The Community
Foundation for Ireland

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Grants Survey
2017

The Community Foundation for Ireland Grants Survey 2018

Each year The Community Foundation for Ireland reaches out to its grant applicants for feedback in relation to its processes, service delivery and funding schemes. In 2017, this process yielded 160 survey responses from *applicants to* and *recipients of* grants from The Community Foundation for Ireland and its donors. Responses came from a wide variety of individuals working across the breadth of the charity and voluntary sector in organisations whose budget ranged from under €50,000 per annum (32%) to over €1,000,000 (22%). The vast majority of these organisations were in receipt of grant aid from more than one other source in 2017, ranging from statutory support from local and national government and the EU, to private funding through charitable trusts and foundations and partnerships with Business. When asked what areas these organisations had most difficulty in securing grant support for, 'Staff Costs' and 'Capital Expenditure' ranked highly, as did 'Overhead Costs' and 'Equipment'.

How We Communicate

With a view to receiving feedback on the ways in which we communicate with grant applicants, we asked how the respondents had first heard about The Community Foundation for Ireland. 23% indicated that they had heard of us through a donor or through a Donor Advised Fund. 18% cited word of mouth as their source and 12% discovered us through our website or via a general internet search. The remainder came through a variety of other sources such as the media, other charities and advertisements about our funding schemes.

Almost a third of all those who completed the survey had read our monthly e-zine 'Philanthropy News Ireland' in the last year and when asked whether they found the information useful, the reaction was exclusively positive. *"Extremely useful, allows us to keep abreast of events and opportunities", "Interesting to see what The Community Foundation is involved in", "Very interesting and good information".*

Feedback in relation to our website www.communityfoundation.ie was also overwhelmingly positive, particularly its new iteration which went live towards the end of 2017. The question was open-ended rather than quantitative and within the 124 responses, words that recurred frequently were: *'comprehensive', 'up-to-date', 'insightful', 'engaging', 'clearly laid out', 'concise', 'very well designed', 'attractive', 'good visuals', 'user-friendly'* and *'easy to navigate'* . Below are some direct quotes from the respondents: *"The new website is excellent", "New design very accessible and attractive", "Excellent website - very comprehensive, informative and easy to navigate", "Presents needed information in a structured and enhancing way. Well done! ".*

How responsive and relevant is our grantmaking?

Within the survey, we asked our grant applicants whether or not they felt that The Community Foundation for Ireland's Social Change Grants were responsive to the needs of communities in terms of their size and the issues they tackle.

59% of respondents 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that the size of the grants (€1,000-€10,000) were responsive to these needs, with 32% saying they were unsure, 8% 'Disagreeing' and only 1% 'Strongly Disagreeing'. Similarly, 72% of respondents 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' that the issues addressed by our Social Change Grants are relevant and responsive to the needs of communities, with 24% saying they were 'Not Sure' and only 4% 'Disagreeing' to any extent. Suggestions for change included the introduction of multi-year or second stage funding for scalable projects and the introduction of larger grants being made available to flagship projects.

When asked to compare their experience of applying to The Community Foundation for Ireland with that of other grant-making bodies, 67% of respondents claimed that their experience with us was better, less than 1% felt that it was worse and the remaining 32% rated these experiences as 'about the same'.

The survey also asked respondents to rate The Community Foundation for Ireland's understanding of the needs of local communities. Of those who answered, 62% felt that we demonstrated 'Expertise' in our understanding of these community needs and a further 29% felt that we demonstrated 'Good knowledge' in this respect, while 9% felt that we showed a 'Limited understanding of community needs'. Those who believed us to have a 'good' or 'expert' level of understanding of community needs, went on to explain that, in their experience, The Community Foundation for Ireland's grant making is based on an awareness of *'existing and emerging needs'* and informed decisions that derive from consultation with vulnerable groups and communities. On the other hand, respondents who believed that our understanding was 'limited' made a number of suggestions for improvement including; greater funding for smaller and less well-known organisations; a widening of grant criteria to include a more varied cohort of vulnerable people; greater transparency in relation to how our funding criteria is devised and; increased engagement and contact with local communities to inform grant making.

