

ROGARE

the fundraising think tank

THEORY OF CHANGE FOR FUNDRAISING

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Amanda Shepard – Co-ordinator, Rogare International Advisory Panel
Ian MacQuillin – Director, Rogare

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Rogare is part of the University of Plymouth Hartsook Centre for Sustainable Philanthropy



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Theory of change task group

Development of this theory of change was initially led by a working part of Rogare's International Advisory panel comprising:

- Amanda Shepard, Advisory Panel co-ordinator – consultant (UK)
- Paul Farthing – consultant (UK)
- Nick Mason – consultant (UK)
- Meredith Niles – Marie Curie Cancer Care (UK)
- Adrian Salmon – Grenzebach Glier Associates (USA/UK)

This was then submitted to a consultation with the International Advisory Panel. AP members who input to this consultation were:

UK

David Boorman, Laura Boulton, Zoë Bunter, Jessica Burgess, Paula Dixon, Lianne Howard-Dace, Joe Jenkins, Craig Linton, Claire Routley, Adrian Salmon, Katharina Steinkellner, Richard Turner, David Walwin, Chris Washington-Sare.

USA

Pamela Barden, Sterrin Bird, T. Clay Buck, Cherian Koshy, Heather McGinness, Joe Matassino, Dusty Rhodes, Beth Rose, Curt Swindoll.

Italy

Simona Biancu.

Netherlands

Nathalie Veenman.

New Zealand

Carole French.

Turkey

Gunes Yildirim.

Shepard, A. and MacQuillin, I. (2017). *Rogare theory of change for fundraising* Plymouth: Hartsook Centre for Sustainable Philanthropy

ABOUT ROGARE

Rogare (Latin for 'to ask') is the University of Plymouth Hartsook Centre for Sustainable Philanthropy's fundraising think tank and the home of Critical Fundraising – the discipline of critically evaluating what fundraisers know, or think they know, about their profession. Our remit is to explore under-researched and 'under-thought' areas of fundraising. One of our key aims is to generate new practical ideas by pulling together the academic and practitioner branches of the fundraising profession.

[@RogareFTT](#)

[f](#) search 'Critical Fundraising Forum'.

Ian MacQuillin

Ian MacQuillin is the founder and director of Rogare, where he is currently leading on a project to develop a new theory of fundraising ethics. He is a lecturer in fundraising and marketing, and is researching the ideological drivers of stakeholder objections to fundraising for his doctoral study. He also edits the Critical Fundraising blog.

[@IanMacQuillin](#).

Amanda Shepard

Amanda has worked in the not for profit sector for over 20 years. Originally in programmes and partnerships at The Prince's Trust, Amanda has since held a variety of income generating and development roles including Head of Professional Development and Director of Development at The Institute of Fundraising. She is now a charity consultant and supports organisations of all sizes – including BBC Children in Need, The VTCT Foundation and The Scar Free Foundation – to increase their impact and income. Amanda is a trustee of PTA UK.

[@ShepardAmanda13](#)

1. WHAT IS THE CHANGE WE WANT TO BRING ABOUT?

Rogare – which is Latin for ‘to ask’ – is the fundraising think tank at the Plymouth University Hartsook Centre for Sustainable Philanthropy.

It has been established to identify new solutions to some of fundraising’s most pressing problems and challenges. Rogare is the engine that turns academic ideas into actionable information for fundraisers by pulling together the academic and practitioner branches of the fundraising profession. We also pull in ideas and theories from outside the fundraising and philanthropy literature, from disciplines such as psychology, public relations, evolutionary biology and marketing, among others.

Our remit is to explore under-researched or ‘under-thought’ topics.

Under-researched:

Topics where there is simply not enough reliable data to inform current practice. Our aim is to find out what research does exist and suggest how this could be used by practitioners.

