

Fundraising Fellowship Ireland

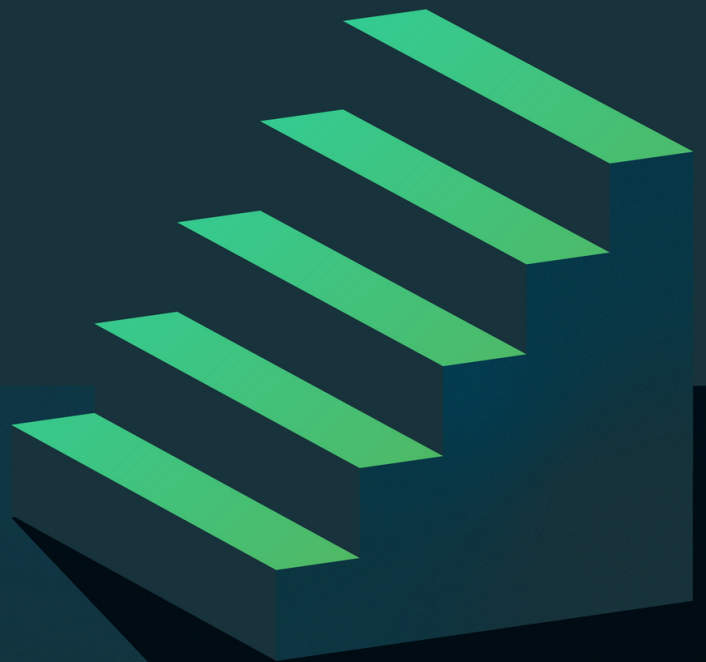


An Roinn Cultúir,
Cumarsáide agus Spóirt
Department of Culture,
Communications and Sport



Case Study: Sample-Studios

Fundraising Fellowship Ireland 2024- 2026



Sample-Studios Profile

Founded in Cork in 2011, Sample-Studios has grown from a grassroots, artist-led initiative into Ireland's largest artist studios. Today, the organisation supports a vibrant community of over 200 artists through affordable workspaces, exhibitions, professional development opportunities, public engagement programmes and sector advocacy.

Over the past 15 years, Sample-Studios has become an important part of Cork's cultural landscape, creating opportunities for artists to develop their practice while connecting contemporary visual arts with wider audiences. Alongside supporting artists, the organisation delivers educational programmes, public events and collaborative projects that encourage greater participation in the arts.

At its core, Sample-Studios is committed to creating sustainable conditions for artists to thrive. Through partnership, innovation and community engagement, the organisation continues to strengthen its role as a key cultural resource for Cork and beyond.

Fellow Profile

Dr Matthew Whyte joined Sample-Studios in 2024 through the Fundraising Fellowship Ireland programme as Development & Communications Coordinator.

Before joining the organisation, Matthew spent more than a decade working in academia, teaching and researching at University College Cork. His background in art history, public engagement and communications gave him extensive experience in building relationships, developing audiences and communicating complex ideas to diverse groups.

While fundraising represented a new professional direction, many of the skills he had developed throughout his career proved highly transferable. His ability to connect with people, tell compelling stories and build partnerships quickly became valuable assets within the role.

The Fellowship also offered Matthew an opportunity to broaden his professional practice beyond academia and contribute directly to the future development of an arts organisation. What began as a Fellowship placement would ultimately become a significant leadership role within Sample-Studios.



The Opportunity

When Sample-Studios joined the Fundraising Fellowship Ireland programme, the organisation had reached an important point in its development.

Under the leadership of Artistic Director Aoibhie McCarthy, governance structures had strengthened, programmes had expanded and the organisation had built a strong reputation within the visual arts sector. However, like many arts organisations, it remained heavily reliant on public funding streams that were increasingly competitive and often project-focused.

There was a growing recognition that future sustainability would require a more diversified funding model.

The organisation also faced wider strategic ambitions. As it explored long-term accommodation solutions and continued to expand its activities, there was a clear need to strengthen fundraising capacity, develop corporate partnerships and create new income opportunities.

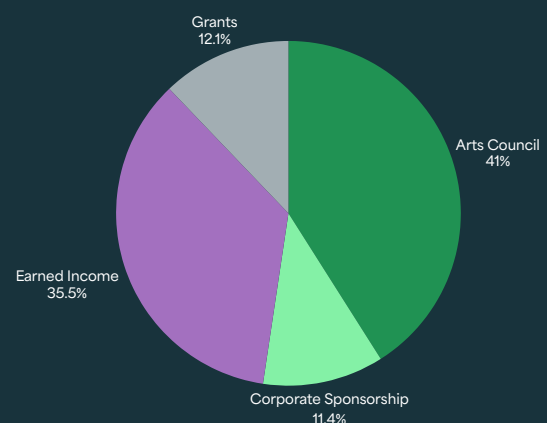
The Fellowship arrived at exactly the right moment.

