

**PHILANTHROPY
IRELAND**

STEWARDED IRISH PHILANTHROPY

A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

*FROM NASCENT TO COURAGEOUS
BUILDING BRAVE, COLLABORATIVE, AND
TRANSFORMATIVE PHILANTHROPY IN IRELAND*



**PHILANTHROPY
IRELAND**

**COPENHAGEN
INSTITUTE
FOR FUTURES
STUDIES**



PHILANTHROPY IRELAND

Philanthropy Ireland is a dynamic membership organisation dedicated to advancing philanthropy in Ireland. Our aim is to cultivate a thriving community of philanthropic entities, fostering collaboration and innovation to address pressing societal challenges.

We support our community in three core areas:

- **Policy:** Shaping a supportive environment for philanthropy through advocacy, policy engagement, and strategic implementation.
- **Practice:** Promoting best practice through collaboration, research, advisory services, and knowledge-sharing.
- **Promotion:** Raising awareness and building a culture of giving through education and outreach.

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STEWARDED IRISH PHILANTHROPY

This roadmap is the result of an extensive consultation process and futures-thinking work, developed with the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies. It started with the 2024 Philanthropy Symposium where over 100 supporters and agents of philanthropy came together to examine the challenges and potential for Irish philanthropy. This was followed by a workshop in early 2025, where 20 senior leaders and influencers in the philanthropy community in Ireland all lent their voice to mapping the complex dynamics that will influence how philanthropy evolves and adapts in the years to come.

The result: a shared vision for courageous, collaborative, and transformational philanthropy in Ireland.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE ROADMAP

We used three key foresight tools to develop this roadmap:

Three Horizons Framework

Explored trends and challenges in the philanthropy community.

Futures Triangle

Assessed what drives change, desired futures, and barriers from the past.