‘Under-thought’:

Topics where the arguments, discussions and debates lack cohesion, substance and/or internal logic. These are likely to be characterised by the same rhetorical arguments being trotted out time and again (from within the sector as well as without) but little progress actually being made.

To tackle these subjects, we use the lens of ‘critical fundraising’, which is a concerted attempt to critically and constructively evaluate issues and identify practical solutions to them.

Our aim is to achieve a paradigm shift, by the mid-2020s, in the way that fundraisers use theory and evidence to analyse, tackle and overcome the challenges faced by their profession.

Change the learning culture

Achieving this paradigm shift means changing the learning culture in fundraising.

One of the predominant ways that fundraisers learn about fundraising is through learning from each other at conferences and other learning events. We have called this the ‘copy the case study’ model. Our aim is to get more fundraisers more frequently seeking out the evidence and theory that exists in the academic literature.

We freely admit we have made some assumptions about how most fundraisers acquire their professional knowledge, partly because there is not a huge body of literature available that explores this topic in depth.

However, we can glean some support for this hypothesis. For example, a study of more than 1,200 Canadian and US nonprofit organisations conducted in 2014 by Chicago University’s Science of Philanthropy Initiative (SPI) found that 48 per cent of fundraisers never consulted academic research before making decisions, while 45 per cent “sometimes” did – only seven per cent did so regularly¹.

This same research found that the sources most regularly used by fundraisers when designing their fundraising campaigns were: listening to podcasts or reading online summaries (30 per cent); conference presentations or workshops (27 per cent); and discussions with peers (22 per cent). White papers written by consultants came in at 15 per cent; but only three per cent of fundraisers favoured published academic papers above other sources when designing their fundraising.

Current ongoing research by Sarah Nathan and Gene Tempel in the USA is looking at how fundraisers acquire their professional knowledge. While 21 per cent have done so through formal education, 71 per cent learned through attending conferences and 58 per cent through mentoring (and 56 per cent are self taught)².

Work from 2015 by Adrian Sargeant, Amy Eisenstein and Rita Kottasz on major gift fundraising at small charities in the USA identified that those CPD activities most favoured by fundraisers were online training and webinars, occasional or *ad hoc* training, and attending local conferences (all in the region of 45-55 per cent). However, just 11 per cent had been certified by a formal process (CFRE, ACFRE or FAHP), while the same number had studied a formal course in fundraising, despite these two – and attendance at a major conference, such as AFP International (22 per cent) – being those that best correlated with fundraising performance³.

And, going back to the SPI research, only 23 per cent of fundraisers say they understand scientific research methods (such as randomisation and the use of controls), while 24 per cent say they have some knowledge of these things. But more than half of fundraisers do not have this knowledge. Yet, crucially, those organisations that reported increased income through fundraising were more likely to have at least one member of the fundraising team who had knowledge of research methods.

1 http://spihub.org/site/resource_files/SPI_report_on_NRC_Survey.pdf – accessed 27.4.17

2 Nathan, S. (2017). *Fundraisers in the 21st Century. Presentation to the Understanding Fundraising Conference, Centre for Philanthropy, Kent University, 13 February 2017.*

3 <http://masteringmajorgifts.com/report/> – accessed 27.4.17

2. HOW DOES ROGARE AIM TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE?

To bring about this paradigm shift, Rogare has developed the following theory of change:

- By enabling fundraisers to **Ask the right questions** about
- **Theory** and
- **Evidence**
- through **Critical thinking**,
- in a mode of enquiry we call '**Critical fundraising**',
- we can establish a **Critical fundraising movement**
- that will engender a **Culture of questioning**, in which we will explore
- **Under-researched issues (evidence)**, and
- **Under-thought issues (theory)**
- leading to **Better theory** and **Better evidence**
- that will close **Knowledge gaps**,
- and, by **Influencing the influencers**
- **Embed new knowledge and thinking in professional practice**
- resulting in a **Paradigm shift** in how fundraisers use **Theory and Evidence** to tackle **Professional challenges**.

