

# Impressions Gallery

## Embedding charitable messaging



Planet Yorkshire Exhibition at Impressions Gallery © Impressions Gallery

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# Impressions Gallery

## Embedding charitable messaging

Impressions Gallery is a charity that helps people to understand the world through photography. Based in Bradford, we bring the best of contemporary photography to a wide and culturally diverse audience.

Like many arts organisations in recent years, we identified the need to diversify our income streams in addition to public funding.

We applied for Catalyst funding from Arts Council England in 2013 to build our fundraising capacity. We are now part way through our second Catalyst-funded project (Catalyst Evolve).

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## Training

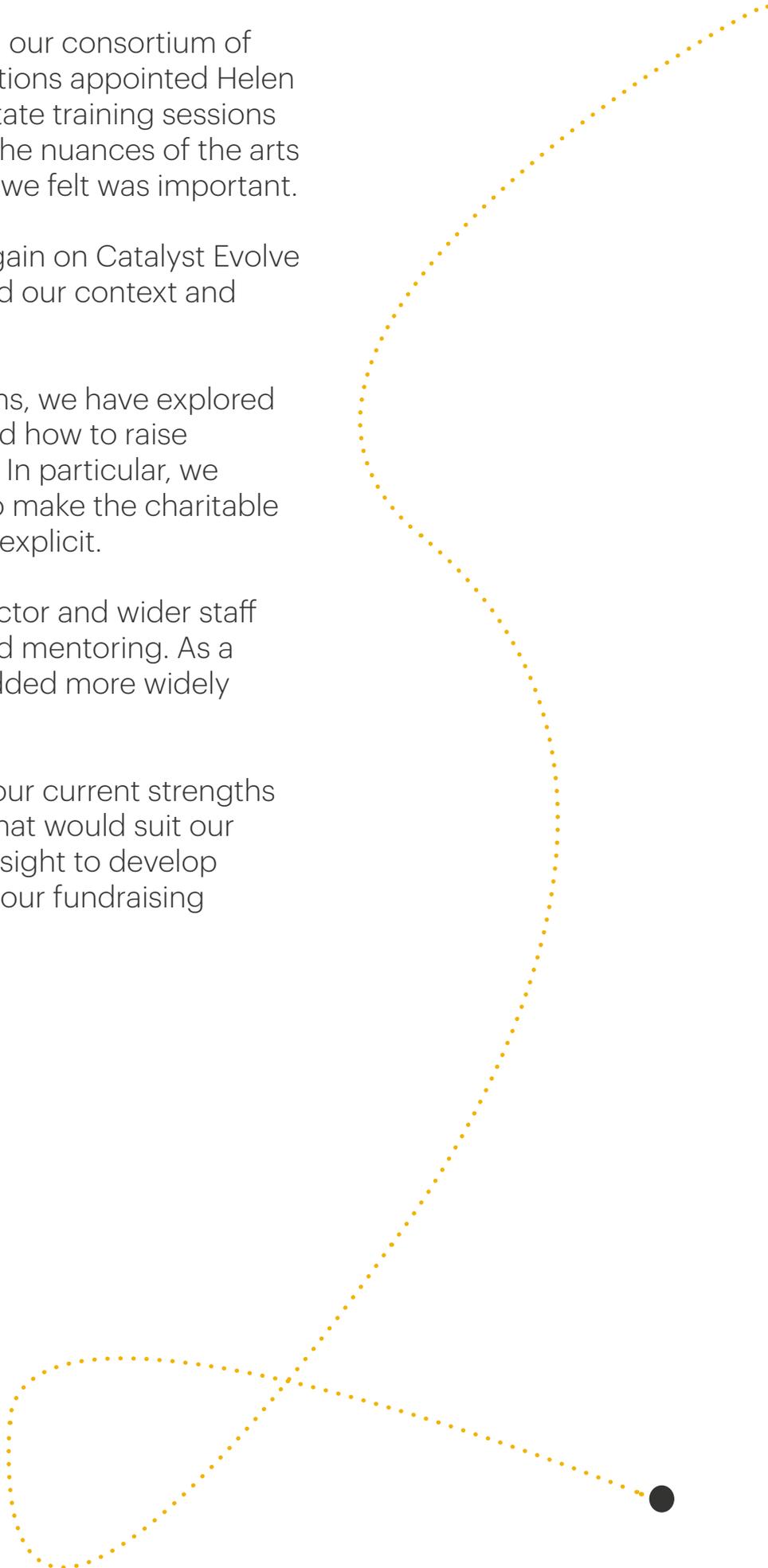
During our first Catalyst project, our consortium of northern photography organisations appointed Helen Jenkins (117 Consulting) to facilitate training sessions for the group. She understood the nuances of the arts and wider charity sector, which we felt was important.

