Possibilities for Transformation

Report and Research for Philanthropy Ireland

Ruairí McKiernan
October 2012

A report outlining many of the issues, challenges, solutions and possibilities
for change in relation to philanthropy and funding in Ireland.

"We can not solve our problems with the same level of consciousness that created them"

- Albert Einstein

Contents

Introduction

In April 2012 I presented to members of Philanthropy Ireland on what I think needs to change in relation to philanthropy and funding in Ireland. This followed my earlier presentation at the launch of the Irish Non Profits Knowledge Exchange report in February where I called for a radical shake-up of how the community sector is organised, funded and supported.

This short report outlines many of the issues, challenges, solutions and possibilities that I outlined during my presentation. The report does not aim to be prescriptive or conclusive and it refers to philanthropy and funding interchangeably. Whilst it does offer practical suggestions, it is geared more towards inspiring and provoking further dialogue and debate at a time when all of society's structures and systems require urgent review and radical reform.

The views expressed here are based on a culmination of my 12 years' experience in the non profit/citizen sector, the review of numerous reports on philanthropy and the sector, and consultation with those working in the area via 30 online survey responses and 6 phone interviews. While many of the views in the report were outlined to me by one or more of those consulted, this was often done so anonymously or on the condition of discretion. Views therefore are presented here with a 'broad brush' and are not necessarily attributed to any particular individual or organisation.

Thanks

I would like to thank Philanthropy Ireland for seeking my contribution and to offer thanks to all those who helped inform the presentation and report including Liam O'Dwyer, Natalie Hodgess, Owen Keenan, Jordan Campbell, Brian Kearney-Grieves, Eoghan Stack, Mark Keane, Patricia Conboy, Anne O'Donnell, Michael Barron, Elaine Gerathy, Frances Byrne, Orla Barry, Niall Crowley, James Doorley, Siobhán McGee, Mary Cunningham, Michael Higgins, Larry Masterson, Tim Spalding, Aonghus Sammin, Clare Mulvany, Clare Herbert, Donncha Foley, Adrian Hendroff, staff at Console and the numerous anonymous submissions I received.

My background with fundraising and philanthropy

I first got involved in youth and community work as a volunteer during my teen and college years. Later, after studying Business Management and working for several multinationals, I became more active in social justice issues and community organising. I joined the North Western Health Board in 2002 and began a 10 year journey developing youth empowerment programmes, including founding and running SpunOut.ie as an innovative and award winning youth organisation between 2004 and 2011. This included establishing a youth citizenship mini-grants scheme called the Super-Heroes fund.

During my years at SpunOut.ie I made dozens of funding pitches and proposals and was successful in raising funds and support from more than 25 separate sources including the HSE, the One Foundation, the Atlantic Philanthropies, Social Entrepreneurs Ireland, the Community Foundation for Ireland, the Vodafone Foundation, ESB Electric Aid, the Dormant Accounts Fund, Google, the National Lottery and Turning the Tide on Suicide.

Late last year I stepped down from my role as CEO of SpunOut.ie and I am currently supporting several organisations in Ireland and abroad in a consultancy and advisory capacity as well as working with the Office of the President on the 'Being Young and Irish' youth engagement initiative. I am also on the boards of Volunteer Ireland and Gaisce – the President's Youth Award, and I am investigating setting up a new project called 'We Have A Dream'. I feel I have some space and distance to 'stand back' from the sector and hopefully provide an honest but constructive outline of some of the main priorities I feel need addressing.

Executive Summary

We are living in one of the greatest periods of transition in Irish history. The upheaval is much greater than just a recession. It is a globalised period of change that affects not just economics, politics and business, but also culture, identity, health, ecology, education, and the arts. It is important that we look at where we are at through a global and interconnected lens.

Much has been said and written about the problems we face, but not enough about the possibilities for real change that exist. The destruction of structures, systems and ways of working creates spaces for new thinking and new ways to emerge.

