

# PHILANTHROPY IRELAND MAGAZINE

Issue Four  
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# **Communities, Courage & Change**

Issue Four



# About 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 the most pressing societal challenges.

Established  
in

# 1998

**65 +** Members and  
Partners

Visit [www.philanthropy.ie](http://www.philanthropy.ie) to explore membership opportunities, learn more about philanthropy and access philanthropy support.

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# The Importance of Connection in a Fragmented World



**Note from Éilis Murray,**  
CEO of Philanthropy Ireland

Reflecting on the contributions in this issue of our magazine, I am struck by an underpinning theme of connectivity. In an increasingly fractured world, this provides a beacon of hope. It is by building and deepening connections that we reach spaces for collective action for the wider good; for greater understanding necessary to build trust and tolerance; for impactful collaborations to maximise resources and for building confident pathways to achieve sustainable impact.

Connecting is what philanthropy can do so well. You will see evidence of this throughout the stories presented here. As a flexible, agile and independent resource, philanthropy can be the catalyst to deepen connections at varying levels, providing more fertile ground to create clarity, build trust and create safe spaces for co-design of solutions to some of the critical needs of our time.

In the pilot place-based giving projects we see the power of community led projects to build local ownership and trust. It can support the testing of new ideas bringing home the concept of learning partnerships. Working to the belief that philanthropy is not about replacing public funding, these pilot projects demonstrate how public and private funding, when

working in tandem, can accelerate impact. In summary they are a seed beds of connectivity.

Understanding the span of stakeholders operating in the philanthropy sector is a key starting point to build connections. We are very proud of the outcomes of our exercise to Map the Philanthropy Ecosystem in Ireland. Even at a glance, it shows the depth of engagement across the sector. It shows how the sector is growing and points to real potential for further development.

The findings of the research study on Women and Philanthropy are further affirmation of the momentum across the sector. Noting how women donors are not passive donors, it highlights the importance they place on building connections. The interview with Ed Murphy is a wonderful insight on a donors journey, the connections built along the way and the impact they have made.

The future impact of this sector won't be shaped by isolated efforts, but by the strength and intention of the connections we build - so take a moment to reflect: who are you connected to, who's missing from your circle, and what could you achieve if you reached out and built something together?

Warm regards,

**Éilis Murray,**  
CEO, Philanthropy Ireland

# The Irish Philanthropy Ecosystem

Check Out the Full Report Here

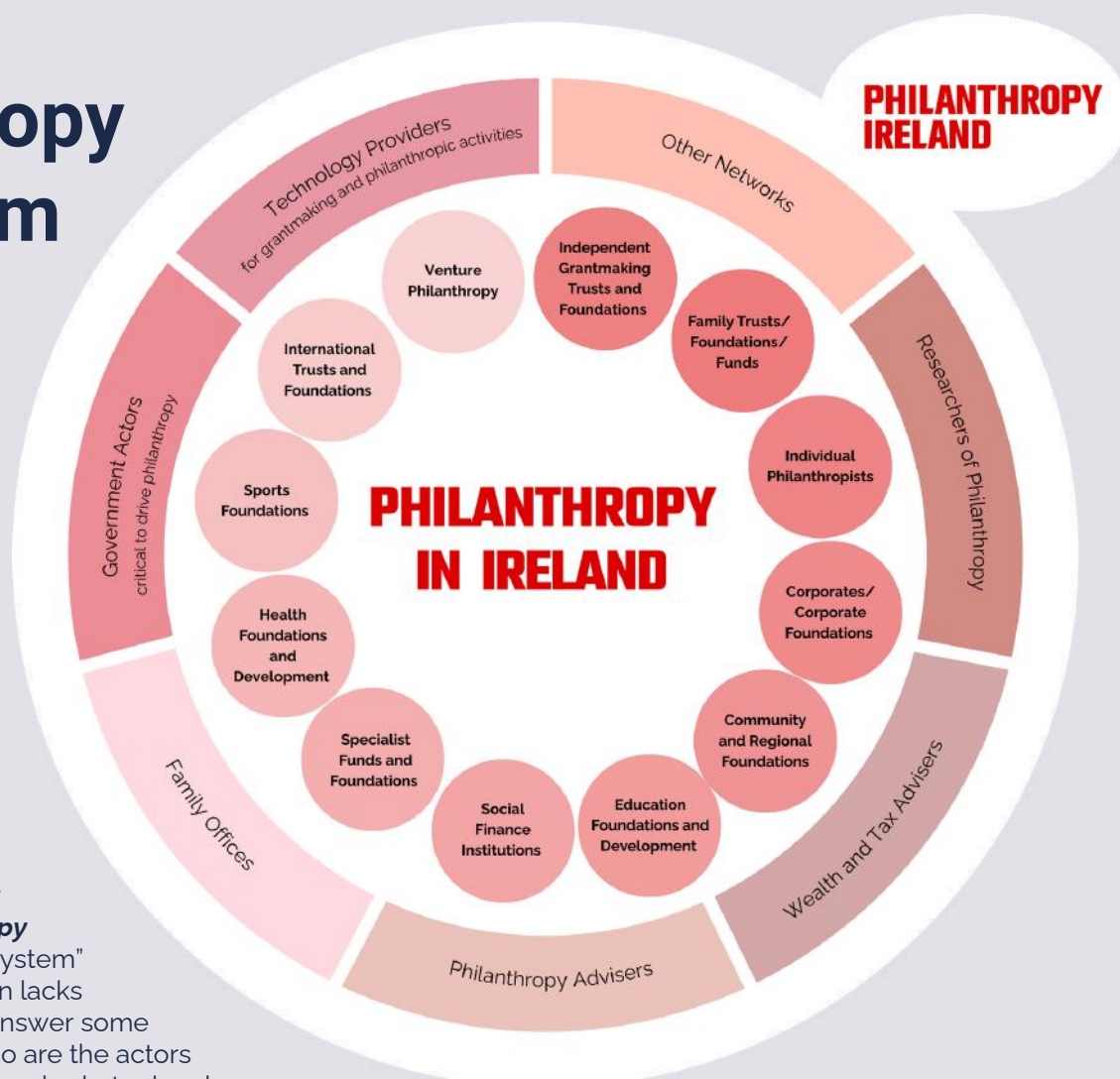


In April we launched a new report, *The Irish Philanthropy Ecosystem*. The term “ecosystem” is widely used, yet too often lacks definition. Our aim was to answer some fundamental questions: who are the actors shaping philanthropy in Ireland, what roles do they play, and how do they connect.

We see Irish philanthropy not as a single entity, but as a dynamic system, one made up of relationships, capital flows, professional expertise and shared purpose. It includes those who mobilise private wealth for public good, alongside those who create the conditions for that giving to be effective, ethical and impactful.

Understanding this ecosystem is important. When actors have visibility of one another’s roles, duplication can be reduced and collaboration strengthened. Clear pathways also support new and emerging philanthropists to engage with greater confidence. At its core, the ecosystem is values-led, grounded in a collective commitment to public benefit, ethical governance, long-term thinking and trust-based relationships.