We chose to work with Helen again on Catalyst Evolve because she already understood our context and fundraising history.

Through various training sessions, we have explored specific forms of fundraising and how to raise awareness of our charity status. In particular, we worked on our 'elevator pitch' to make the charitable worth of the organisation more explicit.

Members of the Board, our Director and wider staff team participated in training and mentoring. As a result fundraising is now embedded more widely across the organisation.

The training helped us identify our current strengths and potential income streams that would suit our organisation. We've used that insight to develop fundraising priorities and refine our fundraising strategy.



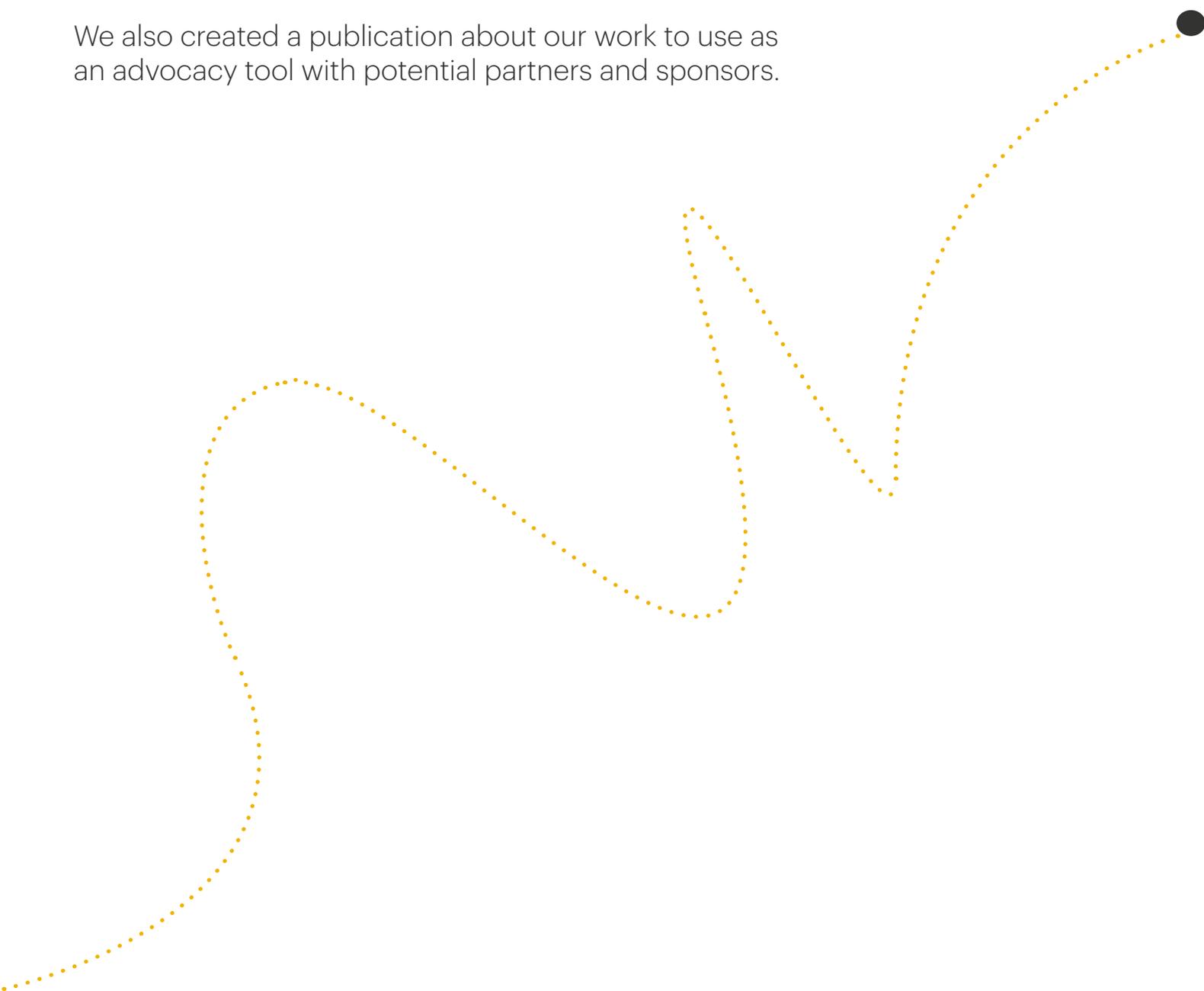
## Shift in communication

An important step in improving our fundraising has been to position ourselves more clearly as a charity. We haven't changed our activity or vision but we now communicate it differently to demonstrate our charitable worth.