Non Profit and Philanthropy

The sectors that are commonly referred to as the non profit sector, or the third or citizen sector, and community and voluntary sector, are at the coalface of this change. The vast numbers of people and organisations working in this area are close to the ground when it comes to experiencing and supporting the effects of unemployment, emigration, health, illness, environmental destruction, and alcohol and drug abuse. So too are their organisations hugely affected by the changing relationship with the state, austerity and funding cuts, the advances in technology and social development, and the huge increase in demand for their services.

There is no doubt that the non profit sector needs to transform itself. It needs to take stock, return to being mission led, cut out waste, and become more cost effective. It needs to embrace partnership and collaboration and avoid duplication of effort. The sector needs to improve inter-sector solidarity, become collectively organised, cultivate strong critical leadership and bring younger and fresher voices into boards and management.

The sector must upskill and embrace technology, diversify fundraising activities and create self-financing initiatives where possible. It needs to break out of the bubble created by years of state dependency and service provision, develop an independent voice, and abandon failed language, methods and attitudes that no longer serve us. In doing so the sector needs to better communicate the huge value of the work being done, the success stories and evidence, and fight to protect their services, staff, funding and ethos. It has been said that there is no such sector as a philanthropy sector. However for the purposes of this report I refer to philanthropy and funders collectively, on the basis that there are common issues faced by both groups, despite the huge diversity within these groups. It is understood that the nature of philanthropy is very much driven by the views, values and wishes of the individual philanthropist.

The Challenge for Philanthropy

As the non profit sector needs to adapt, so too must philanthropists and funders respond to the great changes around them. They are responsible for influencing and creating great changes and often philanthropists and funding bodies aren't aware of the unseen power they wield in influencing thoughts and behaviours. It is vital that they take stock of where they are, individually and collectively. There is a need to embark upon a process of meaningful and honest reflection and of re-engagement with the issues and organisations they seek to support. They need to increasingly understand the macro environment in which they operate and be prepared to re-think worldviews, core beliefs, and standard structures, systems and procedures.

Too often philanthropy favours the safe, tried and tested ways of doing things but this will no longer suffice. If philanthropists want radical transformation, this can best be achieved by radically reshaping how they work. This includes more readily embracing risk as a necessary part of achieving change and more actively cultivating innovation. It includes developing better relationships with grantees, improving understanding and support of partnerships and collaboration, and adjusting social change models and internal structures and systems.

Many would say that the most obvious change required from philanthropy is that we need more of it. Ireland has yet to fully realise the enormous potential in this area and the great strides being made by Philanthropy Ireland and its members are to be welcomed and supported.

If we are interested in deep and lasting social change, we cannot rely simply on a model of philanthropy that is about raising and distributing more money. These efforts need to be more strategic and done in ways that don't create dependencies or recreate aspects of the systemic problems we are trying to solve.

Assessing the Funding Environment

An honest and challenging assessment of the environment in which philanthropy operates is called for. Should the non profit sector and the funders within it accept the current economic and social model that offers us vast inequalities whilst working hard to receive 'the crumbs from the table' from those who are succeeding within our current economic system?

Do funders want to invest in fire fighting work or to tackle the root causes of inequalities and suffering? Is the sector collectively prepared to accept that the state's role is diminishing and turn attention to corporations and wealthy donors, or is there a willingness to advocate that the state has a responsibility to finance basic services, as is the case in most EU democracies? This is a particularly pertinent question for those who believe in the values of a republic.

Or are we prepared to ask awkward but timely questions about why our economic model facilitates vast wealth whilst allowing almost 500,000 to be unemployed, up to 70,000 per year emigrating, and a new generation of people with inferior pay, conditions and opportunities? Is it simply a case of making gradual reforms and waiting until a new boom comes along whilst tapping whatever wealth we can to alleviate the enormous health, social and environment problems that exist?

Philanthropy can do more than just witness or participate in this issue. It can help drive it. It can open up civic space for much needed discussion, debate and dreaming.