The full ecosystem places philanthropy at the centre of an interconnected network of actors. Primary actors, such as individual philanthropists, family foundations, corporate foundations, and intermediary foundations directly deploy capital and drive impact.



What becomes clear is that impact is rarely generated in isolation. Instead, it is created through collaboration, shared knowledge, and the flow of resources across this network. Whether it is a new donor working with an adviser to establish a giving vehicle, or a corporate foundation partnering with a specialist fund to scale impact, the strength of the system lies in its connectivity.

As Philanthropy Ireland, our role is to support this system, not to direct it, but to strengthen it. We act as a neutral convenor and trusted peer network, connecting actors, promoting shared standards and values, and creating opportunities for collaboration. Through our work across policy, practice and promotion, we aim to build a more confident and accessible culture of philanthropic giving in Ireland.

This report ultimately highlights a significant opportunity. By better understanding the ecosystem and strengthening the connections within it, philanthropy in Ireland can move from fragmented activity towards a more cohesive, collaborative and impactful model. Philanthropy is most powerful when it is understood as a shared endeavour, one where each actor plays a role in delivering lasting social good.

# Carrying a Musical Legacy Forward: The Joan Trimble Bursary Awards



**Joan Trimble**, Photo by: Pat Lunny

In County Fermanagh, the legacy of one of Ireland's most distinguished musicians continues to shape the next generation of creative talent. The Joan Trimble Bursary Awards, administered by The Fermanagh Trust, stand as a lasting tribute to a woman whose influence on music remains profound.

Born in Enniskillen in 1915, Joan Trimble grew up in a household steeped in music. Her father, Egbert, a trained opera singer and her mother Marie, a violinist and teacher, fostered an environment where a love of music was abundantly accessible and encouraged. This early exposure shaped a lifelong expression of her classical music and Irish heritage; something that would define her work as both a composer and a performer.

Her studies took her from the Royal Irish Academy of Music and Trinity College Dublin to the Royal College of Music in London, where she trained under composers such as Herbert Howells and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Alongside her sister Valerie, she formed an internationally renowned piano duo, performing widely including appearances at the Proms and regular BBC broadcasts.

Yet Trimble's legacy extends far beyond performance. Her compositions, rich in Irish influence but grounded in classical forms, earned widespread recognition. Works such as Phantasy Trio and Suite

for Strings highlighted her distinctive voice, while her television opera *Blind Raftery*, commissioned by the BBC in 1957, marked a historic milestone as the first such commission awarded to a woman.

Today, that legacy lives on through the Joan Trimble Bursary Awards. Established in 2002 by her family, the fund's purpose is to encourage the involvement of young people in creativity, the performing arts and Irish culture. Since its inception, it has supported over 200 young people and awarded more than £140,000. Initially overseen by her children Joanna, Nick and Caroline (who died in 2022), the fund is now led by her granddaughter, Liz McVey, who chairs the grant panel.

Reflecting on the fund's evolution, Liz explains, "It has always been about continuing my grandmother's connection to Fermanagh and her belief in nurturing talent. Supporting over 200 young people to date is something we're incredibly proud of. It represents a real investment in the creative futures of young people here."

The awards provide bursaries for individuals from Fermanagh up to the age of 25. The bursaries enable recipients to take advantage of opportunities such as specialist training, summer schools, masterclasses and international cultural programmes in all areas of the arts. For many, this support comes at a crucial stage in their artistic development.



**Above.** From left, Moya Sweeney, Ruairí McManus, Liz McVey Chair of the Joan Trimble Bursary Awards, Emily Creevy and Dáire John Dunne

**Right.** Joan Trimble Awards from left, Eibhlinn Fee, Kerry McCabe, Adam Dilworth, Joanna McVey, Harry Rees, Rachael Fyffe and Rebecca Brady



**“Each year, we see young people taking meaningful steps forward... the bursary can make a real difference at a pivotal moment”**

“We work closely with The Fermanagh Trust, who administer a number of local funds including the Joan Trimble Bursary Awards,” Liz says. “We have a grant panel and together we decide who receives funding. There is always a great range of applications and it’s incredibly inspiring to see the level of talent and commitment among those applying.”

She adds, “What is particularly striking is the diversity of applicants. We see everything from drama, classical music to traditional music. We have supported composers of all types and performers in musical theatre. This reflects exactly what the fund has been set out to do: encourage creativity in all its forms.”

Recent recipients include Emily Creevy, a talented multi-instrumentalist, who attended Scoil Éigse in Wexford to focus on traditional Irish flute, while Dáire John Dunne, an accomplished Ulster Fleadh winner, also used his award to attend the same programme. “Those kinds of opportunities can be transformative,” Liz notes. “For young musicians especially, being able to immerse themselves in that environment, learning from others, performing and building confidence. It can really shape their direction.”

The bursaries also support creative development. Moya Sweeney, for instance, used her funding to advance her musical ‘Daughters of Ceithleann’, taking an important step in her artistic journey. Looking back over the years, Liz highlights the long-term impact the awards can have. “We’ve seen recipients go on to build successful careers in the arts. One example is tenor Andrew Irwin, who received support early on for vocal training and has since performed internationally with major opera

companies. It’s incredibly rewarding to see that progression.”

Other recipients have used their bursaries to refine their technical skills and gain performance experience abroad, from prestigious summer schools, to youth orchestras performing in Belgium and France.

For Liz and the panel, however, the decision-making process remains one of the most challenging aspects. “The standard is consistently high and every applicant is clearly passionate about what they do. But that in itself is encouraging. It shows just how much talent there is across Fermanagh.”

At its core, the Joan Trimble Bursary Awards are about more than funding. They are about opportunity and encouragement. “Each year, we see young people taking meaningful steps forward,” Liz says. “Whether it’s attending a summer school or performing in new settings, the bursary can make a real difference at a pivotal moment.”

Joan Trimble herself was not only a gifted composer and performer but also a dedicated educator who believed in sharing knowledge and fostering talent. More than two decades after her death, her influence continues to resonate not only through her music, but through the young people who are now finding their own creative voices.

“The awards are about carrying that legacy forward,” Liz reflects. “Giving young people the chance to explore their potential and stay connected to the rich cultural traditions my grandmother valued so deeply.” ■

## Testing What Works: One Year on from Ireland's Pilot Place-Based Philanthropy Projects



Common Knowledge's Field Good Friday



Meitheal Makers, Community Climate Action Capacity Building Weekend

In May 2025, the National Philanthropy Policy for Ireland 2024–2028 moved from ambition to action.

Through a targeted call from the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, a new initiative was launched: Pilot Place-Based Philanthropy Projects.

The aim was not just to fund activity but to test something more fundamental: **Can philanthropy, government and communities work together deliberately and transparently to address real local challenges?**

One year on, we are beginning to see what that looks like in practice. Not as a finished model but as a live test, with all the complexity that brings.

### From Policy to Practice

The pilot call set out to test a specific model: co-funded, community-led partnerships, grounded in place. This was a deliberate design choice.

Not philanthropy operating separately.

Not government acting alone.

But a structured attempt to bring both into alignment around shared outcomes.