We want to be able to skill up fundraisers to be able to **ask the right questions** about the information they have or need, not simply provide them with information.

Rogare therefore enables and empowers fundraisers to ask the right questions rather than providing the answers to those questions.

Ultimately we want to change the way that fundraisers use **theory** and **evidence** in their day-to-day jobs and when formulating policy for the fundraising profession. We want to transition the profession to a stage where every fundraiser seeks and is able to use theory and evidence in assessing how best to develop not just their own fundraising strategies and plans, but also in the way they tackle their profession's major challenges.

We will do this by encouraging both a mindset and a mode of enquiry we call '**critical fundraising**'.

Critical fundraising is a type of critical thinking that rigorously evaluates what fundraisers know, or think they know, about their profession. It means – as International Advisory Panel member Joe Jenkins of the Children's Society in the UK says – being prepared to challenge the *status quo* in fundraising rather than being indoctrinated by it: there are no sacred cows in fundraising. Everyone presenting ideas should accept that fundraisers will challenge, critique and constructively criticise those ideas; in fact they should welcome this criticism. We are engendering a **culture of questioning** and informed debate in fundraising.

In order to close the knowledge gaps in fundraising, Rogare will use the critical fundraising mode of enquiry to explore and investigate issues that are:

Under-researched – Rogare will find the evidence on which to base better decisions and policies.

Under-thought – Rogare will develop the theory with which to make better decisions.

This will lead to **better evidence** and **better theory** than we had before.

To achieve this change in fundraising, we will need to build, maintain and facilitate a self-sustaining, self-motivating **critical fundraising movement** – a network of critical fundraisers – that will make this change happen (some of the members of this movement are our International Advisory Panel, but it extends beyond the panel, for example those fundraisers who have joined and take part in debates in the *Critical Fundraising Forum* on Facebook).

These fundraisers will be/are the vanguard of the paradigm shift we are trying to make happen. Their role is twofold:

1. Identify the **knowledge gaps** in professional practice that Rogare could fill.
2. Translate and **embed new knowledge into professional practice** and – perhaps most importantly of all – embed new ways to think about and use this new knowledge.

The success of Rogare stands or falls on:

- The calibre of the critical thinkers we recruit to this movement globally.
- How well we can motivate, engage and support these members of the movement.