Leadership and Vision

One of the greatest problems we face is a lack of vision. Our traditional model of leadership has created leaders who are busy managing the status quo rather than trailblazing, inspiring and pioneering. The moral authority of the Catholic Church has been eroded and much of the ethical and moral leadership is coming from manipulative media and marketing.

The citizen sector is a sector that has vast resources, people, talent, energy and passion. It is well placed to assume a leadership role at this time in a way that is democratic, transparent and people powered. Philanthropy can help drive and support this. It can help move the thinking beyond the next quarter and stimulate a movement that looks at what are our common values as a society, and what kind of vision we want for our future.

The hard work and dedication of Ireland's philanthropists and funding agencies has helped take us beyond a reliance on state funding and institutional thinking. The good work of foundations such as the One Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropies needs to be acknowledged and built upon. It is time for the next evolution in how this sector thinks, works and delivers.

While many of the indicators appear gloomy, it is my strong belief that we are simply in the eye of a storm and it shall pass. When it does pass, things will be different but we need to be shaping that difference rather than simply existing in survival mode. This is an opportunity to re-imagine and re-create and one we should not waste.

In Conclusion

In writing this short report and in consulting numerous people working in the area I have found that there are some areas of agreement but many diverse opinions. Ultimately nobody has all the answers in terms of how to improve philanthropy or indeed improve society. What is needed is to start listening, discussing, debating and reconnecting on the issues.

Rather than rushing to find easy answers we need to embark on a journey of mutual learning and development. Philanthropists have a unique and privileged role in our changing Ireland and they can play an important role in catalysing great change by encouraging new ways of thinking and working and ones that expand horizons and tackle the root causes of health, social, environmental and economic issues. So too can they help find and nurture start-ups and visionaries working to create social innovations that have the potential to reinvent our world.

My Experience and Findings

I first encountered the world of philanthropy back in 2006. At the time I was in my mid-twenties and had no great understanding of philanthropy. If anything, I was suspicious of it and curious as to whether philanthropic support interfered with the independence and culture of organisations. In the subsequent years I led successful pitches for philanthropic funding.

While my fundraising experiences are largely influenced by my position as a successful grantee of particular foundations, issues raised here are common to other funders. On the whole my experiences, similar to many others in the sector, have been positive but not without their challenges. Some of my experiences and views are summarised on the following pages:

Strengths

- **Hands off / trust**
  On the whole I found funders to be largely trusting and empowering in with regard to the dispersal and management of their funds how the disperse and manage their funds.

- **Partnership**
  For the most part, funders take a partnership approach to the funding relationship. They provide the funds and mostly let you get on with the work. They are partners in agreeing goals, targets, budgets and plans.

- **Understanding of issues**
  In most cases the staff of the foundations with whom I linked had some background in the sector and a genuine interest in social change and in the issues facing the sector.

- **Fringe issues**
  The Atlantic Philanthropies (AP) and the One Foundation (OF) in particular have been instrumental in supporting issues and causes that were being ignored by the Irish state. Areas like youth mental health, human rights, LGBT issues, social entrepreneurship and youth civic action have all benefited as a result.

- **Added-value**
  Funders can be open to providing additional expertise, contacts and advice when needed, with larger foundations often providing training or networking days to support their grantees.

- **Connection**
  Being funded by large philanthropic organisations can provide additional opportunities for connecting and collaborating with individuals and organisations.

- **Up-skill**
  Large philanthropic organisations have high standards in terms of what they expect, which in the case of SpunOut.ie for example, caused us to upskill in terms of how we managed funds and related to funders.

- **Challenge**
  Funders expect quality communications and reporting. There is a pressure to deliver. In my experience it can be helpful to have someone to report to, which helps accountability and productivity.

- **Credibility**
  Receiving investment from large funders has been seen as a gold seal of credibility for some organisations. It can help establish credibility in the eyes of the state, other funders and the media.

- **Leverage**
  Similarly investment from these organisations can be used to help leverage funding from the state and from other funders.

