  records of refunds where applicable;
-  the amount raised;
-  the final expenditure; and
-  the treatment of any remaining balance.



RECONCILE THE CAMPAIGN

Once the immediate fundraising period has ended, compare the money received with the costs attributed to the appeal.

If there is a difference, explain why and set out what has happened to any remaining funds.



WHY RECORDS MATTER

- Protects donors and maintains their trust
- Demonstrates responsible use of funds
- Helps identify lessons for future appeals
- Supports good governance
- Ultimately helps more animals

“

Good records protect donors, animals and the organisation itself.



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08 | AFTER THE DONATION

The responsibility does not end at checkout

A fundraising appeal creates a relationship between the organisation and the people who responded to it.

Supporters do not need a running commentary on every veterinary appointment, but significant developments should not disappear from view.

If surgery took place, say so. If treatment changed, explain the significant change. If rehabilitation will take months, supporters can be told that the case has moved into longer-term care.

Their story continues because you care



DIFFICULT OUTCOMES

Not every animal survives.

Where an animal dies despite treatment, the organisation should normally close the story rather than simply stop mentioning the case.

The same principle applies where euthanasia becomes necessary on welfare grounds, treatment fails or the eventual outcome differs substantially from the one anticipated when fundraising began.

Accuracy does not stop being important when the news is painful.

Honesty in difficult moments builds trust for the future.



CLOSE THE LOOP

A useful final update can be very simple:



What happened



What supporters funded



What happens next

This gives supporters a clear picture of the outcome and how their donation has made a difference, even if the animal's journey has not ended in the way everyone hoped.

Keeping supporters informed shows respect for their trust and for the animals in our care.



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*Transparency
builds trust*

09 | WHEN FUNDRAISING GOES WRONG

When fundraising goes wrong

Correct, account, learn

Mistakes happen. An incorrect figure may be published, a diagnosis may change or an appeal may remain live after its purpose has changed.

The appropriate response depends on the significance of the error.

A minor typographical mistake may simply need correcting. A material error affecting why people donated may require a visible explanation.



DO NOT QUIETLY REWRITE HISTORY

Where a substantive claim has already been widely published, editing the original post without acknowledging the change can create further distrust.

Record the correction and explain it proportionately.

Be open about what changed, why it changed and when.



WHEN CONFIDENCE HAS BEEN DAMAGED

Provide evidence capable of addressing the issue. Correct inaccurate information. Reconcile the campaign. Make refunds where required or appropriate. Change the process that allowed the problem to occur.

Defensiveness does not restore trust. Evidence can.

Use the issue as an opportunity to strengthen your processes.



COMPLAINTS

Provide a route through which supporters can raise reasonable concerns about fundraising. Record significant complaints and the organisation's response.

Questions about money should not automatically be treated as hostility.

A respectful complaints process shows that you take supporters seriously.



A BETTER WAY FORWARD

- ✓ Acknowledge the error
- ✓ Explain what happened
- ✓ Show the correct information
- ✓ Account for the funds
- ✓ Make amends where appropriate
- ✓ Learn and improve

Honesty and accountability protect your supporters, your organisation and, most importantly, the animals.



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10 | A BETTER FUNDRAISING CULTURE

Moving beyond permanent crisis

Animals need urgent help, and there will always be times when emergency fundraising is necessary. But a healthier fundraising culture is about more than reacting to crisis. It is about building a long-term, responsible and sustainable approach that protects animals, supports people and builds trust.



*Kindness
today.
A better
tomorrow.*



PLAN AHEAD

Develop a fundraising strategy that includes both emergency and ongoing needs. Planning ahead helps reduce pressure, allows time for thoughtful communication and supports a more balanced approach.



FOCUS ON LONG-TERM IMPACT

Where possible, raise funds for preventative work such as spay/neuter, vaccinations, community support and shelter improvements. These efforts can reduce future suffering and the need for repeated emergency appeals.



BE HONEST ABOUT CHALLENGES

It is acceptable to explain the difficulties your organisation faces. Supporters are more likely to stay with you when you are open about the realities, including what you can and cannot do.



INVEST IN CAPACITY

A stronger organisation can help more animals. Consider how funding can be used to build infrastructure, improve systems, support staff and volunteers, and develop skills.