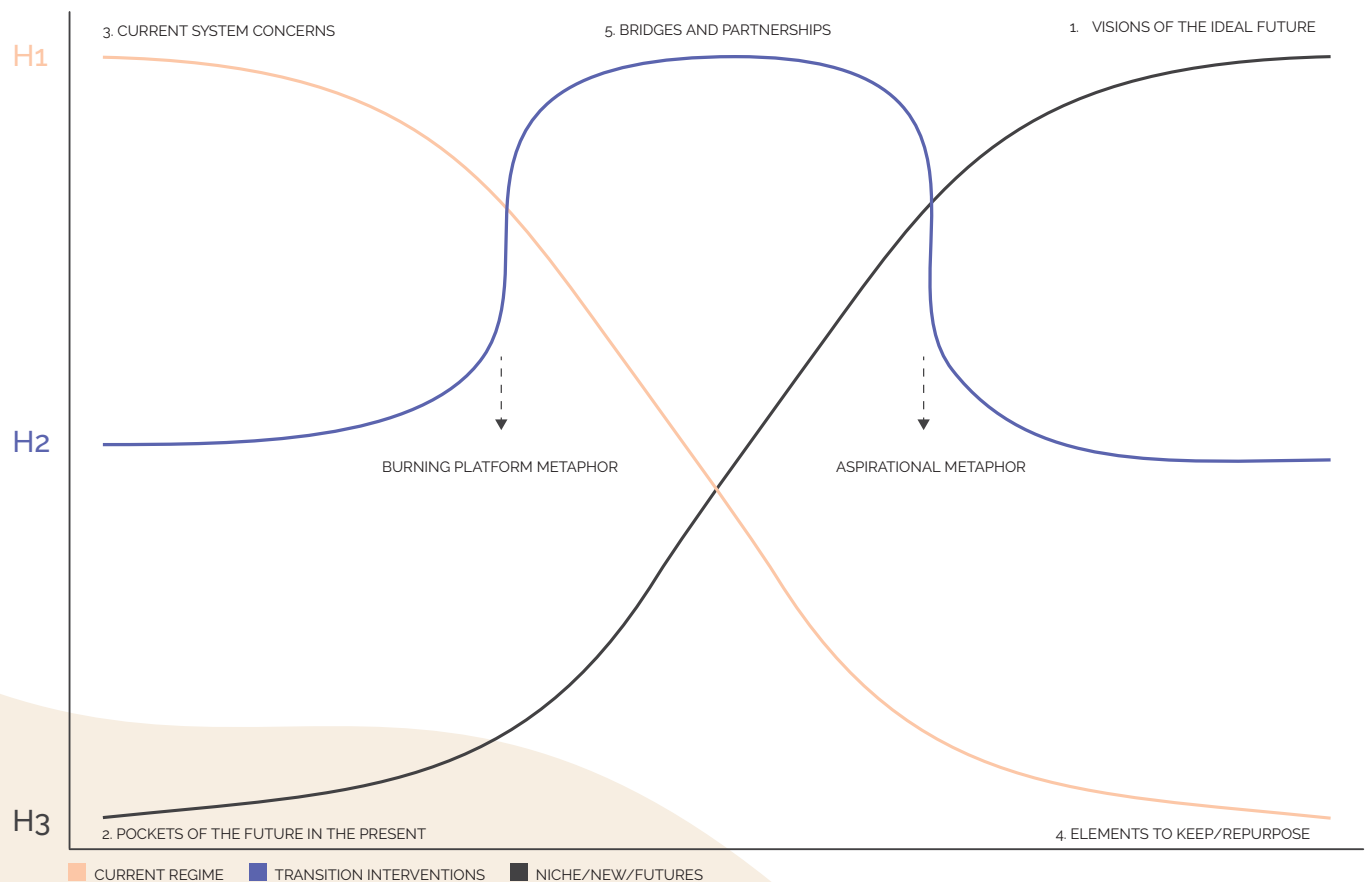
Causal Layered Analysis

Revealed deep-seated beliefs and narratives shaping philanthropy today.



THREE HORIZONS FRAMEWORK

The Three Horizons Framework was developed by Bill Sharpe



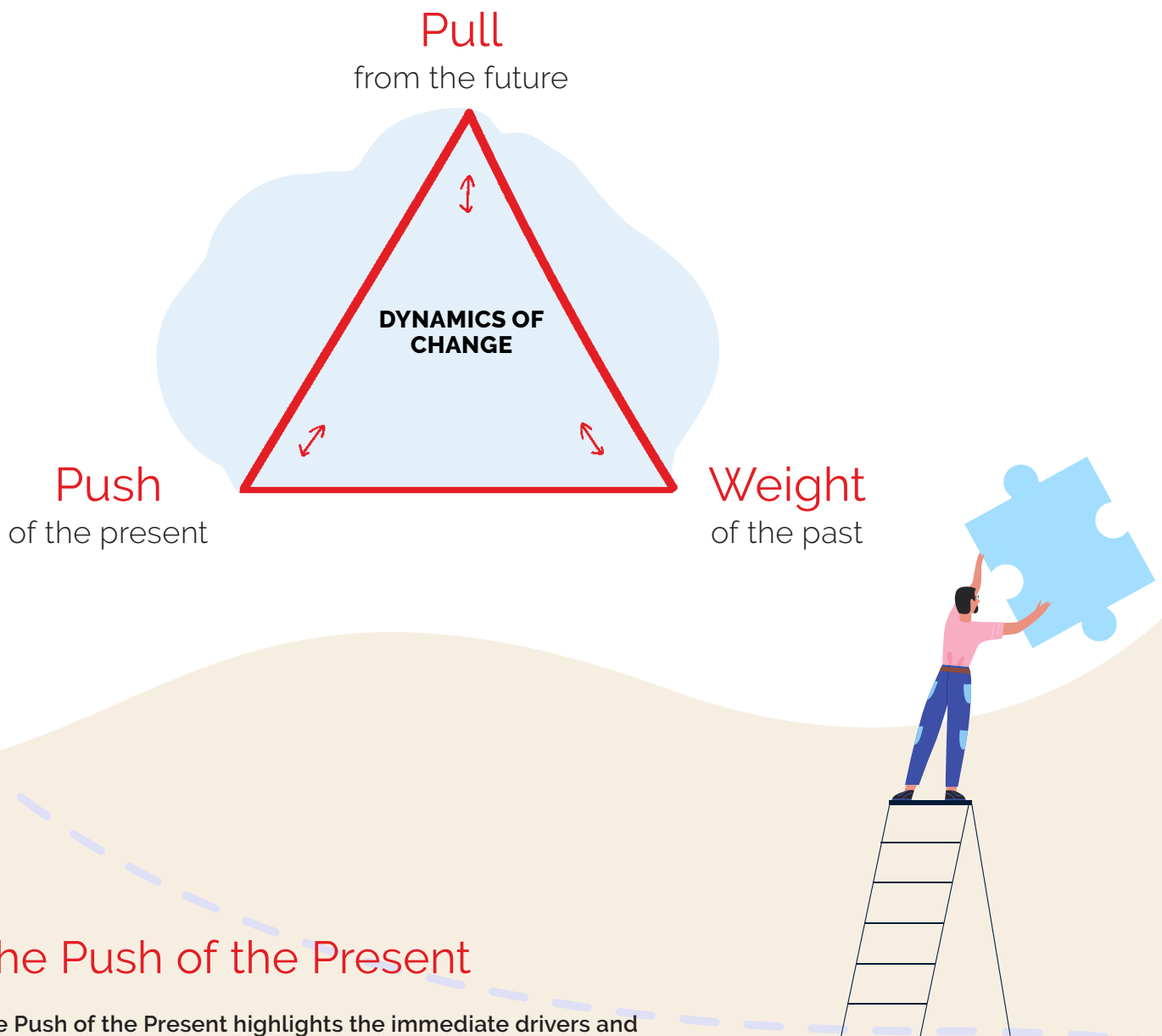
At the Philanthropy Symposium 2024, leaders in the sector collaborated using the Three Horizons Framework to imagine the future of philanthropy in Ireland. Participants articulated a vision for the future where philanthropy is mainstream, inclusive, and strategic—embedded across education, civic life, and public policy. They identified the emergence of dynamic networks, growing societal appetite for impact, and a shift toward systemic, trust-based giving as key “pockets of the future” already visible today. However, they also recognised barriers including regulatory burdens, short-term mindsets, and a culture of mistrust that can inhibit the full potential of philanthropy.