Difficulties

- **Risk**
Many philanthropists and funders desire new thinking, innovations, and radical approaches to transforming how things are done. The challenge is that they also want security, safety and the tried and tested. Herein lies a key paradoxical challenge to be addressed.

  What tends to happen is that the true wish is for something new, edgy and exciting (the next big thing) but the existing structures and systems require organisations that have a strong track record, credibility, proven leadership, proven results, and solid secure systems. This tends to rule out a lot of the visionary thinkers and emerging agents for change who are often without funding or support as they set about blazing a new trail.

  These people are 'up-setters', often 'difficult' to work with, and their vision can be hard to see for those who aren't so visionary. Think Steve Jobs. You cannot 'think different' but do the same.

  What often happens is that the same old people, same old organisations, and same old ways benefit and the status quo continues. The activists, innovators and visionaries are either excluded, dismissed or beaten down, or they get on with it without the support of the philanthropists or funders. From time to time there is an exception to this rule and new ideas slip through the cracks of the systems.

  Ultimately you cannot achieve great (radical) change without risk. Life is risk. Venture capitalists know this and they have risk tolerance for start-ups and visionaries and have developed sophisticated ways of embracing this. They sometimes lose but often they gain and are part of new breakthroughs in technology and industry on a vast scale.

  This is what is needed in the citizen sector – an embrace of risk and faith that it will deliver. The current way of working isn't as safe as people think. Lots of funding and potential impact is already being risked by the continuation of the 'same old'. It would therefore make sense to set about a new course of action that looks at a Silicon Valley approach for social solutions.

- **Root cause / advocacy**
Ultimately I don't think there is enough interest, awareness or support for organisations and individuals that are looking at the bigger picture in terms of our failed social and economic model. This includes things like supporting research, advocacy, community organising and dissent. Critiquing and building alternatives to the status quo are vital ingredients in changing society and require greater support. This includes wide lens analysis of our democracy and political system, and the core beliefs we operate within.

  While philanthropic funding has been invested in some areas of advocacy, particularly around mental health and children's rights, it is disappointing to hear of a strategic move away from supporting civic action. Civic action, in my opinion, is a more sustainable and meaningful way to create social change rather than waiting on the powers that be to grant us reforms.

  Ultimately investing in people powered activism is required, activism that builds citizen voice, visions, platforms and capacity, and presents radically different views of the assumed best practice in democracy, economics, health and education.

  Central to this is embracing and understanding the importance of areas like spirituality, ecology and culture, which are key determinants of so much else. Looking at this in an interconnected way, rather than through the current 'logical' and fragmented approach, is vital. Organisations like the Feasta, Cultivate, New Economics Foundation and the Transition Towns movement are examples of organisations that need greater support.

- **Social change models**
  Large funders require different models of social change. For example, in the case of One Foundation it's the 'theory of change' and for Atlantic Philanthropies it's 'the logic model'. Both models have merits and help explain change to the rational mind. I think it's important that organisations don't just think they are doing good work, but have some strategic thinking behind it that explains why and how they are doing what they are doing and looking at how it affects change.

  Overall the models are ok but weaknesses exist in so far as most Irish organisations have no prior experience with these models. It can mean that they sign up to models they don't fully understand or agree with, simply for the sake of accessing funds.

  Furthermore, I think the models don't go far enough in terms of looking at the root causes of the issues, critiquing the overall economic or social paradigm around the problem or allowing space for the creativity and innovation that is required to solve it. My view is that social change creation is a much more complex process than is allowed for by these models and my sense is that many grantees end up with models, goals and targets that they sometimes don't understand or agree with.

  When I think of great social change I often think of Gandhi or Martin Luther King. Both were visionary strategists, but I am unsure as to whether their movements were logical, or indeed explainable via current theories of change. I think more weight needs to be placed on systems thinking and social movement building.