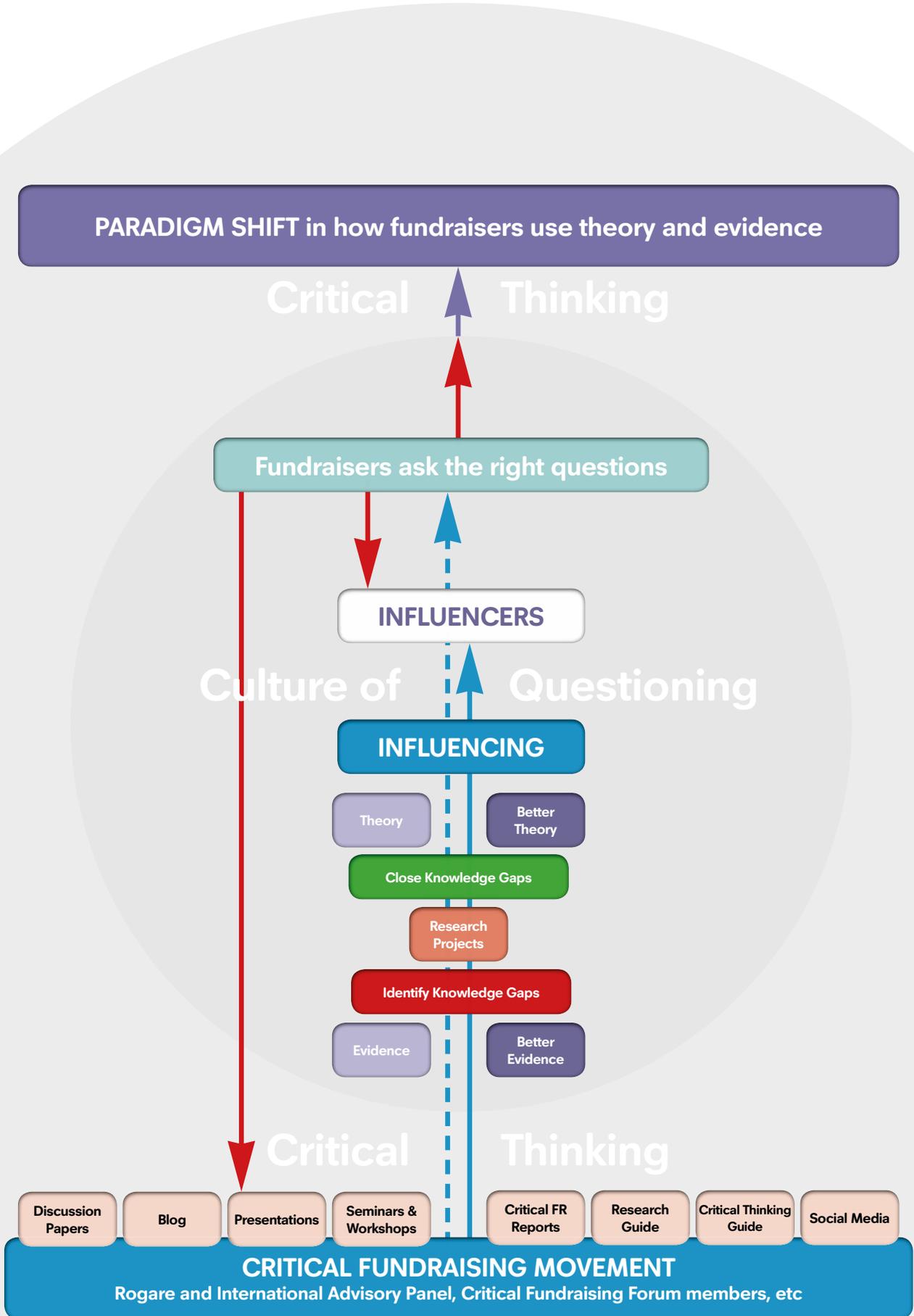
The fundraisers in this movement are what links Rogare's academic and theoretical outputs with the professional practice that will utilise and apply them. Without a cohort of motivated fundraising professionals behind us, Rogare is little more than an academic institution producing reports that fundraisers may or may not read, let alone act on.

Further, we are aware that we cannot reach and influence the whole of the fundraising profession at one go. Our ideas and outputs may be too theoretical or too complex to engage many, perhaps most, coalface fundraisers.

Our goal therefore is to '**influence the influencers**'. At the centre of the web of influencers are members of our critical fundraising movement (including, but not only, members of Rogare's International Advisory Panel) – highly-influential, critical-thinking members of the fundraising profession who, through their own activities and networks, will not only help us reach and influence other influential change-makers in the fundraising profession, but also create new influencers.

If we can do all this, we will deliver a **paradigm shift** – led by our movement of critical thinkers in fundraising – in how fundraisers use **theory and evidence to tackle the challenges** they face in both their day-to-day roles and in building their profession.

THEORY OF CHANGE



3. WHY 'ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS'?

A key component of the Theory of Change is that we aim to encourage fundraisers to 'ask the right questions' – to interrogate current professional knowledge, and those who hold it, develop it, and promulgate it, to ensure that it is based on sound evidence and theory.

This raised the question when we consulted on the Theory of Change with our International Advisory Panel of whether Rogare ought to provide 'answers' (or solutions) to any questions that fundraisers might ask, rather than encourage them to ask those questions.