Projects were required to:

- Address a clearly identified local need
- Be led by a community organisation
- Include a confirmed philanthropic partner

- Demonstrate collaboration across sectors
- Commit to measurable outcomes and learning

Funding was structured on a 50:50 match basis, ensuring shared investment and shared responsibility. From 33 applications, 9 projects were selected, representing a total investment of almost €1.9 million, split evenly between public funding and philanthropic contributions. It was a test how this model can work in practice.

### A Diverse Portfolio of Local Innovation

The selected projects span the country - from Clare to Cork, Dublin to Limerick and reflect the diversity and complexity of challenges facing communities: Education. Food poverty. Access to justice. Youth disadvantage. Environmental resilience.

Together, they form a portfolio of real-world experiments:

- **JumpAGrade** (Cork), supporting over 1,200 students in disadvantaged areas
- **Citywise** (Dublin), improving access to third-level education
- **Croom Community Kitchen** (Limerick), tackling rural isolation and food poverty
- **The Hygiene Hub** (National), addressing hygiene poverty at scale
- **Legal Change-Makers** (Limerick), expanding access to justice

## Partnership is the Innovation

These pilots are:

- Bringing philanthropy into structured, transparent collaboration with government
- Creating new relationships between community organisations, donors and local authorities
- Testing the role of intermediaries in managing funding and governance

These partnerships are being developed within clear governance frameworks, ensuring transparency, accountability and alignment with public funding principles

## Communities Are Leading, Not Receiving

A defining feature of the programme is that projects are community-led.

This has resulted in:

- Strong alignment with real, lived needs
- Local ownership and trust
- Relevant and responsive programme design

## Philanthropy is Supporting Learning

Across the projects, philanthropy is playing a distinct role:

- Enabling new ideas to be tested
- Supporting early-stage innovation
- Providing flexibility where traditional funding may be constrained

In effect, these projects are operating as learning partnerships where ideas can be tested, evidence generated, and insights used to inform future policy decisions.

## Early Signals of Impact

Although full evaluations will take time, the projects are generating insights:

- What makes co-funding work in practice
- Where governance or reporting needs refinement
- How partnerships can be structured more effectively

Importantly, these projects are also testing approaches that may be adapted or replicated in other contexts. This learning is a core objective of the pilots and one of their most valuable outputs.

## What This Means for Policy

These pilot projects are doing something important: They are making the National Philanthropy Policy real.

They demonstrate that:

- Philanthropy can complement public systems
- Government can engage in partnerships that are structured, transparent and aligned with public priorities
- Community-led initiatives can be strengthened through blended funding models

Perhaps most significantly, they provide practical evidence base and learning for future decisions.

As the policy moves forward, these pilots will help answer key questions:

- Where is philanthropy most effective?
- What partnership models work best?
- How can this approach be scaled responsibly?

For policymakers, the key question is not whether philanthropy can contribute but under what conditions it is most effective - clarity of roles, strong local leadership, and appropriate governance structures are critical to making these partnerships work in practice.

Can the learning be captured clearly? Can it inform how

Government engages going forward? Can effective models be adapted and applied elsewhere without losing what made them work locally?

## This is where policy becomes real.



**Citywise,** improving access to third-level education

## Looking Ahead

The Pilot Place-Based Philanthropy Projects are a starting point. Their impact will be measured not only in local outcomes but in how they inform a broader shift:

From isolated funding streams to collaborative, place-based solutions. From abstract policy to practical partnership. From "what is philanthropy?" to "how can it help?"

It is still early. It is still evolving.

But it is beginning to show what is possible when partnership is treated not as an idea, but as a practice.

The Department are working on the design of a collaborative framework which will put in place a mechanism for Government, philanthropists and beneficiary organisations to work together on social issues of shared concern. It will enable all parties to engage and agree on key areas such as funding principles, roles, decision-making, learning, and accountability.

The first iteration of the framework is currently being finalised with a view to testing via a funding call in 2026. The learnings captured from testing the framework, and the Pilot Place-Based Philanthropy Projects will inform future refinement of the framework to ensure it can be utilised by all parties to strengthen social impact in Ireland. ■



Sightsavers

# How Philanthropy is Helping Sightsavers Ireland Deliver Lasting Impact Through Eye Health



**Luyando (11)**, through Sightsavers' inclusive eye health project in Zambia, Luyando was able to visit a hospital where she was diagnosed with cataracts. © Sightsavers. Photo by: Hudson Chirwa

In a world shaped by growing inequality, climate change, and fragile health systems, the need for effective, scalable health interventions has never been greater. Eye health stands out as one of the most powerful, and cost-effective ways to transform lives. For Sightsavers Ireland, philanthropy has played a key role in turning this potential into lasting impact, enabling us to restore sight, strengthen health systems, and ensure that those furthest behind are reached first.

Established in 2003, Sightsavers Ireland's vision is to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote the rights of people with disabilities across more than 30 countries in Africa and Asia. While our work spans disability, education, and social inclusion, eye health remains our defining strength and the area where philanthropic investment has consistently delivered impactful results.

In 2024 alone, Sightsavers globally supported more than half a million eye operations, the vast majority of which were cataract surgeries. Cataract remains the leading cause of blindness worldwide, yet it can be treated with a straightforward, low cost operation that restores sight in under an hour. For individuals living in

poverty, however, access to such treatment is often out of reach. Philanthropic funding enables Sightsavers Ireland to bridge this gap, supporting everything from community screening and referral to hospital capacity, surgical equipment, and trained health workers.

Strategic partnerships allow Sightsavers Ireland to invest in quality sustainable health care. Donor support has helped strengthen district level eye care systems, improve surgical outcomes, and embed monitoring tools that ensure accountability and continuous improvement. This approach ensures that restored sight is not a one off intervention, but part of a resilient local health system capable of serving communities long after a project ends.

Eye health is also a powerful entry point for tackling inequality. Women and persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected by avoidable blindness and face greater barriers to accessing care. When it comes to eye care, women have poorer access to services than men and are more likely to be blind or have a visual impairment. Without targeted action to address barriers to access, women are likely to continue experiencing higher rates of avoidable blindness than men. Philanthropic partners have

enabled Sightsavers Ireland to design and deliver eye health programmes that are deliberately inclusive combining gender responsive outreach, disability inclusive facilities, and close collaboration with organisations of persons with disabilities. As a result, women consistently make up more than half of cataract surgery beneficiaries across many programmes.

Through partnerships with Irish Aid, the European Union, and philanthropic supporters, Sightsavers Ireland has helped translate global commitments into practical action, ensuring that eye health services are accessible, equitable, and aligned with national systems. Philanthropy has been particularly important in enabling flexible, long-term approaches that support policy engagement, system strengthening, and evidence generation alongside service delivery.

"Sightsavers Ireland is a valued partner for **ElectricAid**, reflecting the importance we place on working with trusted organisations that combine strong governance with deep expertise. Through our funding partnership, we are supporting sustainable, long-term solutions for people living with visual impairments, delivering meaningful impact to marginalised communities throughout the countries where Sightsavers works."