One of the first things we did was to purchase a donations box, which helped to signal that we are a charity. We also invite people to make a donation when they book onto free events at the gallery, and use this opportunity to explain how the gallery is funded.

The involvement of the staff in training has helped everyone to talk about the gallery as a charity and raised confidence in asking for donations. Fundraising duties have also been included in job descriptions and induction processes for new staff.

We also created a publication about our work to use as an advocacy tool with potential partners and sponsors.



## Capacity building

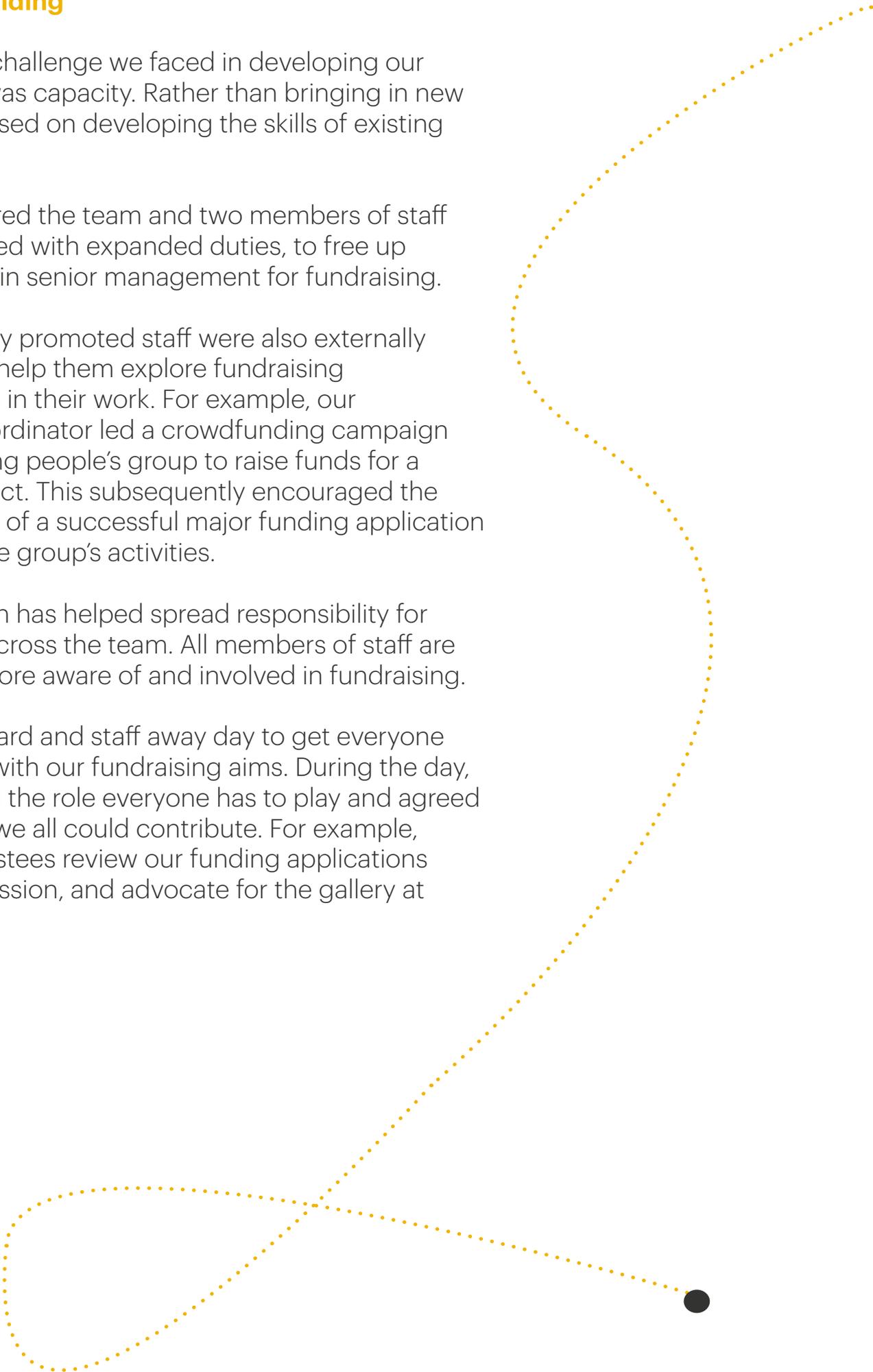
The biggest challenge we faced in developing our fundraising was capacity. Rather than bringing in new staff, we focused on developing the skills of existing staff.