- **Reporting**
  The danger in not working within a suitable strategic framework (or model) is that both the funder and the grantee end up ticking boxes whilst key information is being lost. Much time can be given to capturing and reporting data that isn't relevant. Meanwhile more nuanced factors don't get appreciated or recorded such as the changing political environment, the development (or lack of) of organisational leadership, or success in relevant programme areas that aren't in the agreed metrics.

- **Relationships and communications**
  Good positive relationships based on understanding and mutual respect are important in any relationship. My experiences in this regard were mostly positive but I often felt frustrated by a strong sense of a lack of effort made by foundation staff to really understand the nature of the organisation or the work, including taking time to visit our offices. I often sensed paternalistic and sometimes patronising dynamic in the relationship and both written and verbal communications could have been improved. Changes in personnel and contact points were also difficult as it meant re-starting new relationships in the midst of delivering on a plan.

  Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties I and many others faced in the sector has been the challenge of honest communication to and from funders. Often it is felt, rightly or wrongly that communicating difficulties or critiques will result in negative consequences of some sort. Indeed, from time to time this was the actual experience.

  At other times I have experienced 'whispering' in the sector, hearing things back that funders said about (but not to) myself, or other individuals or organisations. This was a learning period for me and there was plenty I could have done better, but in general I noticed a sense of similar frustration amongst colleagues in the sector. I think some of this can be resolved by real investment in relationship building at the start of a process, ensuring foundations are at all times staffed to the highest standards of professionalism, creating the space for difficult dialogue to be embraced by all parties as an essential part of working together.

- **Clear vision, procedures and expectations**
  Many philanthropy and funding bodies have very clear and simple information on who they fund, why, and how. They make the application process simple and clear and outline key requirements and timeframes. However this is not always the case and often the funding application procedures and processes are unclear. Within this process it can become unclear as to what is needed, by whom, when and in what format. Improvements can be made to better communicate, simplify and streamline this process.

The same applies to when funding is being administered and managed. More time should be taken to express expectations around reporting and communications. This also applies to communicating the vision, mission and plans of the foundation or funder as they evolve. Too often communications around what is happening, what might be funded or not funded etc. etc., either does not happen or is fudged. Sometimes there are mixed messages coming from funders', making it difficult for organisations to engage.

- **Evaluating the funders**
  From time to time funders will send out a survey or engage a consultant to assess the views of grantees on their relationship with the funder or on how things could improve. Whilst this is important, it would be better to create a culture of continued embedded feedback whereby the grantees felt they could openly discuss ways in which they feel the funder could improve their performance, plans, strategy and systems.

  At present there is a sense that 'funder knows best' and there is a lack of joined up thinking or improvements taking place. This is an opportunity for the grantee to work in partnership to improve funding and philanthropy, in the same way companies encourage customer involvement in reviewing or planning products or services.

- **Results only**
  It is understandable that funders are mainly interested in results and impact. However I think it is also important to understand the inputs and ingredients that go into creating those results. This includes taking a general (hands off) interest in the internal operations and culture of an organisation. Funders obviously like when big successes and 'wins' are achieved but often don't fully appreciate the formula to that success.

  Similarly, when success isn't forthcoming or the organisation isn't performing as expected, it can be useful to know why this is. Success is built on people, and I think too often we treat social change like just another production line of industry. This results in burn-out, fatigue and frustration amongst leaders and staff, who are already inevitably under-resourced and facing greater demands, often without supportive pay, conditions and support structures.

- **Inner Circles**
  Ireland is a small country and most of the economic, political and social activity here is based around Dublin. Dublin in turn is a small city and almost all the national funders and non profit organisations are based here. Over my 8 years with SpunOut.ie, much of which was based in the west of Ireland with weekly trips to Dublin, I observed how there is a Dublin-centric culture at play. Some of this is understandable but it also risks ignoring the great people, organisations and need that exists outside of the capital.