This exploratory workshop allowed Philanthropy Ireland and the Copenhagen Institute of Future Studies to lay the foundations for the immersive workshop that has ultimately led us to the Roadmap for Future Philanthropy. Explore the full Symposium 24 report at www.philanthropysymposium.ie



MAPPING CHANGE IN IRISH PHILANTHROPY

Mapping dynamics of change for philanthropy in Ireland through a futures triangle analysis.



The Push of the Present

The Push of the Present highlights the immediate drivers and pressures shaping Ireland's philanthropic activities today.

Economic Drivers and Inequality

- **Wealth Creation and Division:** Ireland's economic growth has created new pools of wealth, prompting both an opportunity and a moral imperative for greater philanthropic involvement. However, rising inequalities fuel concerns whether philanthropy is addressing root causes or merely treating symptoms.
- **Growing Wealth vs. Growing Need:** As prosperity increases for some, stark gaps remain in housing, healthcare, and educational resources. Charities and social enterprises feel pressure to fill these gaps.

Policy and Regulatory Environment

- **Fiscal/Policy Environment:** There is ongoing debate over how tax incentives, government funding, and public policy can encourage or constrain philanthropic giving. Some see an underutilised potential for policy to catalyse sustained, strategic philanthropy.
- **National Philanthropy Policy:** The launch of the Policy was seen as a positive step, though questions remain regarding implementation, oversight, and whether it can foster genuine systemic change.

Social and Technological Influences

- **Digital and Social Media:** Online platforms increase visibility and enable grassroots fundraising, but they also carry risks of misinformation. The ease of digital giving can lead to fragmented efforts rather than cohesive, long-term strategies.
- **AI and Tech:** Emerging technologies promise greater efficiency, data-driven giving, and the potential for new philanthropic models (e.g., donor-advised funds, pooled funds). However, ethical and regulatory questions linger.

Shifting Cultural Norms

- **Changing Culture of Giving:** Younger generations appear more engaged and informed, signalling a growing receptiveness to philanthropic efforts. Yet misinformation, polarising debates, and “influence networks” can distort perceptions of what philanthropy achieves.
- **Class Divisions and Bias:** Ireland’s historical and social fabric grapples with tensions around class and wealth. Public trust in philanthropic motives can be fragile, especially if giving is perceived as elitist or out of touch with community needs.

Climate and Global Crises

- **Climate Change:** Ireland, like other nations, confronts environmental challenges. For philanthropy, this means new areas of focus, from funding climate resilience locally to global collaborations on sustainability.
- **Conflict and Migration:** War and displacement bring urgent humanitarian needs. Ireland’s openness and ability to integrate new populations can shape both domestic and international giving priorities.

The Pull of the Future

The Pull of the Future captures a range of visions—aspirations and anxieties—about where philanthropy in Ireland could go. These ideas drive innovation in giving, and in shaping emerging policy and practice.

A More Inclusive, Equitable Society

- **Equal Opportunities and Access:** Many envision a future where philanthropy supports equal access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Strategic investments can help close persistent gaps in wealth and opportunity.
- **Greater Collaboration:** An ideal future sees government, the private sector, and philanthropic organisations working in partnership to address grand challenges - minimising duplication, building shared knowledge, and maximising impact.