VALUE YOUR SUPPORTERS

Treat donors with respect. Keep them informed, show the difference their support makes and acknowledge their contribution. A trusted relationship with supporters is built over time through honest and regular communication.



LEARN AND IMPROVE

Take time to review what works and what could be better. Seek feedback, learn from experience and be open to change. A culture of learning helps you grow and do more for animals in the future.



A KINDER, MORE SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Moving beyond a cycle of permanent crisis allows organisations to create lasting change. By combining urgent action with long-term planning, transparency and care for supporters, we can build a fundraising culture that helps more animals and creates a fairer, kinder world for stray dogs.

Sustainable fundraising today builds a kinder tomorrow.



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*Real cases.
Real lessons.
A better future.*

11 | ANONYMISED CASE PATTERNS

What common situations can teach us

Every case is different, but common patterns can help us fundraise more responsibly and maintain the trust of our supporters.

1 THE UNKNOWN INJURY



A dog is found with a severe injury. Nobody witnessed what happened, but the fundraising post states that the dog was deliberately attacked.

! Risk: an assumption has become a factual claim.

✓ Better approach: describe the injury, treatment and circumstances in which the dog was found. Attribute ~~earn~~ opinion about possible cause.

2 THE PHOTOGRAPH THAT NEVER CHANGES



THEN



NOW

An animal arrives emaciated and seriously ill. Treatment succeeds, but the original intake photograph continues to be used repeatedly in fundraising months later.

! Risk: supporters may believe the animal remains in the condition shown.

✓ Better approach: retain the original image as part of the documented story while using current photographs when describing current needs.

3 THE UNEXPECTED SURPLUS

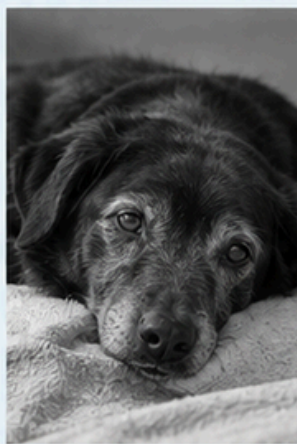


An appeal raises substantially more than the eventual veterinary cost.

! Risk: donors do not know what happened to the remaining money.

✓ Better approach: establish and publish a surplus policy before fundraising and provide an update where a significant balance remains.

4 THE UNSUCCESSFUL OUTCOME



Money is raised for treatment, but the animal dies. The organisation stops posting about the case.

! Risk: supporters are left without an outcome and may question whether treatment occurred.

✓ Better approach: report the death sensitively, explain that treatment was provided and, where relevant, explain how the funds were used.



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12 | PRACTICAL TEMPLATES

Ready-to-adapt tools

These templates can be used and adapted by animal-welfare organisations to support responsible and transparent fundraising.

*Practical support.
Real change.*

TEMPLATE 1 Pre-publication fundraising record



Animal/case reference	
Date appeal prepared	
Fundraising purpose	
Evidence supporting case description	
Veterinary information/diagnosis	
Known costs	
Estimated costs	
Target and basis	
Deadline and basis	
Images/video approved	
Graphic-content warning required?	
Surplus-fund position	
Person approving publication	

TEMPLATE 2 Five-point appeal check



☐ The factual account is supportable.



☐ Veterinary information is correctly attributed.



☐ The purpose of the fundraising is clear.



☐ Any deadline or urgency has a genuine basis.



☐ The organisation knows how donations will be recorded and reconciled.

TEMPLATE 3 Campaign reconciliation



Campaign reference	
Published target	
Total gross donations	
Platform/payment fees	
Net funds received	
Veterinary expenditure	
Other stated expenditure	
Balance remaining	
Treatment of balance	
Final supporter update	
Date campaign closed	
Reviewed by	

TEMPLATE 4 Outcome update



Original need:

What was the organisation raising money to address?



What happened:

Record the significant treatment or outcome.



Funds:

Explain any material difference between the original target and actual position.



What happens next:

Recovery, rehabilitation, continuing treatment, sanctuary care, return, adoption or closure of the case.



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| BEFORE YOU PUBLISH

Eight questions to ask before you publish

Use this quick check to make sure your appeal is accurate, responsible and transparent.