The value of these partnerships lies not only in funding, but in trust. Many of Sightsavers Ireland's supporters have partnered with the organisation over many years, providing the stability needed to plan, respond to emerging needs, and maintain focus in an increasingly volatile funding environment.

As the international development sector faces mounting pressures from global aid cuts to rising demand, this model of partnership is more important than ever. Philanthropy enables Sightsavers Ireland to remain agile while staying anchored to evidence, accountability, and impact. It supports innovation, such as integrating digital monitoring tools into routine eye care delivery and ensures value for money by investing in interventions proven to deliver lifechanging outcomes at scale.

Looking ahead, Sightsavers Ireland remains ambitious. With avoidable blindness still affecting millions, sustained philanthropic engagement will be essential to protect hard-won gains and extend access to quality eye care for those who need it most. For philanthropy leaders seeking measurable impact, few investments are as compelling: restoring sight not only changes individual lives, but strengthens families, communities, and health systems.

Charitable giving has helped Sightsavers Ireland demonstrate what is possible. With continued partnership, it can help ensure that avoidable blindness becomes a thing of the past and that no one is left behind. ■

"At **L'Occitane en Provence**, we believe in crafting life ties with heart and reason. We strive to build meaningful connections that go beyond commerce and into real human impact. Our partnership with Sightsavers Ireland is a powerful expression of that belief."



**Above.** Luyando's sight was restored following cataract surgery.  
© Sightsavers. Photo by: Hudson Chirwa



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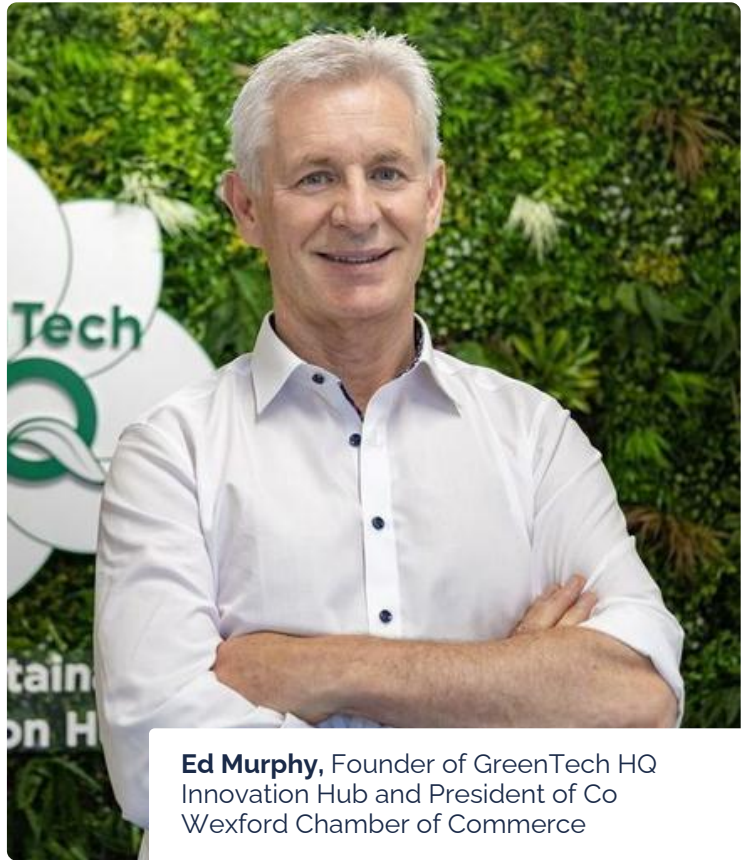
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"**Bank of Ireland Staff Charitable Fund** are proud to partner with Sightsavers Ireland and support the impactful work they deliver in some of the world's most underserved communities. Their commitment to improving eye health, fighting disease and strengthening health systems is inspiring. Throughout our collaboration, Sightsavers Ireland have always operated with a high degree of transparency, accountability and consistently delivered programmes on time and on budget. Their focus on sustainability and local capacity building ensures that their programmes create lasting change. Bank of Ireland Staff Charitable Fund greatly values this partnership and looks forward to continuing to support their vital work."

# Driving Local Change: An Interview with Ed Murphy



**Ed Murphy**, Founder of GreenTech HQ Innovation Hub and President of Co Wexford Chamber of Commerce

In this episode of the Philanthropy Ireland Podcast, Vincent Wall spoke with Ed Murphy about business, giving, and revitalising rural Ireland. Ed reflected on business success, the meaning of “enough,” and why he has committed his time and resources to revitalising communities in County Wexford.

**Vincent Wall: You’ve had a hugely successful business career. When did philanthropy begin to take shape for you?**

**Ed Murphy:** I think if you end up in philanthropy, it’s probably always been in your nature. But for me, it became real when I stepped back after exiting my business and recognised I had enough. That’s a moment people rarely acknowledge. I realised I didn’t want to spend another decade building something just to repeat the same cycle. Instead, I wanted to use what I’d learned to do something genuinely useful.

**“I think often... people are not pulled aside and told, by the way, you probably have enough.”**

**That shift brought you back to Wexford. What did you see when you returned?**

Coming back after so many years, I could feel the difference straight away. The energy I remembered just wasn’t there anymore. Too many young people had left, and with them went ambition, vibrancy, and future potential. That really drove me. I wanted to help create sustainable jobs and a community where people could live, work, and enjoy life locally again. It wasn’t just about employment, it was about rebuilding a sense of place.

**You didn’t set up a traditional foundation. Instead, you’ve taken a collaborative approach. Why?**

I came into philanthropy a bit sideways. I started by helping the county council, but I found I could move faster and have more impact by setting up something myself. That led to Green Tech HQ.

The idea was to create an innovation hub focused on sustainability; renewable energy, circular economy, and future industries. At the same time, I began mentoring local businesses to help them scale,

because growing indigenous companies is one of the fastest ways to create jobs.

I also chose to work with organisations like Rethink Ireland because they bring governance and expertise. If I put in €50,000, it can turn into €100,000 and do real value for the community. That kind of leverage made sense to me.

### What impact have you seen so far?

At the start, there was plenty of scepticism, even from myself at times. I was investing my own money and taking a chance on something new. But today, there are over 100 people working in the hub. We've supported dozens of companies and helped create real jobs. That's hugely satisfying. Beyond that, I can see a shift in mindset. There's more positivity, more engagement, and people beginning to believe in what's possible again.

### You've taken risks throughout your career. Has your attitude to risk changed?

Not really. If anything, I'm even more comfortable with risk now. I've had successes and failures over the years, but you don't need to win every time. If one in three or four works out, that can make all the difference. Now, I'm willing to take those risks for something bigger than just business success.

**"The biggest risk in life is not taking a risk at all."**

### What challenges have you encountered in trying to drive change locally?

One of the biggest challenges is a decline in community spirit. Volunteerism isn't as strong as it once was, and there's more of an individual mindset. I believe businesses, especially successful ones, have a responsibility to give back, to support their local communities, mentor others, and help build a stronger environment overall. That's something we need to rebuild.