Stronger Culture of Philanthropy

- **Increased Visibility and Acceptance:** Optimists foresee a broad cultural shift where philanthropy is widely recognised as a positive, essential force - no longer shrouded in stigma or mistrust.
- **Policy Support:** With supportive laws, fiscal incentives, and national recognition, philanthropy could thrive, accelerating solutions to social and environmental issues.



Harnessing Technological and Societal Innovation

- **AI and Next-Gen Engagement:** Advances in AI could improve data collection, transparency, and efficiency in grantmaking. Younger generations' familiarity with technology may foster fresh philanthropic models aligned with climate action, mental health, and social justice.
- **Participatory Democracy:** Citizens' assemblies and other democratic innovations could be expanded, integrating philanthropic investments into broader societal decision-making.

Navigating Fears and Unknowns

- **Climate and Democratic Backsliding:** Some future visions include fears that philanthropic resources might be insufficient in the face of climate disasters or that political fragmentation could undermine collaborative efforts.

- **Wealth Concentration and Polarisation:** There is a concern that continued wealth concentration will deepen social divides unless philanthropic leadership addresses root inequalities.

National and Global Impact

- **All-Island Approach:** With greater awareness of shared challenges—north and south—there is potential for philanthropic collaboration across the entire island of Ireland.
- **Balancing Local and Global:** Irish philanthropy could expand its global presence, especially around pressing issues like climate migration, while ensuring that local communities remain well-served.



The Weight of the Past

The Weight of the Past refers to the cultural, historical, and institutional legacies that shape how philanthropy is viewed and practiced in Ireland. These forces can both ground and constrain the future of Irish philanthropy.

Historical Roles of Church and State

- **Religious Influence:** Philanthropic traditions in Ireland often stem from the Church's influence in education, healthcare, and social services. As society becomes more secular, questions arise about how new philanthropic structures will replace or adapt these faith-based traditions.
- **Government Risk Aversion:** Historically, the Irish government has been conservative in adopting innovative policies or funding mechanisms, leading to reliance on incremental or short-term measures rather than bold, systemic solutions.

Cultural Norms Around Giving

- **Charity vs. Philanthropy:** Many Irish people are raised to see charitable giving - like the iconic Trócaire box or local fundraising drives - as virtuous. However, large-scale philanthropy can be viewed with suspicion or perceived as elitist.
- **Modesty and Secrecy:** Cultural attitudes sometimes discourage public recognition for giving. This reluctance to "Go Public" about donations can undermine transparency and hamper philanthropic collaboration.

Colonial and Postcolonial Legacies

- **Relationship with Power:** Ireland's history of colonisation influences attitudes towards outside funding, foreign donors, and philanthropic power structures.
- **Impact on Today's Generosity:** Collective memory of struggle and diaspora has also cultivated empathy, a willingness to help underdogs, and a global outlook that can be harnessed for future philanthropic endeavours.

Trust and Transparency Challenges

- **Past Scandals and Broken Trust:** Cases of misuse of funds or opaque governance within charities have eroded public confidence, making people wary of the charity sector,

impacting current and potential philanthropies. Rebuilding trust requires clear accountability, regulation, and open communication.