For the first time, Sample-Studios had dedicated capacity to focus on fundraising strategically rather than fitting it around other responsibilities. This created space to build relationships, explore new opportunities and take a longer-term view of organisational sustainability.

"The Fellowship came at exactly the right time for us. We'd reached a point where we had the governance, the strategy, and the ambition, but we needed dedicated fundraising capacity to fulfill our vision."

Aoibhie McCarthy, Artistic Director,
Sample-Studios

Sources of Funds at Sample-Studios now



Building Fundraising Capacity



One of the Fellowship's most important contributions was the creation of dedicated fundraising capacity within the organisation.

Prior to Matthew's appointment, fundraising activity was undertaken by the Artistic Director. While this approach had successfully secured public funding support, there was limited capacity to proactively develop new corporate and philanthropic partnerships or pursue alternative income streams

The Fellowship changed that.

From the outset, Matthew focused on building a structured fundraising approach that prioritised relationship development, strategic planning and income diversification. Rather than concentrating solely on grant funding, he explored opportunities across corporate partnerships, earned income, and collaborative projects that aligned with the organisation's mission and values.

Matthew turned the organisation's Fundraising Plan into reality.

The goal was not simply to secure funding for the next project, but to create a stronger and more sustainable foundation for the future.

At the same time, the Fellowship helped strengthen fundraising across the wider organisation. Board members became more actively involved in partnership development, helping to open doors, facilitate introductions and support fundraising conversations.

This collaborative approach would prove critical to many of the programme's successes.

Key Partnerships and Projects

Corporate partnership development became a major focus of the Fellowship. One of Matthew's earliest observations was that successful fundraising depends on relationships. While identifying potential supporters is important, meaningful partnerships are built through trust, shared values and mutual benefit.

Matthew reflected, "The biggest challenge was getting a foot in the door. Once you got in front of people and could explain the organisation and its impact, the conversations became much easier."

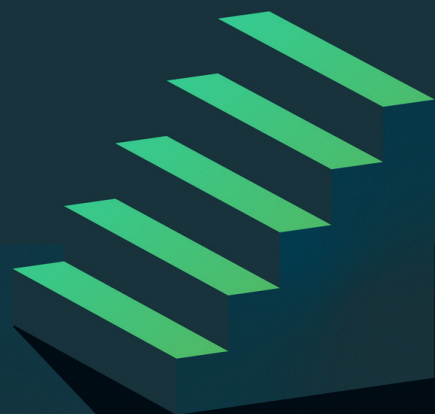
Relationship-building proved central to the work. Although developing a prospect pipeline was relatively straightforward, securing access to decision-makers often relied on trusted introductions and personal networks. Working closely with the board, Matthew activated existing contacts and developed a prospect list of approximately 70 corporate targets, creating new pathways to engage potential supporters.

A key achievement was securing a partnership with the Matheson legal firm to support the organisation's Digital Arts Programme in partnership with UCC Department of Digital Humanities, a longstanding and valued partner of Sample-Studios. This represented a significant investment in artistic programming and demonstrated the potential of a meaningful corporate collaboration.

Matthew also developed a relationship with the Musgrave Group through its annual Musgrave Gives Back initiative. In addition to financial support, the partnership provided opportunities to engage with one of Ireland's largest companies and establish a broader strategic relationship. A further partnership with legal firm RDJ LLP supported the organisation's education programme, expanding opportunities for artists and participants.

Several existing supporters increased their investment during the Fellowship, contributing to the strongest and most diverse portfolio of corporate partnerships in the organisation's history.

The Fellowship also supported new earned-income opportunities. Matthew created a public talks and lecture series at Triskel Arts Centre, which now generates approximately €10,000 annually while delivering audience development and unrestricted income benefits.



Achievements and Impact

The impact of the Fellowship can be measured in more than fundraising figures alone.

The organisation developed new corporate partnerships, strengthened existing relationships and established new earned-income streams that continue to support its work.

Equally important was the growth in audience engagement.

The public talks programme attracted new audiences who had not previously engaged with Sample-Studios. Participants included members of arts and cultural organisations across Cork, as well as individuals looking for opportunities to engage with visual arts during a period of significant change within the city's cultural landscape.

This broadened awareness of Sample-Studios and helped position the organisation as an important contributor to conversations around art, culture and civic life.

The Fellowship also strengthened organisational storytelling, ensuring that fundraising, communications and audience engagement became more closely connected.

Perhaps the most significant organisational outcome was the decision to retain and expand the role following completion of the Fellowship. The fundraising capacity created through the programme was not temporary; it became a permanent part of the organisation's future.