### What would you say to others considering philanthropy?

I'd say start small and get involved. You don't have to have all the answers. Work with organisations that know what they're doing, learn from them, and build from there. Most importantly, recognise when you have enough and think about what you can do with that. For me, the satisfaction of helping, mentoring, and seeing real change has been far greater than anything I experienced in business.

**"I haven't been paid for the last six or seven years... but it's the best job I've ever had."**

Ed Murphy's journey shows how entrepreneurial skills can be redirected towards community impact. By combining local focus with collaborative giving, he is helping to create a model for sustainable, place-based philanthropy in Ireland. ■

*This is an extract of the Philanthropy Ireland podcast. You can find out more about the Philanthropy Ireland Podcast on the QR code below.*



**Above.** Ed Murphy Appointed President of County Wexford Chamber. *County Wexford Chamber.*



# A Public Ready for Philanthropy: Opportunity Meets Awareness Gap



**Krystian Seibert from Philanthropy Australia, Michael McLaughlin from Amárach Research and Éilis Murray from Philanthropy Ireland at the Philanthropy Symposium 2025**

New research conducted by Amárach Research on behalf of Philanthropy Ireland offers an encouraging and instructive snapshot of how the Irish public views philanthropy today. At a time when the National Philanthropy Policy is gaining momentum, the findings point to a clear conclusion: the appetite for philanthropy exists, but awareness still lags behind.

At its core, the research reveals a striking paradox. While philanthropy is widely valued, it is not yet widely understood.

One third of respondents (33%) admitted they do not know what philanthropy means, highlighting a fundamental awareness gap that presents both a challenge and an opportunity.

Even when provided with a definition, familiarity with philanthropy in practice remains limited. Only one in four people (25%) reported awareness of a project or initiative supported by philanthropic funding. This suggests that while philanthropy is active across Ireland, its visibility to the general public is not

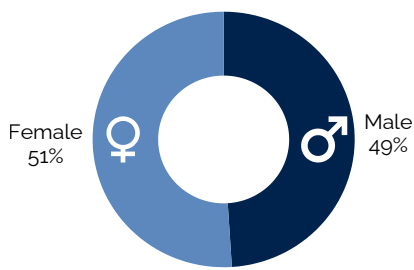
keeping pace. Yet, the broader sentiment toward philanthropy is overwhelmingly positive.

More than half of respondents (56%) believe philanthropy plays an important role in supporting communities and social causes. This belief strengthens further when framed as a responsibility: 65% agree that individuals and organisations with significant resources have a duty to contribute to society.

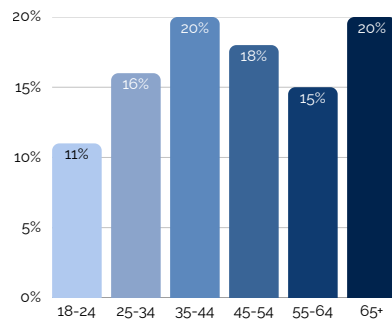
Importantly, the public is not only supportive, they are also looking to leadership. Nearly two-thirds (63%) believe that government should actively encourage philanthropic giving. This is a powerful signal to policymakers that there is public backing for a more enabling environment for philanthropy in Ireland.

These findings arrive at a pivotal moment. With the National Philanthropy Policy now in place and with dedicated capacity within Philanthropy Ireland now in place through our new Communications and Awareness Lead to advance this key objective the sector is uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between goodwill and understanding. ■

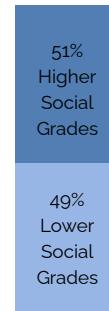
## AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS



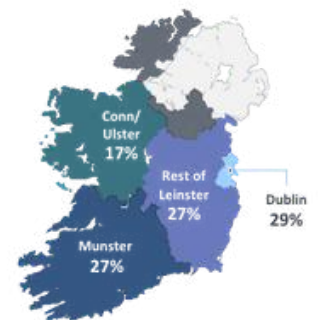
Gender



Age

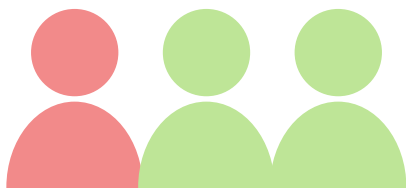


Social Class

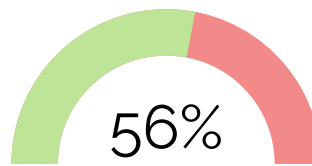


Region

## ATTITUDES TO PHILANTHROPY



**33%** don't know what **philanthropy** means

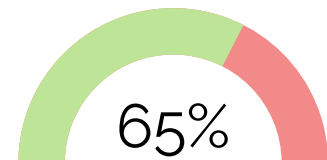


believe **philanthropy** plays an important role

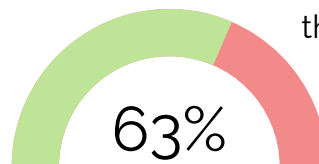


in supporting communities and social causes in Ireland

believe those with resources have a **responsibility to give**



**25%** are aware of a **philanthropic project**



think **government** should encourage philanthropy



**The opportunity is clear:** by increasing public awareness, showcasing real-world impact, and strengthening enabling supports, Ireland can unlock a deeper culture of giving. The public is ready. The mandate is there. What comes next is ensuring that philanthropy is not only valued but visible, understood, and empowered to grow.

# From Grants Rage to Real Impact



**Kathy Richardson**, Executive Director at Our Community

I've spent a fair chunk of my career listening to what I've come to call "grants rage."

On one side, community groups: online forms that crash, questions asked multiple times in slightly different ways, reports that take days to write and are never read. On the other, grantmakers: applications that miss the point, don't align to policy goals, or look great on paper but don't deliver much in practice. Both sides are frustrated. Both are right.

When we built SmartyGrants back in 2009, our first client was a local council about to commission a bespoke system at significant cost. They took a punt on us instead, and we built the system alongside them. More than 850 funders (including 200+ local councils) have since joined.

SmartyGrants is a grants management platform, but it was never meant to be just software. We built it to fix the friction on both sides of the system, and to embed better grantmaking practice into the everyday work of applying for, managing and reporting on grants. I've often described it as a benevolent Trojan horse – we don't just make processing grants more efficient. We're also improving how they're made.

Grantmakers have been very good at measuring activity – how many grants, how many applicants, how many workshops delivered – but less good at answering the obvious follow-up: what actually changed? That gap isn't for lack of effort. It's structural. Too often, policy is made in one room and grantmaking done in another, with no door in between.

That realisation led us to build the Outcomes Engine, a tool built into SmartyGrants to help grantmakers answer that perennial question: what difference did we make? But building the tool taught us something humbling: the hardest part isn't the technology. It's the thinking.



When one Australian council signed up as a beta user, they went looking for their outcomes framework and found themselves drowning in internal plans – nine major ones, 200-plus objectives. It took days of work just to produce a usable list. When they then asked grantees to describe their outcomes? Most wrote activity statements. A few swung the other way – "solving poverty" for a two-year grant. The council ran workshops just to get grantees to the starting line.