*Raise.
Check.
Make it count*



- **1 What is the factual basis?**
Is the information you are sharing accurate, evidence-based and clearly sourced?
- **2 How is veterinary information presented?**
Is it correctly attributed and do you make it clear what is known and what is still uncertain?
- **3 What images or video are you using?**
Are they necessary, respectful and an accurate representation of the animal's condition?
- **4 What is the purpose of the fundraising?**
Is it clear what the money will be used for and how the target has been calculated?
- **5 Is any deadline or urgency justified?**
Do you have a genuine basis for the timescale and have you explained this clearly to supporters?
- **6 How will the organisation record and account for the money?**
Do you have a plan to track donations, reconcile funds and report on what has been spent?
- **7 Have you considered what happens if circumstances change?**
Do you have a clear position on restricted and surplus funds?
- **8 Is the appeal ready to publish?**
Has the appeal been reviewed and approved by the appropriate person before it is shared?



FINAL CHECK

If you cannot answer all of these questions confidently, take more time before you publish. A careful approach protects the animal, your supporters and your organisation.

*Thoughtful
fundraising today.
A fairer future
for more animals
tomorrow.*



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Alliance Standard

Animal-welfare fundraising can be emotional because animal suffering is emotional. It can be urgent because veterinary care is often urgent. Neither requires exaggeration.



BE HONEST

Show the reality when there is a reason to show it.



BE ACCURATE

Describe what is known without filling gaps with a more compelling story.



BE CLEAR

Tell people what their money will support.



BE ACCOUNTABLE

Maintain the records necessary to account for it afterwards.



PUT THE ANIMAL FIRST

Most importantly, allow the animal's story to move forward.



*Real dogs.
Real care.
A better future.*

*Suffering may explain why help is needed.
It should never become the product being sold.*



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R | REFERENCES

Sources and further guidance

*Knowledge
leads to kinder
action.*

The following sources informed the content of this guide. They provide further information on fundraising practice, regulation, data protection and donor communications. They are particularly useful for organisations that want to explore the issues covered in more detail.



Fundraising Regulator Code of Fundraising Practice (2025)

Standards covering truthful fundraising communications, evidence for claims, treatment of donors and restricted-purpose appeals. The current Code took effect on 1 November 2025.

WEBSITE

www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/code



Fundraising Regulator Introduction to the Code of Fundraising Practice

Practical guidance on legal, open, honest and respectful fundraising and organisational responsibility for fundraising carried out by staff, volunteers and third parties.

WEBSITE

www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/about-fundraising/resources/introduction-code-fundraising-practice



Fundraising Regulator Complaints Handling Guidance

Guidance for organisations on receiving, recording and responding appropriately to fundraising complaints.

WEBSITE

www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/about-fundraising/resources/complaints-handling-guidance-charities-and-third-party-fundraising



Fundraising Regulator Documenting Your Fundraising Decisions

Supporting guidance on maintaining appropriate records of fundraising decisions and organisational oversight.

WEBSITE

www.fundraisingregulator.org.uk/code/code-support-guides



Charity Commission for England and Wales Charity Fundraising Appeals for Specific Purposes

Guidance on what charities should consider when an appeal raises more than required, raises insufficient funds or can no longer achieve its stated purpose. Updated February 2026.

WEBSITE

www.gov.uk/government/publications/charity-fundraising-appeals-for-specific-purposes



Information Commissioner's Office Direct Marketing Guidance

Guidance on data protection, supporter communications, marketing preferences and the use of personal information in fundraising and other direct marketing.

WEBSITE

www.ico.org.uk/for-organisations/direct-marketing-and-privacy-and-electronic-communications/direct-marketing-guidance



Information Commissioner's Office Guidance on Direct Marketing Using Electronic Mail

Current guidance covering email, text and other electronic direct marketing, including the charitable-purpose soft opt-in introduced under the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025.

WEBSITE

www.ico.org.uk/for-organisations/direct-marketing-and-privacy-and-electronic-communications/guidance-on-direct-marketing-using-electronic-mail



International use

Fundraising regulation varies considerably between jurisdictions. The UK sources above provide useful examples of established fundraising standards but should not be treated as statements of law outside the jurisdictions to which they apply. Organisations should check the laws, regulatory requirements, platform terms and financial rules applicable where they operate and fundraise.

Accessed
September 2026.