We restructured the team and two members of staff were promoted with expanded duties, to free up capacity within senior management for fundraising.

The two newly promoted staff were also externally mentored to help them explore fundraising opportunities in their work. For example, our Learning Coordinator led a crowdfunding campaign with our young people's group to raise funds for a specific project. This subsequently encouraged the development of a successful major funding application to support the group's activities.

This approach has helped spread responsibility for fundraising across the team. All members of staff are now much more aware of and involved in fundraising.

We held a board and staff away day to get everyone up to speed with our fundraising aims. During the day, we discussed the role everyone has to play and agreed simple ways we all could contribute. For example, individual trustees review our funding applications before submission, and advocate for the gallery at events.



## Supporter research

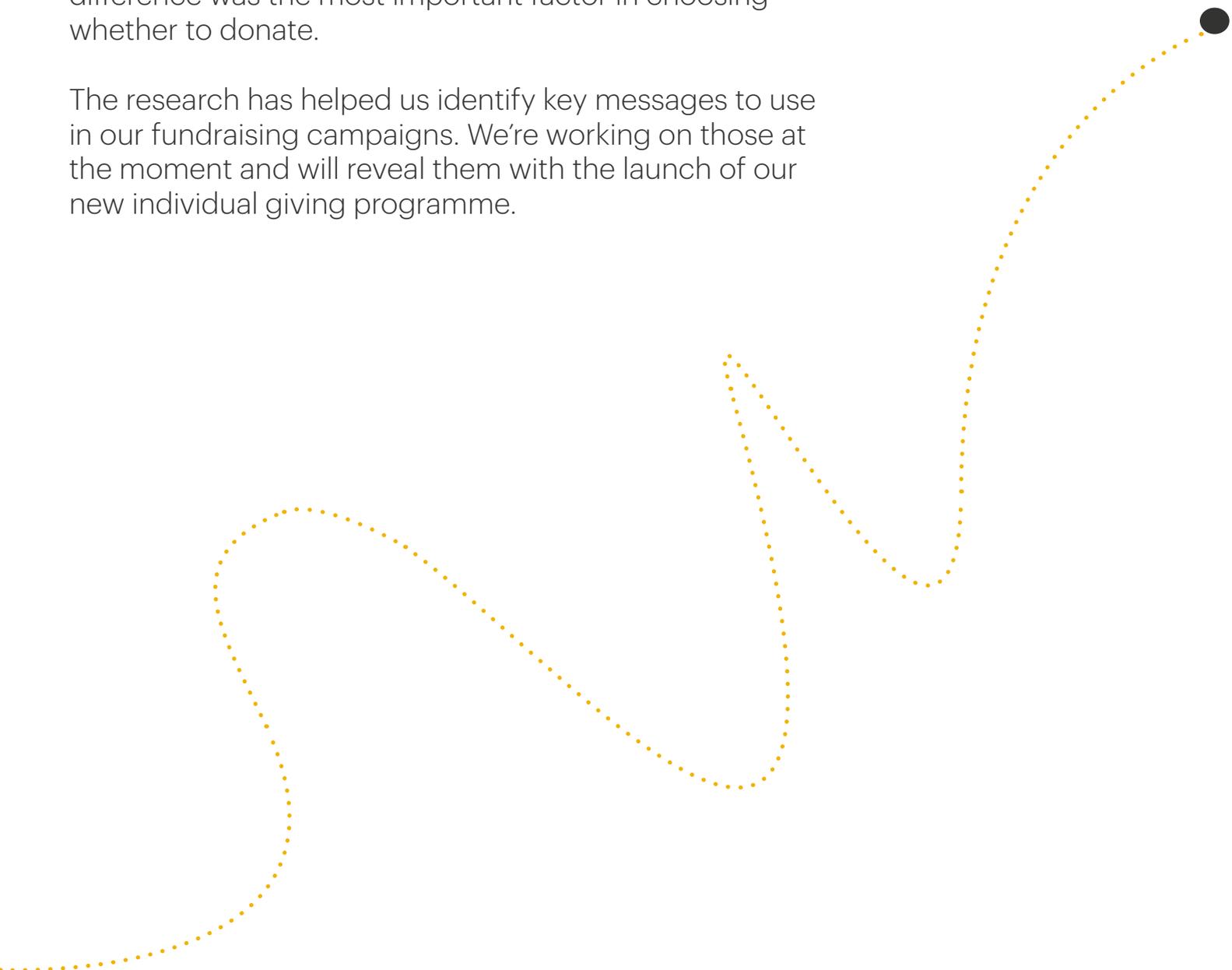
To support the newly restructured team, we drew on the expertise of consultants to conduct research with our supporter base.