This isn't unusual. Across the sector, grantmakers and grantees alike have been operating without a shared language for change. The Outcomes Engine provides that language – a structured framework connecting what a funder is trying to achieve with what grantees actually report. A couple of years on, that council's data revealed something worth knowing: the outcomes being funded were surprisingly narrow. That's not a failure, that's intelligence – the kind that drives better decisions next round.

Our next frontier is AI. Used well, it can improve efficiency, reduce duplication, and surface patterns that would otherwise stay buried. Used badly, it risks automating poor decisions and amplifying bias. Our broad approach to AI is to let machines do the admin, but keep judgement where it belongs – with the humans.

None of what we're building will eliminate grants rage. But there's a practical place to start: before you design your next round, write down what you want to be different in the world when the money's been spent. Not what you're funding – what you want to change. That single act of clarity reshapes everything downstream. Grant funds are too precious for vague intentions. ■

*Kathy Richardson is Executive Director of SmartyGrants, part of the Our Community group, and has spent more than two decades working to improve grantmaking practice and impact.*

# Women and Philanthropy in Ireland: From Hidden Presence to Recognised Influence

Check Out the Full Report Here



**Dr Maria Gallo** is Strategic Projects Manager at Trinity Business School and a co-author of this study.

Women & Philanthropy in Ireland: From Hidden Presence to Recognised Influence is a new landmark study that presents the first in-depth qualitative exploration of giving by women to Ireland. I was part of a research team including my colleagues Dr Sheila Cannon, Dr Gemma Donnelly-Cox and Lian Wang at the Centre for Social Innovation at Trinity Business School, Trinity College Dublin. This research was possible with the support and partnership of Community Foundation Ireland. In March, Dr Mary McAleese launched the [research report](#) at Trinity College Dublin at an event to mark International Women's Day.

## Why This Research Matters

Women play a central role in Ireland's culture of giving, yet their contributions are often under-recognised or under-researched. Through a literature review, consultation with international experts, and in-depth interviews with women philanthropists and philanthropic advisors, this study set out to understand women's giving journeys and the factors that shape them. As the research project lead, Dr Gemma Donnelly-Cox explains: "Our research finds that women in Ireland are giving in ways that are thoughtful, values-driven, personal and

strategic. They contribute financial support, time, networks, advocacy, and leadership." The research aims to generate insights that could inform both policy and philanthropic practice, strengthening the evidence base for philanthropy in Ireland.

The study shows women generate opportunities to mobilise financial resources, expertise, and networks to address systemic challenges and strengthen communities locally and globally. At the launch Dr Sheila Cannon shared: "This research challenges outdated assumptions about women's giving. Women in Ireland are not passive donors. They are strategic, values-driven and deeply engaged in shaping social change." She added: "We got to hear about thoughtful, careful, meaningful and impactful stories of giving and impact. It was a real privilege to gather these stories. We are so grateful to the women who gave us their time and shared their experiences with us."

Overall, the research suggests that by expanding the visibility for women's philanthropic leadership—alongside gender-inclusive giving strategies, stronger data, and sustained investment—there is potential to unlock even greater impact.



**Above.** Report authors Dr Maria Gallo, Dr Sheila Cannon and Lian Wang. Photo by: Naoise Culhane



**Left**, Pictured at the launch are Kate Bond, Chief Advancement Officer, Trinity Development Alumni; Linda Doyle, Provost, Trinity College Dublin; Mary McAleese, Chancellor of Trinity College and Former President of Ireland; and Denise Charlton Chief Executive of Community Foundation Ireland. Photo by: Naoise Culhane

## Key Findings

Women's philanthropy in Ireland is strategic, multi-dimensional, and shaped over a lifetime. The research shows that women engaged in philanthropy contribute far more than financial resources: they give time, skills, networks, advocacy, and leadership. Early influences such as family values, education, and community engagement shape initial attitudes, while later in life women's giving often becomes more strategic or catalytic, informed by leadership experience, legacy planning, and a desire to drive systemic change.

Women navigate dynamic dimensions in their philanthropy, balancing visibility and privacy, moving between collaborative and individual approaches to giving, and integrating data-driven decision-making with personal experience and values.

## What's Next

The study underscores the need for further philanthropy mapping and longitudinal research in Ireland. There is also value in an international comparative analysis—critical steps in advancing a more complete picture of women's philanthropic impact in Ireland and the wider Irish philanthropic sector.

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**The report: Women & Philanthropy in Ireland: From Hidden Presence to Recognised Influence co-authored by Dr Sheila Cannon, Dr Gemma Donnelly-Cox, Dr Maria Gallo and Lian Wang of the Centre for Social Innovation, Trinity Business School – Trinity College Dublin is available on [tcd.ie](https://tcd.ie).**

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## Key Insights



The report *Women and Philanthropy in Ireland: From Hidden Presence to Recognised Influence* provides **the first in-depth qualitative insight into how women are shaping the country's philanthropic landscape**, revealing a shift from largely invisible contributions to a more strategic and influential role. Based on interviews with 38 participants, the research finds that women's philanthropy in Ireland is "**thoughtful, values-driven, personal and strategic**," combining financial giving with time, expertise and advocacy to drive long-term social change.



A central finding is that women are not passive donors but **active partners and leaders**. As one contributor notes, philanthropy today is "not just money, it's also who you know... I'm interested in **solutions that can solve multiple problems at once**." This reflects a broader trend towards systemic thinking, where donors prioritise sustainable impact over short-term interventions.



The research also highlights the **deeply personal nature of giving**. Women's philanthropic journeys often mirror their life experiences, evolving over time and shaped by family, education and values. "Our philanthropic journey is tied to our personal journey," one interviewee explains, while another recalls giving "since my first full-time paycheck... even before I really knew what philanthropy meant." This **lifetime approach to giving** underscores both consistency and adaptability, with women maintaining engagement even during periods of economic uncertainty.



**Left.** Pictured at the launch are Denise Charlton Chief Executive of Community Foundation Ireland; Mary McAleese, Chancellor of Trinity College and Former President of Ireland; Linda Doyle, Provost, Trinity College Dublin and Kate Bond, Chief Advancement Officer, Trinity Development Alumni. Photo by: Naoise Culhane



Despite this growing influence, the report finds that **women’s philanthropy often remains understated**. A strong cultural preference for privacy persists, with many donors reluctant to self-identify publicly. As one participant puts it, “Irish people are generous... but very few will say, I give significantly... we are unbelievably discreet.” At the same time, others see visibility as a tool for advocacy, using their profile to encourage wider participation and normalise giving.



Another key insight is the **balance women strike between emotional motivation and evidence-based decision-making**. Many donors describe navigating between “my head” and “my heart,” combining personal passion with a focus on measurable impact and transparency. This dual approach reflects a maturing philanthropic culture that values both empathy and effectiveness. **Relationships and trust emerge as critical enablers**. Women emphasise the importance of strong connections with organisations and advisors, with one noting, “Once you’re engaged, you’re much more likely to give again, because the relationship is there.” These relational dynamics support more sustained and strategic engagement over time.