  Beyond this I have seen a culture whereby there is a 'scene' of people attending conferences and events, seeking to network, connect, and get seen and heard. Much of this is motivated by the need for funding and it can serve a purpose. However I believe it is overdone and much time is wasted 'getting seen'. In addition, small networks form and can lead to group thinking and favouritism. Some non profits know how to play the game, and can invest valuable time in it. This can lead to pet projects and pet organisations/people. It can also resemble parochial politics at times and is not the most professional or effective way of developing the sector.

- **Consultants**
  In my experience there has been a huge over-use and over reliance on external consultants in the sector. I have worked with consultants who have charged up to €2,000 per day and the quality and expertise of these needs to be questioned. Sometimes there is an assumption that by bringing in outside (or overseas) help that we will find better answers. In many cases external consultants help us shape and ask the right questions and point us in the right direction. However not enough importance is placed on the value of internal knowledge and expertise, including that of our boards, staff, volunteers and beneficiaries.

- **Competition v. cooperation**
  The non-profit sector is hugely fragmented and often there are competing voices, egos and services all seeking the same users, media or funding. The sector is very competitive and very political, perhaps as a result of the prioritisation of survival over the common good. The wider culture of individualism has permeated the sector and there is a lack of social solidarity and cooperation. Big personalities and egos are in abundance and it may be that this suited the state, which could deal with and pacify the sector on that basis.

  Questions need to be asked about the role of the state and the role of the organisations who find themselves in competition mode. Funders quite often take the high moral ground on this issue and continually point to the need for cooperation, collaboration and partnership and do so now more than ever.

  However not enough has been said about the role of **funders in creating competition, either directly or indirectly**. Non profit leaders often mention this but rarely will do so directly to funders for fear of being seen as difficult, disruptive or territorial, or for fear or losing funds or future funds. I have experience in this regard and have been accused of being competitive while attempting to have a conversation about the potential duplication of efforts in the youth sector. The result has been that the grantees back down from the conversation, the duplication occurs, and then funders later call for greater partnership towards reducing duplication.

Conclusion

My experience of dealing with large philanthropic organisations in Ireland was a generally positive one but one that was still challenging in various ways. Perhaps the good work done by philanthropists in Ireland is often underappreciated and unreported but so are the things that they don't do so well. In an era that requires us all to be more open, accountable, transparent and efficient, philanthropy organisations also need to improve and evolve, especially if they are serious about achieving meaningful social change.

The way in which philanthropy and funding is organised and managed has posed great challenges to me, my colleagues and many in the sector. It has often limited creativity and innovation and influenced a way of working that brings us closer to the corporate sector and away from the grassroots community spirit and energy we started with. This in turn creates clashes of culture and ethos and can lead to an over-professionalistion where leaders become managers, visionaries become functionaries, and innovation becomes stagnant. The result is that people tend either fall into line and play the game, or they burn out, or become disillusioned and leave.

In saying that, without the vision, generosity, hard work and investment of the people working in this area I may not have been able to succeed in ways I have over recent years and in turn so many young people would not have benefited from this work. This is also the case in the many areas of society that have benefited from philanthropic investment.

There is no doubt that a 'dance of deception' goes on between both sides of the funding relationship and this is something that needs to be addressed. There is an urgent need to re-engage with each other and the issues. We need to have open, honest and difficult conversations, and to find common ground and ways of working towards what should be shared goals towards a shared vision.

With both the Atlantic Philanthropies and the One Foundation due to cease trading in the coming years, now is a good time to start a real and serious discussion about not only how their funding support can be replaced, but how and what they have done can be built upon and improved.

Suggested Areas of Action:

✓ **Reflect**
Take a regular step back for re-visioning, to re-look at values, mission and methodology. Consider how your organisation and work is adapting to the transition times we are in.

✓ **Visualise**
Be clear about what your vision for society is, what you stand for and what your values are. Have a clear vision.

✓ **Research and reconnect**
Develop up to date research on issues and trends. Reconnect with people and organisations that are working on the ground. Mobilise talent scouts for people and projects. Consider that there may be people and organisations doing things in different ways and places that you are not yet aware of.