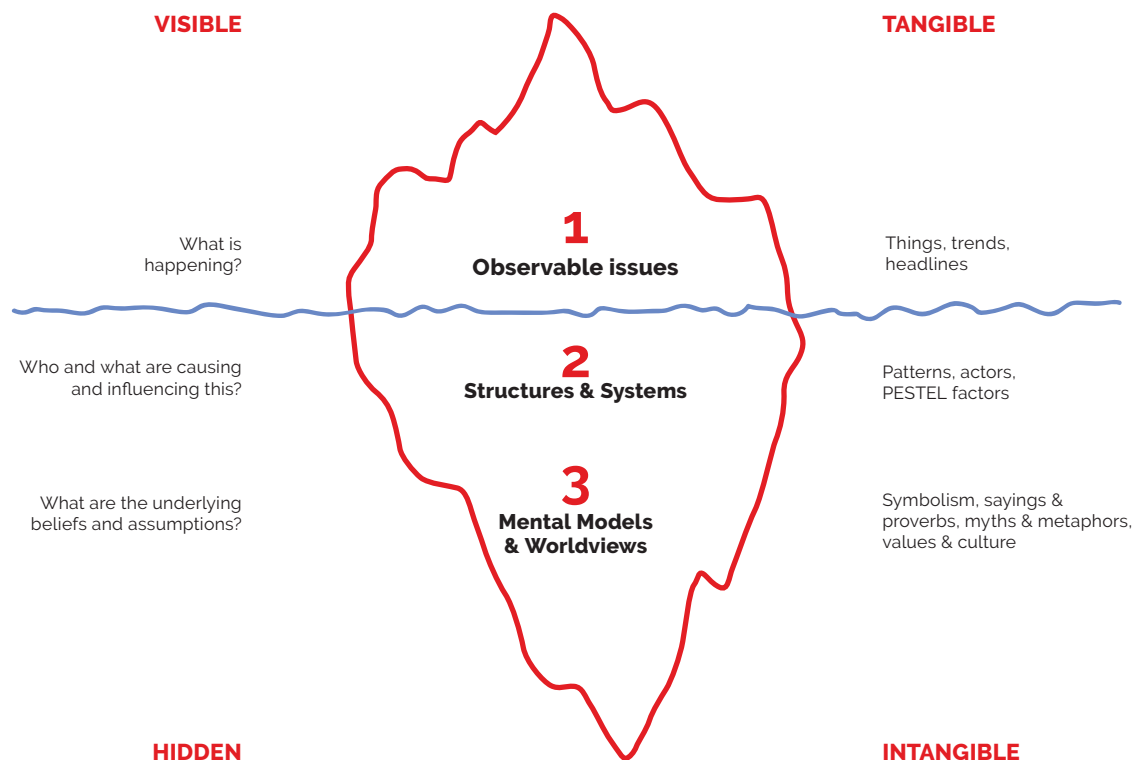
- **Regulatory Restructuring:** Increased oversight (e.g., Charities Regulator) aims to boost accountability, but complexity can hinder new entrants and stifle innovative giving mechanisms.

Community and Family Ties

- **Strong Sense of Place/Tribe:** Ireland's deep community networks and familial connections often channel giving in local, informal ways. While this grassroots solidarity is a strength, it can also reinforce parochial approaches at the expense of broader, more strategic impact.

RE-ENVISIONING PHILANTHROPY IN IRELAND

Causal Layered Analysis uses four layers to highlight how deeply held beliefs and images of philanthropy shape Ireland's giving culture and how updating those metaphors can open the path to a more courageous philanthropic future.



PART I. Critiquing the Present Reality of Philanthropy in Ireland

Level 1: Surface

At the surface level, common narratives about philanthropy in Ireland revolve around limited visibility, growing wealth, and persistent mistrust:

- **Growing Wealth but Limited Coordination:** While there is an overall increase in philanthropic funds and notable legacy giving, efforts often lack clear coordination or collaboration. Multiple stakeholders point to uncoordinated giving trends—sometimes fragmented by single-issue campaigns or reactive donations.
- **Operational and Regulatory Hurdles:** Many philanthropists and non-profits face difficulties setting up and running philanthropic vehicles due to complex or underdeveloped regulations. This fosters a perception that the regulatory environment is often antagonistic, not facilitative.
- **Mistrust and Public Fatigue:** Scandals, negative press, and fear of exposure discourage donors from going public. In parallel, the public can grow weary of “constant calls to donate,” leading to distrust of charities—or a sense that “government should be funding these services instead.”
- **Polarisation and Tech Influences:** Social media's capacity for misinformation, combined with political polarisation, heightens suspicion about how philanthropic money is used. Some donors fear that being too visible might spark controversy or backlash.

Level 2: Systems and Structures

Beneath the surface lies a network of systemic and structural factors shaping philanthropic practice:

- **Policy Gaps and Underdeveloped Incentives:** Stakeholders note that tax relief or gift-aid frameworks exist but remain underdeveloped. In some cases, fiscal policies are not robust enough to support sustained or large-scale giving, limiting philanthropy's potential impact.
- **Government's Role and Regulatory Tone:** Government often appears risk-averse and reluctant to innovate. Rather than being a partner, the state can become an obstacle through cumbersome oversight or regulations that presume negative intent. Charities, too, navigate a regulatory environment that can prioritise compliance over support.
- **Underdeveloped Philanthropy Infrastructure:** The lack of professional training, limited advisory services, and networking platforms means donors and charities alike struggle to find synergy. In some cases, donors rely on wealth advisors who are not adequately versed in philanthropic best practices, further stalling philanthropic innovation.
- **Limited Collaboration Mechanisms:** Pathways for strategic partnership—among donors, non-profits, and public institutions—remain unclear or unpublicised. As a result, many donors operate independently, funding short-term projects rather than contributing to cohesive, long-term strategies.