Our strong view is that Rogare ought not aim to provide definitive answers that fundraisers assume to be correct – because Rogare says it is. All we would then be doing is replacing one kind of authority (the authority of personalities and learning by case study) with another kind of authority.

We are confident any ideas we did provide would be robust and based on the best evidence and theory. But we still might be wrong (or at least not as right as we could be). And fundraisers will need to interrogate our ideas to satisfy themselves that what we say is backed by theory and evidence, not simply take our word for it.

For example, during the consultation, one panel member suggested that Rogare could provide answers about what types of fundraising are ethical and then lobby to have these ethical justifications accepted and promulgated throughout the profession. However, almost no-one can say definitively whether a type of fundraising is or is not 'ethical' in every situation or context: all we can do is give good or less good ethical justifications for what we do. Knowing how to ethically justify something requires knowing how to ask the right questions about why something might or might not be ethical, not simply accepting that it is ethical 'because Rogare says it is'.

Another panel member said: "Rogare shouldn't be afraid of taking strong positions on fundraising issues and this will involve giving answers."

We have never shied away from taking strong positions and we have done so particularly during the fundraising crisis in the UK. But we have not done this by providing answers. Instead, what we have done is to challenge the thinking and concepts of those who have been critical of fundraising and encouraged fundraisers to think differently about those issues. It doesn't follow that taking a strong position necessitates providing answers.

Some of our panel highlighted what they thought was an inherent contradiction in the Theory of Change. They pointed out that if the ToC says we will close knowledge gaps by providing better theory and better evidence than we had before, then we must, by definition, be providing 'answers' (or solutions).

This is true. But we are not providing a definitive or final answer to a problem, we are providing a better one than we had before. But that answer can be further refined and improved.

Our work on ethics and relationship fundraising has already provided answers (on a conceptual level) that we didn't previously have, but they are in no way the final, definitive answers.

For example, some of the new ideas suggested by our review of how relationship building in social psychology could be applied to fundraising are now being tested by the team at the Hartsook Centre for Sustainable Philanthropy in two projects in the USA and UK/Australia. When these results are published in 2018/19, they will provide some practical answers that we didn't previously have. But they will not be the be all and end all. There's always another question we can ask.

We know that fundraisers want answers to the challenges they face in their profession, but the first step in getting those right answers *is* to ask the right questions.

Our Theory of Change is therefore an iterative one. We identify a knowledge gap, and provide a better solution in that gap than we had before. Then we challenge that solution to see if we can make it even better. This is why many of our project outputs are labeled v1.1 or v1.2 (as is this Theory of Change), because we understand that they may need to change in the future, based on new insights, evidence and/or theory.

The risk for anyone who sees their role as providing answers (or solutions) is that their answers might not be very good ones, and if no-one knows how to challenge them (i.e. ask questions), those poor answers will be perpetuated throughout professional practice.

Here are the thoughts of a couple of panel members who agreed with this approach.



UK Advisory Panel member **Katharina Steinkellner**, head of philanthropy at the Science Museum in London, says:

"Enabling fundraisers to critically think about their professional practice and environment is key and is the only way to achieve a cultural change in the sector. Providing answers means to prolong the existing paradigm."



And American panel member **Heather McGinness**, vice president for advancement at Concordia College in New York state, says:

"The nonprofit sector and the environment in which it operates are both continually evolving. Questions are dynamic and can be responsive to changing states. Answers are static and would require frequent updates. As such, I think enabling fundraisers to ask the right questions is the better long-range strategy to improve the profession."

4. WHY 'INFLUENCING THE INFLUENCERS'?

Our rationale for an 'influencing the influencers' strategy is that our goal is so big that it can't be achieved by trying to directly influence or change coalface professional practice, but will need to be achieved through a trickle-down effect by influencing those people or bodies who will buy in to our vision, take it on board, and then reach a much wider audience through their networks.