Overall, the report positions women’s philanthropy as a “**strategic force for positive social change in Ireland**,” highlighting its growing scale, sophistication and impact. While challenges remain - including limited data and structural barriers - the **findings point to significant untapped potential if visibility, policy support and research continue to evolve**.

### Who We Are

Since 2002, OKC has been working across the not-for-profit sector to enable philanthropic impact. We are passionate about enabling social transformation through philanthropy by providing values-led and impact driven counsel for our clients. **We are committed to connecting great people to great causes to enable great impact!**

### Our Services

Philanthropy Strategy & Advisory | Structuring & Governance for Foundations and Funds | Board & Leadership Development | Impact Frameworks & Assessments | Training & Coaching | Grantmaking Design, Foundation Strategy & Programme Development | Investment & Stewardship Advisory | Risk, Evaluation & Learning | Partnership & Legacy Planning | HR & Recruitment

**If you too are passionate about enabling social impact through philanthropy, we’re always happy to chat!**  
Please email [oonagh@okennedyconsulting.ie](mailto:oonagh@okennedyconsulting.ie) to arrange a conversation.

# Celebrating Women In Philanthropy

The insights, wisdom and generosity of women and girls is always central in driving Community Foundation Ireland's commitment to deliver for people, place and planet.

Through our work as a philanthropic hub we meet and work with extraordinary women every day. On the ground in communities, as researchers, advocates and philanthropists they lead and drive our equality mission.

All are bound by a shared vision, a belief in a society that is better, fairer and stronger. A belief that in an uncertain complex world will be fought for over the coming decade.

Hard-won rights are under pressure. Digital misogyny, democratic backsliding, the rise of domestic and sexual violence are all taking place against a landscape of a planet which is itself under threat.

## Resolve

Yet this is not a moment for despair. It is a moment for resolve. Across the world, women are not only responding to these challenges, but they are also redesigning the systems that created them.

They are leading climate-justice movements, pioneering restorative approaches to peace and security, driving community-resilience to strengthen entire societies and reshaping philanthropy.

Internationally their contribution is often misunderstood and understated in terms of being a source of allyship and support as well as the impact it can have in advancing equality.

The publication of 'Women and Philanthropy in Ireland: From hidden presence to recognised influence' is an opportunity to raise awareness while also encouraging others to follow a similar philanthropic journey.



**Denise Charlton**, CEO of  
Community Foundation Ireland

The insights from the pioneering research by the Community Foundation in partnership with Trinity College Dublin must not just inform our next steps as a philanthropic hub but also the implementation of the wider National Policy on Philanthropy.

## Values-led and Strategic

Women philanthropists shape the agenda for social change. Whether as individuals, as families or influencing corporate philanthropy their giving is intentional, relational, and rooted in justice.

The approach is transforming what philanthropy can be. What is striking is the thoughtful values led motivation not just in terms of financial support but that thirst to become informed, involved and to act on issues which hold a deep or personal resonance.

Often extending their contribution to offer their own life experience, skills and insight. This can be seen in the philanthropic support for work and projects to expand access to education, create opportunities for young people, strengthen families, and assisting those experiencing poverty, displacement, or violence. Impact is happening and lives are being transformed in every community.

## The Future

Our world is hugely complex. Women-led philanthropy has an increasingly important role to play. It offers courage, vision and values when others shy away or are silent. We look forward to continuing the conversation with all who want to be part of its next chapter. ■



# Planning for the Future: Stewardship in Irish Philanthropy



**Helen Harrington**, Director – Stewardship Advisory Services

Across Ireland's philanthropic and charitable landscape, leaders, donors and trustees are facing a common challenge. Social need is becoming more complex, resources are under pressure and expectations around impact and accountability continue to rise. In this context, a key question emerges: how can we support work that is sustainable, mission-led and fit for the future?

A stewardship perspective provides a compelling answer. Stewardship is about the careful, values-led oversight of resources entrusted for the public good. It extends beyond financial management to include responsibility for people, purpose and long-term impact. In uncertain times, stewardship offers a shared framework for planning, funding and supporting meaningful change.

## The Case for Long-Term Thinking

Philanthropy is often driven by the need to respond quickly to urgent challenges. However, lasting impact depends on the ability to look ahead. Stewardship encourages all actors in the system to ask deeper questions: Are current models sustainable? Are resources aligned with mission? Are we funding activity or enabling long-term impact?

When planning and funding decisions are rooted in stewardship, they help build resilience within organisations, strengthen public trust and ensure charitable resources are used responsibly over time.

## Grounding Strategy in Reality

Effective planning begins with an understanding of both social need and organisational capacity. Communities evolve, demographics shift and economic or policy changes reshape demand. Meanwhile, many charities face constraints including limited funding diversity, stretched teams or governance structures shaped by past contexts. From working with charities and philanthropists in Ireland and internationally, the most meaningful planning processes are grounded in realism. Clear-eyed assessment enables better decisions and more sustainable strategies. For funders and advisers, supporting this reflective phase can be as valuable as supporting delivery itself.

## Planning as an Ongoing Journey

Planning isn't a static document but an ongoing process. It requires clear priorities, realistic timelines and strong governance, alongside a willingness to review and adapt to changes. The most effective plans are collectively owned by boards, leadership and supported by funders who understand that organisational health underpins impact.

## Implications for Philanthropy

A stewardship lens invites philanthropists, trustees and advisers to think differently about their role. Supporting future readiness may mean funding governance, leadership or core capacity, not just programmes. It may also involve accompanying organisations through change, recognising adaptation as a sign of responsible stewardship rather than failure.

## Key Takeaways

- Stewardship provides a shared framework for sustainable, mission-led impact
- Long-term thinking strengthens organisations and philanthropy alike
- Honest assessment of capacity is essential for credible planning
- Mission clarity should guide both strategic and funding decisions
- Funders play a crucial role in enabling resilience

## Conclusion

Planning for the future isn't about eliminating uncertainty, it's about creating the conditions in which charitable work can continue to respond effectively to social need. ■

*Cantor Fitzgerald Ireland provides specialist stewardship advisory services, supporting organisations to plan responsibly for the long term and align resources with purpose and impact. To find out how L&P Cantor Fitzgerald Ireland can support your organisation, please contact [l&p@cantor.com](mailto:l&p@cantor.com).*

**Warning:** The content doesn't constitute financial, investment, legal or tax advice and should not be relied upon as such.

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# From Pier to Podium: The Power of Philanthropy in Irish Sport



**Sienna Wright of Howth Yacht Club**, Credit: Sailing Energy

When Irish Sailing's Eve McMahon won Gold at the Grand Slam regatta in Los Angeles in 2025, few in the crowd knew the full story. Behind that podium moment was an Irish donor who had funded a training base on the Pacific coast — practical, personal philanthropy that gave Eve and her teammates the environment they needed to train in the waters of the 2028 Olympics. It is not the first time a supporter has changed the course of an Irish sailor's career. Before Rio 2016, an Irish donor offered Annalise Murphy use of a base in Brazil. She won Silver at the Rio Olympic Games. Philanthropy has been part of this story for a long time.