We wanted to find out what our audiences thought of Impressions Gallery and giving to charities. The research challenged our assumptions about what is important to people about our work.

We realised that people wanted to donate but that we hadn't made it easy for them to give in the past. They also revealed a willingness to donate regularly, with many saying they would rather give a small amount more often.

Although research showed that match funding was a significant motivator, more than 50% of those surveyed said knowing their donation would make a positive difference was the most important factor in choosing whether to donate.

The research has helped us identify key messages to use in our fundraising campaigns. We're working on those at the moment and will reveal them with the launch of our new individual giving programme.



## Results

We have definitely improved our fundraising since 2013. We are less than a year into our Catalyst Evolve project and have already exceeded our targets for the year.

We started by focusing on trusts and foundations during the first Catalyst project in 2013 - 2015. We achieved a 40% success rate with applications during that period.

After investing time in research and improving our bid-writing skills, our success rate is increasing. We made two targeted applications to trusts and foundations in the last year, as well as two applications for lottery funding, all of which have been successful.

Income from individual giving was nominal before 2013 but that has now doubled annually.

We have seen a gradual increase in donations for free events and contributions left in the donations box. We have also experimented with crowdfunding and another time-limited campaign promoting the match funding available to us through Catalyst Evolve.

We are now focusing on the findings of our supporter research to increase the effectiveness of messaging on posters and signs around the building.

This research is also informing the design of our individual giving programme which is launching soon.



## Recommendations

**Start where you feel you are strongest** — we began with trusts and foundations because we had some experience and relevant skills in that area. If you start in the area that you're strongest in you can raise vital funds to help you build capacity and infrastructure.

**Invest in research** — it's really important to understand funders and supporters. The research we've done has really paid off and put us in the best possible position to succeed.