Level 3: Worldviews and Metaphors

At the deepest level, it becomes clear that cultural narratives, worldviews, and myths can either stifle or energise philanthropic progress:

- **“Nascent” vs. “Mature”:** A common refrain has been that philanthropy in Ireland is still “nascent.” This metaphor conveys caution and infancy—implying that Ireland’s philanthropic sector is underdeveloped, untested, or inexperienced. While it once highlighted the sector’s fledgling nature, many now feel this image no longer serves. It can reinforce timidity and keep new actors from embracing larger, more transformative visions.
- **Private, Silent, or Elitist:** Deep-seated norms around privacy with regard to money reinforce an unspoken rule that “good deeds should be done quietly.” Consequently, philanthropy risks being perceived as an elite practice or a hush-hush affair—rather than a community-driven, inclusive force.
- **Fear of “Playing God”:** There’s a pervasive tension about the power dynamics inherent in philanthropy: If large donors step in, do they undermine democracy? Are they overshadowing smaller-scale charitable giving? And if philanthropic funds carry conditions, does that manipulate public services? These questions hover, unaddressed, fuelling suspicion around philanthropic motives.
- **Reactive Instead of Strategic:** Deep cultural roots in charity (immediate relief) overshadow the concept of philanthropy (systemic change). This worldview sometimes keeps donors in a short-term, “firefighting” mindset, rather than exploring riskier, long-term investments that address root causes.

Collectively, these deeper worldviews and metaphors create an environment in which philanthropy is often kept small-scale, reactive, or even secretive. Many in the sector believe it’s time to replace the outdated metaphor of “nascent philanthropy” with a more empowering and forward-looking narrative.

PART II. Building a New Vision for Philanthropy in Ireland

With a solid understanding of existing limitations, the next step is to imagine - and begin constructing - a more courageous future. By revisiting each level, we can sketch out an Irish philanthropic sector that is transparent, innovative, collaborative, and bold.

Level 1: Surface

- **Growth in Visibility and Impact:** In the desired future, philanthropy moves from scattered, low-profile actions to a visible and coordinated force. Stakeholders see “going big” on nationwide campaigns, focusing on underfunded areas like housing, climate resilience, and social innovation.
- **Inclusive Engagement:** Ireland fosters a culture where donating of time, skills, or money is normalised, regardless of socioeconomic status. “Philanthropy for Everyone” becomes a rallying cry, encouraging consistent, smaller contributions alongside major philanthropic investments.
- **Proactive Solutions and Risk-Taking:** Rather than waiting for crises, philanthropists collaborate with communities and government to invest in innovative, long-term solutions—be it in mental health, environmental restoration, or youth engagement.

Level 2: Systems and Structures

- **Enabling Policies and Frameworks:** In the ideal future, supportive tax and fiscal policies actively encourage giving. Streamlined regulations and government units dedicated to philanthropic engagement create a safer space for experimentation. Crucially, these policies protect the public interest while reducing unnecessary bureaucracy.
- **Professionalised Support Infrastructure:** A specialised ecosystem of philanthropy advisors, collaborative platforms, and research institutions emerges. For instance, adopting donor-advised funds or pooled vehicles becomes simpler and more transparent. Simultaneously, philanthropic organisations invest in professional development for staff, ensuring better oversight, accountability, and strategic alignment.
- **Robust Collaboration Mechanisms:** Clear pathways for joint efforts between philanthropists, non-profits, and government help merge resources effectively. Place-based philanthropy—where local donors work closely with regional communities—demonstrates how to tackle complex challenges more holistically. Nationally, “all-island” collaboration ensures that Northern and Southern philanthropy connect around shared social and environmental goals.

Level 3: Worldviews and Metaphors

Here is where transformation truly takes hold. Replacing old metaphors with a new shared narrative can shift mindsets and spark courage:

- **From ‘Nascent’ to ‘Courageous’:** The idea that Irish philanthropy is only beginning—no longer serves. Instead, a new metaphor of “courageous philanthropists” emerges, people and institutions willing to push boundaries, take risks, and tackle big issues in partnership with the community. This shift reframes Irish philanthropy as dynamic, proactive, and pioneering.
- **A Culture of Openness and Visibility:** Shedding the secrecy around money and giving means celebrating philanthropic efforts - large and small - as part of a public, communal narrative. By normalising conversation about wealth, impact, and outcomes, philanthropy is recognised as an inclusive tool for societal well-being.
- **Empowered Worldview: Collaboration Over Competition:** A philanthropic culture that embraces collaboration stands in direct contrast to the fear-based worldview that philanthropic power is inherently suspect or manipulative. This new worldview sees philanthropic resources as complementary to government and community initiatives, uniting all sectors in systemic problem-solving.
- **Strategic and Transformative:** In the new narrative, philanthropic giving is not limited to short-term relief. Instead, donors seek systemic change, supporting overheads, capacity building, and multi-year commitments to ensure long-lasting impact. Such long-horizon investments become the norm, showing that “transactional” giving and “transformational” change can coexist.