“What's been really interesting is that the public talks have brought in a completely different audience to Sample-Studios. We've had people coming from Friends of the Crawford, the Cork Decorative and Fine Arts Society, and people who maybe wouldn't have engaged with us before.”

Key Achievements

- Corporate sponsorship grew by 218% between 2024 and 2026, increasing from €11,328 to €36,000 with €10,000 secured from the Matheson partnership.
- Large Philanthropic support from Rethink Ireland's Resilient Cork Fund in 2025 of €68k
- Launched a new series of ticketed events generating €10,000 annually+ in unrestricted income.
- His contribution to fundraising rose to 43.57% of all funds raised

Period	Funds raised by Fellow	Funds raised by Organisation
2024 (from June)	€14,299*	€370,811
2025	€93,761*	€425,250
2026 (to June)	€138,102*	€317,000

*Fellow secured funds from Matheson, Musgraves, RDJ, Jacobs, Rethink Ireland, Lilly, Gurranabraher Credit Union, Community Foundation Ireland (via the RTÉ Toy Show Appeal), The Ireland Funds.

Professional Development & Looking Ahead

For Matthew, the Fellowship represented a significant professional transition and an opportunity to develop as a fundraiser and arts leader. Through mentoring from Andrew Hetherington, Head of Audience Development and Stakeholder Engagement at the National Gallery of Ireland, and Eamonn Carroll, Festival Director of Blackwater Valley Opera Festival, alongside training and hands-on experience, he developed expertise in fundraising, partnership development and stakeholder engagement.

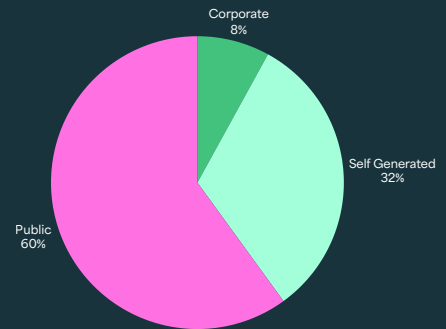
One of the most valuable lessons came through corporate fundraising. Building relationships, securing introductions and developing trust with prospective partners required persistence, confidence and a clear understanding of organisational value. Through this process, Matthew established significant corporate relationships that Sample-Studios believes will continue to deliver long-term value.

The legacy of the Fellowship extends beyond the funds raised. Through new corporate partnerships, earned-income initiatives and expanded audience engagement, Sample-Studios has developed a more sustainable model for the future.

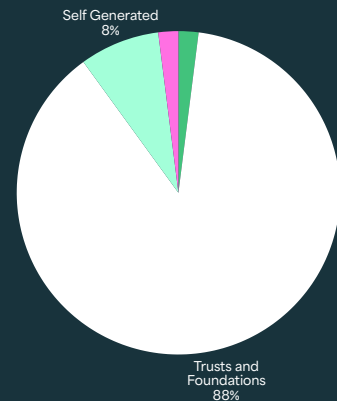
By embedding fundraising expertise within the senior leadership team, the organisation has ensured that development and partnership-building remain central to future growth.

With stronger relationships, more diversified income streams and dedicated fundraising leadership in place, Sample-Studios enters its next phase of development with confidence and ambition.

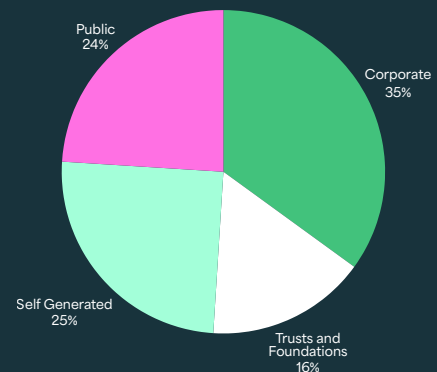
2024 Fellow funds raised by source



2025 Fellow funds raised by source



2026 Fellow funds raised by source



Sample-Studios Team & Board

Team

Aoibhie McCarthy, Artistic Director
Matthew Whyte, Development Manager
Kevin O'Keeffe, Facilities Manager
Kim-Ling Morris, Financial Manager
Sinéad Barrett, Programme Manager
Dee Hurley, Gallery Assistant

Board

Emer Yip
Debbie Dawson
Anne Brennan
Dr. Darius Whelan
Seamus Coghlan
Dr James O'Sullivan
Dr Michael Waldron
Jacqui Feeley
Deirdre Corcoran
Anne Brennan
John MacMonagle

Find out more about Sample-Studios
www.sample-studios.com

With thanks to Fundraising Fellowship Ireland mentors, funders, and subject matter experts

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