## A Foundation Built for Sport

The Irish Sailing Foundation (ISF) was established in 2015 as Ireland's first foundation created specifically for the philanthropic support of sport. We raise funds to support Irish Sailing's Performance Pathway — the four-stage programme from junior development to senior Olympic squad through which Ireland's future champions are built. Our mission goes beyond medals. We believe in the holistic development of young people: the discipline, resilience and leadership that competitive sailing instils are qualities athletes carry into every area of their lives. With the support of our donors, the majority of whom are based here in Ireland, we work to ensure that talent, not background or postcode, determines how far a young sailor can go.

That commitment extends across the island. ISF bursaries have enabled talented athletes from Northern Ireland to choose to compete for Ireland — removing what was, at its root, a financial barrier. The idea that philanthropy can make it possible to opt to compete for Ireland is one we find quietly extraordinary.

The Pathway supports sailors from the age of thirteen through to thirty, accompanying them across the most formative years of their lives. For the vast majority, the destination is not the Olympics — and that is not the point. The skills forged along the way — how to set a goal and pursue it under pressure, how to recover from setbacks, how to lead and be led — are the real prize. A young person who has been through this programme carries something with them long after the racing is over. Donors to the ISF are not simply investing in Irish sailing. They are investing in the people Irish Sailing produces.

## What Philanthropy Makes Possible

In 2025, donor support enabled the ISF to provide additional support to more than 50 young athletes. Every high-performance athlete needs access to world-class coaching, sports psychology, strength and conditioning, and nutrition expertise. Sailing adds further layers specific to the sport: meteorological analysis, and sophisticated data and performance analytics using technology common to aerospace and Formula 1. ISF funding helps Irish



**Above.** 29er European Championships in Sweden 2023. Photo by: Mogens Hansen - Royal Swedish Yacht Club (KSSS)



**Irish Sailing's Eve McMahon**, Paris 2024 Olympic Games Sailing Regatta

## IRISH SAILING FOUNDATION



Contact **Catherine Tempany** at [catherine@sailingfoundation.ie](mailto:catherine@sailingfoundation.ie)

The results speak for themselves. In 2025, Irish sailors won six senior international medals. All four of Ireland's Paris 2024 Olympians were ranked in the World Sailing Top Five. U23 coaching support was a direct factor in Erin McLwaine and Ellen Barbour winning Bronze at the World Championships, and Ben O'Shaughnessy and Ethan Spain claiming Gold at the U23 Europeans. The ISF also funded a pilot Coach Development Programme, bringing performance-level coaching to clubs nationwide — the most significant step yet towards all-island access to competitive sailing.

### Why Philanthropy - and Why Now

What makes philanthropy specifically impactful — more so than grant funding or commercial sponsorship — is its flexibility and its longevity. State funding is essential but constrained. Commercial sponsorship follows visibility and rarely reaches junior or development athletes. Philanthropy fills the space between: it funds the additional coaching hour, the accommodation bursary, the pilot programme, the LA base. It takes the long view, because donors who give to the ISF are not investing in this year's results. They are investing in a generation.

For donors in Ireland, the 2024 Finance Act has made giving more accessible than ever. For those with Irish connections in the United States or United Kingdom, the ISF works with the Ireland Funds to enable tax-efficient giving through established structures in both countries. Irish-connected donors abroad have been part of this story since the beginning — from Annalise's base in Brazil to Eve's base in LA — and we welcome that connection as part of a broad and generous community. ■

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# Governance, Compliance & Grantmaking: What Ireland's Philanthropic Foundations Need to Know

Ireland's philanthropic sector continues to evolve and develop. As philanthropy gains prominence through the National Philanthropy Policy and increasing public visibility, governance and compliance are increasingly central to how foundations and grantmakers build trust, demonstrate accountability and maximise impact. Recent guidance from the Charities Regulator, governance practitioners, and the Charities (Amendment) Act 2024 signals a clear shift to what we have known for some time: governance is no longer a peripheral administrative function, but a strategic priority.

## Choosing the Right Structure: Philanthropy Beyond Charity Status

For philanthropic foundations, governance begins with organisational structure. In Ireland, philanthropic entities may operate as charitable trusts, Companies Limited by Guarantee (CLGs), unincorporated associations, or through non-charitable philanthropic structures. Importantly, philanthropy does not require charitable registration. However, charitable status offers increased public confidence, legal recognition, and tax advantages while also imposing a clear framework for regulatory obligations.

To be considered for registration as a charity, an organisation must satisfy the charity test. This includes charitable purpose, public benefit and constitutional compliance. Foundations must therefore carefully assess whether their chosen structure serves their mission, operational model, and governance capacity.

Best practice includes regular board evaluations, trustee induction and training, robust risk registers, documented policies, and clear governance procedures. If philanthropic organisations expect high governance standards from grantees, they must apply equal or greater scrutiny to their own operations. Strong governance is the foundation of credibility and long-term impact.



## The Charities (Amendment) Act 2024

The Charities (Amendment) Act 2024 signals some changes in Ireland's charity regulatory framework. Key reforms include:

- A statutory minimum of three trustees
- A requirement that the majority of trustees are not connected relatives (excludes in-laws and cousins)
- Explicit trustee duties
- Enhanced obligations around governance documentation, member registers and winding-up procedures

For philanthropic foundations, these reforms reinforce the importance of board independence,

**Below.** Philanthropy Ireland Members attending Convening with the CEO of the Charities Regulator Madeleine Delaney in February 2026.



formal oversight, and succession planning. They also present challenges for smaller or community-led organisations that may lack governance infrastructure, highlighting an important role for philanthropy in funding governance capacity, trustee development and compliance support.

### **Smarter Grantmaking: Due Diligence and Oversight**

Governance obligations do not end in the boardroom; they extend directly into grantmaking practice. Foundations are increasingly expected to verify the regulatory standing and governance quality of grantees, including checking the public charity register before funding decisions.

Where grants are made to non-registered

organisations or social enterprises, trustees must ensure funding advances their own charitable purpose, delivers public benefit and includes sufficient oversight. This requires foundations to move beyond simple grant disbursement toward more structured due diligence, monitoring, and accountability frameworks. Trustees must be able to demonstrate that funds are used as intended and aligned with their charitable objectives.

### **Financial Transparency and the Rise of SORP**

The phased implementation of the Charities Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) marks a significant advancement in financial transparency. Standardised reporting will improve comparability, public trust, and financial accountability across the sector.

For many smaller organisations, however, these new standards may create operational strain. This presents a strategic opportunity for philanthropists to support grantees not only through programme funding, but through investment in governance systems, financial controls, digital infrastructure, and administrative resilience. Flexible funding for compliance capacity may prove essential to sustaining effective civil society organisations.

### **From Compliance to Strategic Leadership**

Compliance should not be viewed as an obstacle to philanthropic ambition, but as the framework that protects mission integrity, public trust and long-term effectiveness.

For philanthropic foundations and grantmakers, the challenge is to move beyond meeting regulatory minimums. It is to embed governance excellence into organisational culture, strategic planning, and grantmaking practice. Those that do so will be best positioned to navigate Ireland's evolving regulatory environment while staying true to their mission, while delivering sustainable and credible social impact. ■

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