A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE

By implementing the foresight tools with leaders in the philanthropy community a roadmap was developed that provides a guiding vision for the next decade. It is clear from the insights outlined in the previous pages that the community is moving from the old metaphor of 'nascent' and embracing a self-image of courageous, collaborative advocates of social good. A new narrative of fearless philanthropy—rooted in visibility, accountability, and partnership—holds the potential to break through old doubts and usher in a more equitable, vibrant, and resilient society. In doing so, philanthropy in Ireland can truly move beyond old constraints and step confidently into a future where giving is everyone's business and to everyone's benefit.

THREE PHASES OF CHANGE

The roadmap for the future of philanthropy in Ireland is broken into three phases.

PHASE



BUILD CONFIDENCE AND VISIBILITY (2025–2027)

Adopt and Promote a New Narrative

- Replace "nascent" with "courageous" philanthropy across all communications.
- Launch a national storytelling campaign showcasing diverse, impactful philanthropic efforts.

Expand the Culture of Giving

- Promote inclusive messages like "Philanthropy for Everyone" across schools, universities, and workplaces.
- Encourage giving of time, knowledge, and influence—not just money.
- Tap into younger generations' passion for justice and tech-savviness to develop new giving models.

Enhance Transparency and Trust

- Partner with media to highlight success stories and philanthropic impact.
- Support public-facing platforms for tracking philanthropic initiatives and fund flows.



STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPACITY (2027–2030)

Policy and Regulatory Reforms

- Advocate for streamlined, supportive regulations and fiscal policies.
- Establish dedicated government units or liaisons to support philanthropic innovation.

Professional Development

- Create training programs and certification for philanthropy advisors and non-profit leaders.
- Fund research hubs and think tanks to evaluate philanthropic outcomes and trends.
- Use technology for real-time tracking of outcomes, needs forecasting, and grant effectiveness.

Develop Collaborative Platforms

- Launch national and regional hubs for donors and non-profits to share data, co-fund initiatives, and coordinate strategies.
- Foster pooled and donor-advised fund models adapted to Irish context.



DRIVE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT (2030–2035)

Champion Systemic Change

- Shift funding priorities toward long-term, systemic initiatives.
- Encourage multi-year commitments and unrestricted funding.
- Develop rapid-response philanthropic models for emerging crises (e.g., climate disasters, pandemics).

Institutionalise Place-Based Philanthropy

- Promote models where local philanthropists work together with communities to develop tailored, strategic interventions.

Advance Global Philanthropic Engagement

- Strengthen Ireland's role in international philanthropy.
- Build North-South philanthropic bridges across the island of Ireland.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF FUTURE PHILANTHROPY

These phases and the philanthropy we envision for the future is underpinned by six characteristics.



Courageous Leadership

Embracing bold action and risk-taking to tackle root causes of inequality, climate crisis, and systemic barriers.



Radical Transparency

Normalising open dialogue about wealth, power, and philanthropic impact to build trust and legitimacy.



Collaborative Synergy

Deep alignment and partnerships across philanthropy, government, civil society, and business.



Professional Infrastructure

Supported by enabling policies, accessible philanthropic tools, and expert advisory networks.



Local Roots, Global Reach

Balancing grassroots responsiveness with global responsibility and cross-border innovation.



Empowered Narrative

A cultural shift from the myth of silent charity to a vibrant story of community-powered philanthropy.

A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE OF IRISH PHILANTHROPY

2025–2027

PHASE



BUILD CONFIDENCE AND VISIBILITY

- Adopt and Promote a New Narrative
- Expand the Culture of Giving
- Enhance Transparency and Trust

2027 - 2030

PHASE



STRENGTHEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPACITY

- Policy and Regulatory
- Professional Development
- Develop Collaborative

PHILANTHROPY IRELAND

2030 - 2035

PHASE



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DRIVE TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT

- Champion Systemic Change
- Institutionalise Place-Based Philanthropy
- Advance Global Philanthropic Engagement