✓ **Share**
Work with other philanthropy and funding bodies to share research, data, trends, plans, what's working and not working.

✓ **Simplify and streamline**
Simplify communications, strategy and processes. Ensure you have the right team in place with the right skills, attitude and appetite for change.

✓ **Risk**
Realise that the radical changes and innovations that are needed cannot be achieved without risk. Organisations need to adapt to tolerate risk in the same way as Silicon Valley venture capitalists do.

✓ **Relate**
Improve culture and capacity for communicating with grantees. Develop honest open mechanisms for sharing, learning, critiquing.

✓ **Communicate**
Openly communicate your vision, values, mission, plans and processes. Be clear about what you want, don't want etc. Devise easy to use application and grant management procedures. Make more use of the web and cloud applications and reporting.

✓ **Celebrate and reward**
Celebrate what is working and reward success.

✓ **Prioritise and invest in**
- Civic action projects that mobilise citizen power as a force for change
- Organisations that take an interconnected view of problems/solutions
- Grassroots community based work with direct user participation
- Cooperatives and partnership/collaborative initiatives
- Projects that look at sustainability, participation, ecological awareness and
  their relationship to mental and physical health
- Shared upskilling, research and training programmes
- Leadership and welfare development programmes for NGO leaders
- Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation
-Areas of personal/national transformation such as large scale mindfulness programmes.

Selected views on Philanthropy

Frances Byrne, OPEN
'It would be vital to have independent support for NGOs who would like respond to austerity and its impacts, in solidarity with each other; this could include support for re-imagining organisations/movements.'

Mark Keane, Consultant
'I think one thing above things - give NGOs permission to take risks and give themselves permission to more risk tolerance. Behave like the social venture capitalists they are meant to be. Government does the low risk stuff - philanthropists take the high risk. Philanthropy should seek opportunities to collaborate and integrate their funding strategies as often as they can.'

Emma Lane Spollen, The One Foundation
'Every philanthropist works differently. what has to be remembered is that Philanthropy is largely individual giving especially in Ireland. It is not anonymous institutions. Its people's own money and that makes it personal first and foremost – their values, passions, priorities and perspectives.'

Orla Barry, Mental Health Reform
'Philanthropy and the not-for-profit sector are natural partners in the movement for social change in Ireland. Support from philanthropy would be of great benefit to voluntary and community groups seeking to articulate their vision and advocate for structural and cultural change.'

Michael Barron, BeLongTo
'On the positives, Philanthropy has contributed hugely to human rights causes and marginalized groups such as the LGBT Community, The Travelling Community and Migrants - groups and causes which can struggle to secure state funding. The great social change that this has supported will, for me, be the most significant legacy of the past decade of philanthropy in Ireland.'

'On the negatives, Philanthropy has missed the mark has been when it has attempted to reinvent and shape sectors without proper regard for experience and existing great practice. This has happened in the youth sector where instead of investing in and supporting long established youth services, choices were made to set up new ones that do not have the skills or deep understanding of how to truly empower young people. I have always thought that in a time of scarcity it was a shame that some of these choices were made.'

Tina Roche, The Community Foundation for Ireland
'I think it is hard to encapsulate in a short note what needs to change in philanthropy because all of it does except the Irish citizens inherent generosity. In terms of philanthropy I think we are at the foothills of the Himalayas and it will be a hard climb but a fantastic achievement and view when we get there. When our culture has changed to where we are all everyday philanthropists then we know we will have succeeded. The hardest part may in fact be the permanent government's attitude to philanthropy as 'tax foregone'. Our sector (grantmakers) must become more open, transparent and accountable too if we are to play a credible role. As I said I think it is manageable but a tough road.'

Niall Crowley, Equality Consultant
'We need a philanthropy that takes risks and enables organisations working for social justice to evolve and reinvent themselves in the current context of crisis. We need a philanthropy that does not impose business models, restrict independence or duplicates activities already in progress.'