Of course, we are not setting an objective of *not* reaching coalface fundraisers, just that we aim to reach most of them through intermediary stages.

However, some members of the Advisory Panel raised doubts about this approach. One respondent said this was élitist. Another said:

"I am very dubious about this idea of a cabal of influencers who are willing to spread the gospel of Rogare. Influencers is one way of spreading the word. But what about other methods? Partnering with training providers? Links to media contacts?"

Our first response is that our Advisory Panel is already a "cabal of influencers who are willing to spread the gospel of Rogare", although we wouldn't phrase it like that. But being a group of influencers doesn't mean that members International Advisory Panel are not open to being influenced themselves. A key skill of AP members is critical self-reflection, so that they can take on board new ideas and thinking and change their own views if the evidence and theory suggests they should.

The second point is that the 'influencers' are not intended to be a cabal or a secret society. This is strategy for disseminating our ideas into professional practice. We have decided that we cannot do this by directly reaching all coalface fundraisers but will instead aim to influence anyone who can in turn do this for us. 'Influencers' could therefore be umbrella bodies, training organisations, and the media.

One panel member said that many people are influential in fundraising but are firmly rooted in the existing paradigm. And she is right that we would not want to expend our time trying to influence people just because they already have 'influence'.

So for our needs, 'influencers' are:

- People or organisations that are able to reach a wide audience *and* buy into our ideas.

We asked our Advisory Panel who they thought these influencers (and therefore the people we would need to reach) would be. This is what they told us:

- CEOs and trustees
- Training bodies
- Educators (e.g. IoF Academy) and academics
- Future leaders programmes
- Students on fundraising courses
- Media and bloggers
- Fundraising umbrella and representative bodies (including regional branches and chapters).



UK panel member **Jessica Burgess** – a PhD student at the Hartsook Centre for Sustainable Philanthropy and a fundraiser at Brighton and Sussex University Hospital Charity – articulately encapsulates our position:

"As in any field – law, medicine, accounting, etc. – not everyone on the front line will be inquisitive and involved within the profession. There will be plenty of individual fundraisers who will happily implement proven techniques to raise support for their cause, without digging into the details.

"Additionally, this theory of change is introducing a cultural change in the profession. These types of changes take time and effort to implement, often with minimal results to begin with. By utilizing the investment and involvement of the 'influencers', Rogare is intelligently recognizing that the best assets in the field are these individuals. Starting with this group, Rogare can infiltrate the profession from the inside out, like when a stone is thrown in a still pond and creates ripples across the water."

Become part of the Critical Fundraising Movement

If you want to help Rogare change the paradigm in fundraising, you can take part in the debate and discussion by joining the *Critical Fundraising Forum* on Facebook. You might also consider taking a more active role as a member of our International Advisory Panel. Search 'Rogare' on www.plymouth.ac.uk and go to the International Advisory Panel page for details about how to join.

ROGARE ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Rogare is supported in its work by a number of Associate Members – partners to the fundraising sector that share our critical fundraising ethos. Our Associate Members are:



Ask Direct – Irish creative agency (Global)



Bluefrog – creative agency (UK)



DTV Group – Direct response agency (Global)



Ethical – telephone fundraising agency (UK)



HOME Fundraising – doorstep fundraising agency (UK)



Pursuant – strategic and creative fundraising agency (USA – lead associate member for North America)



Rapidata – regular giving specialist (UK).

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GET IN TOUCH

For more information about Rogare's review of fundraising ethics, contact:

Ian MacQuillin

Director

Rogare – The Fundraising Think Tank

✉ ian.macquillin@plymouth.ac.uk

☎ +44 (0)7977 422273

Search 'Rogare' on:

www.plymouth.ac.uk

@RogareFTT

The core funding support provided by our Associate Members has proved key in allowing this review of fundraising ethics to get off the ground.

We also have a research association with the Resource Alliance.



Visit our website for more information on Associate Membership of Rogare.