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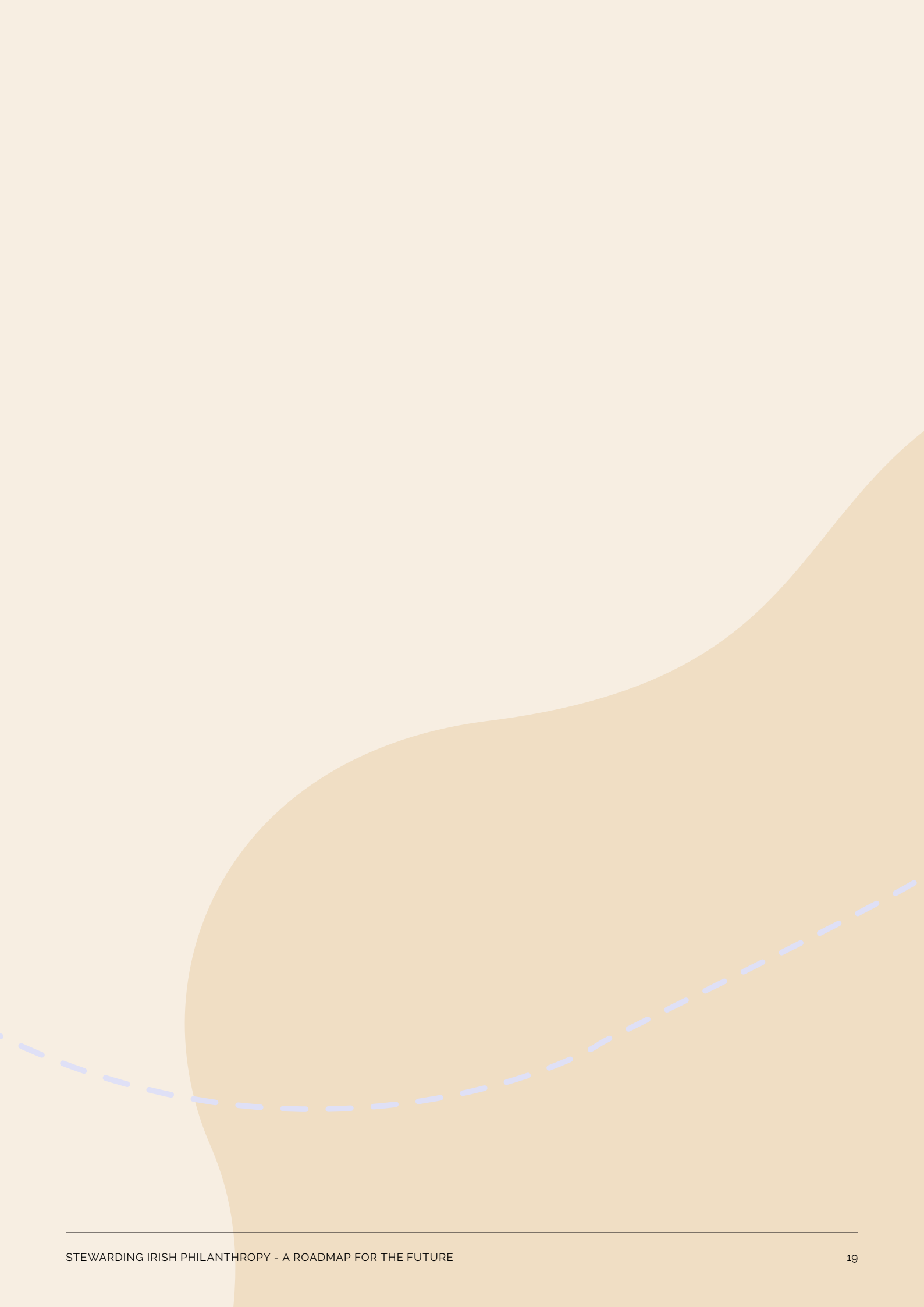
This roadmap is an invitation - not a prescription. As part of creating this roadmap and guiding vision, Philanthropy Ireland wants to empower its members and the wider community to integrate foresight and futures thinking into your own work. By using some of the tools outlined in this report and through examining the roadmap to the future through your own organisational and philanthropic lens we can reach that vision, strengthening philanthropy for increased social impact.

A Guide to Using the Future and Adopting a Futures Mindset

- Practice anticipation and welcome uncertainty
- Address biases, assumptions and fallacies
- Navigate towards the future with empathy
- Foster expansive thinking by leading with questions
- Challenge official images of the future
- Treasure failure as learning
- Shift from inside out, to outside in
- Prioritise the voice of tomorrow



Philanthropy Ireland's own journey to this work began with the Philea report- Futures Philanthropy: Anticipation for the Common Good. This excellent resource provides key guidance and tools to guide the philanthropy community. You can read the full report and find out more about the European futures philanthropy community at philea.eu



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