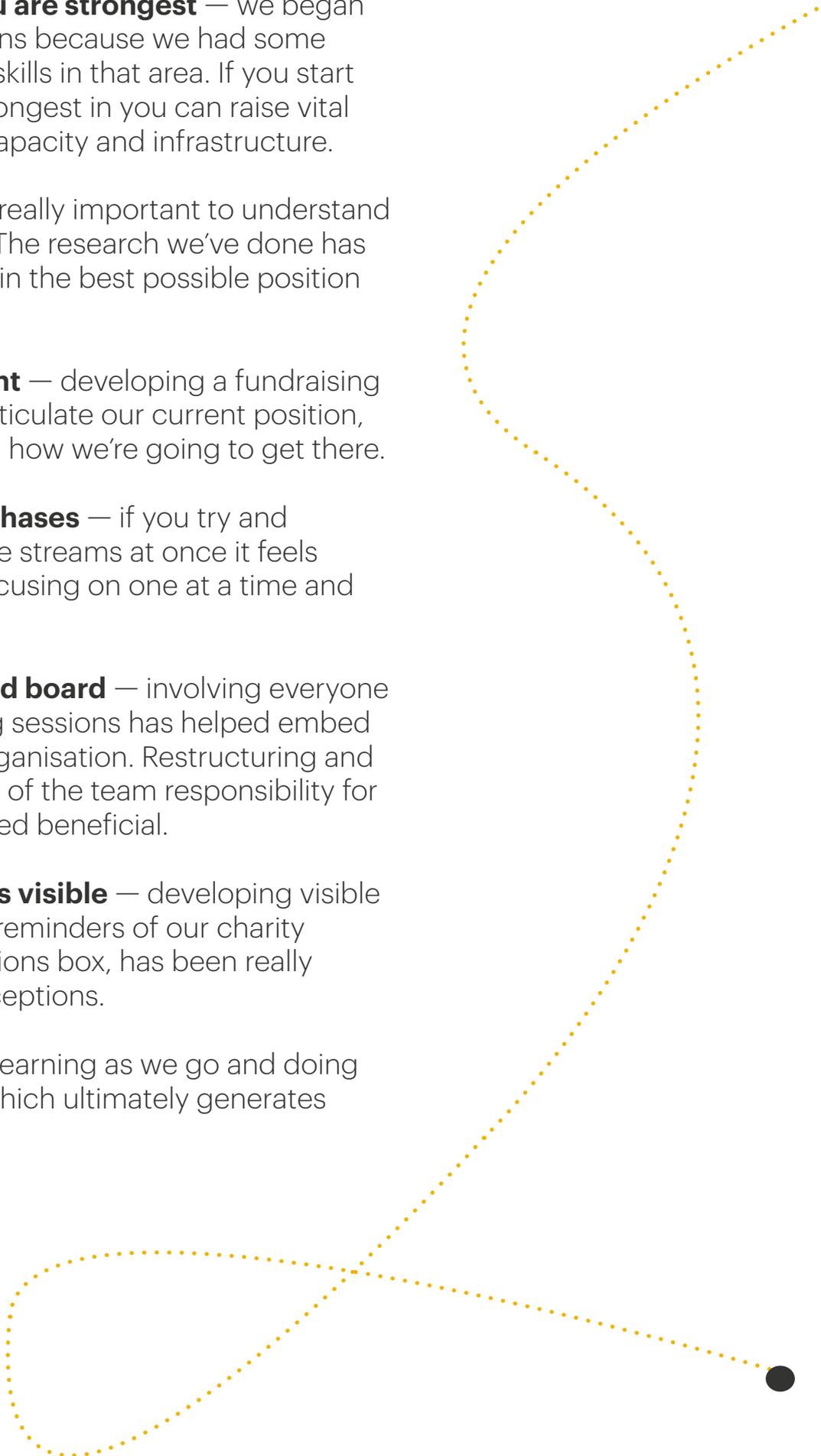
**Get the foundations right** — developing a fundraising strategy has helped us articulate our current position, where we want to go and how we're going to get there.

**Do work in stages and phases** — if you try and tackle all potential income streams at once it feels overwhelming. We are focusing on one at a time and diversifying gradually.

**Actively involve staff and board** — involving everyone in the fundraising training sessions has helped embed fundraising across the organisation. Restructuring and giving different members of the team responsibility for fundraising has also proved beneficial.

**Make your charity status visible** — developing visible campaigns and physical reminders of our charity status, such as the donations box, has been really important in shifting perceptions.

**Learn by doing** — we're learning as we go and doing more and asking more, which ultimately generates more income.





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