Another aspect of The Community Foundation for Ireland's grantmaking is our Learning Network Events that bring together grantees from our Social Change grant rounds to share details of their projects, their experiences and the challenges they face. In the survey we asked participants to rate their experience of these events and, overall, the responses were very positive. The vast majority of respondents felt that the following elements of the event were either 'Excellent' or 'Good'; Venue (100%), Timing (90%), Format (90%), Facilitators (95%). The remaining participants felt that these elements were 'Fair' and nobody rated any of them as 'Poor'. 85% of those who took part in answering this question had positive experiences in terms of the 'Networking' and 'Learning' opportunities provided by these events, 15% felt that the opportunities provided were 'Fair' and nobody selected 'Poor'. Regarding overall usefulness of the event for their work, the reaction was more mixed, 25% felt that it was 'Excellent', 55% felt that it was 'Good', 10% rated it as 'Fair' and the remaining 10% selected 'Poor'. Comments in relation to the Learning Network Events included reference to the fact that allocating staff and finances to attending events like this can put smaller organisations under pressure. Suggestions for change included the idea that regular grantees who had previously attended these events might be exempt from attending for every

subsequent grant awarded.

Our Service Delivery

While completing the survey, grant applicants were also asked to rate their experiences of applying for and receiving a grant from us. Over 90% of all respondents to these questions felt that the processes of 'Accessing and completing the online application form', 'Submitting an online form' and 'Receiving feedback on an application' were 'Easy' or 'Very Easy'. Almost 70% of respondents felt that 'Knowing when a scheme was open' was 'Easy' or 'Very Easy' and 87% of respondents found 'Understanding the grant criteria' 'Easy' or 'Very Easy'. Respondents commented that the process was smooth and that the application was straightforward, user-friendly and accessible. They also found staff to be supportive and helpful. Suggestions for improvement of these processes included; less repetition in the online application form; greater clarity in terms of the variety of grants available; more information in relation to the number of grants made and types of projects that receive funding and; more detailed feedback in relation to unsuccessful applications.

Within the survey we also asked grantees to rate how easy or difficult they found various elements of the post- application process. None of the respondents found any of the elements 'Very Difficult' and the vast majority of respondents found the following elements 'Easy' or 'Very Easy': Receiving Payment (98%), Completing the Evaluation Plan (97%), Completing the Monitoring Report (95%) and Completing the Outcome Report (93%). Of those who had had a site visit carried out by The Community Foundation staff, 93% felt that the process was 'Easy' or 'Very Easy'.

We also asked participants to rate the quality of advice and service received from us in relation to their grant. The majority reported very positive experiences, with 59% saying that the quality was 'Excellent', 40% saying it was 'Good' while the remaining 1% thought it was 'Poor'. Positive experiences were also reported in the context of receiving feedback on grants process (51% 'Excellent', 46% 'Good', 3.8% 'Poor') and the efficiency of receiving the grant itself (64% 'Excellent' and 36% 'Good').

Similar levels of satisfaction were experienced in relation to the accessibility of our staff (65% 'Excellent', 34% 'Good' 1% 'Poor') and how well informed our staff are (62% 'Excellent' and 38% 'Good'). Respondents also left overwhelmingly positive comments in relation to the level of service provided by the Grants and Donor Services Team: *"Thank you for making your grant processes, clear, easily adhered to and most of all not burdening. You should share your best practice with other Foundations who are younger and could benefit. Thank you!"; "Excellent team, respond to queries straight away and really make sure you are getting your reports in on time"; "Your staff are really helpful and supportive of the work we do"; "Found the whole process through Community Foundation very professional and staff extremely supportive"; "(the staff member's) help and support throughout the application process - not entirely straightforward - was invaluable".*

Further to this, the overall reported levels of satisfaction with The Community Foundation for Ireland were high, with 70% of respondents answering that it

was 'Excellent', a further 28% rating it as 'Good , 1% saying 'Average' and the remaining 1% providing a 'Poor' rating.

As part of this feedback, we also ask participants to nominate one thing that The Community Foundation for Ireland should *start* doing and one thing we should *stop* doing. Over 100 people made suggestions in relation to what we should start doing, many of which can be grouped under similar category headings as follows:

Types and Size of Grants: Suggestions included; looking more closely at specific geographic areas or specific causes (sick children/ eco-social projects etc); considering the funding of capital and core costs for organisations as well as fundraising costs; increasing grant amounts and/ or providing follow-up funding to scale up projects after the first year.

Capacity Building for Small Organisations: Support governance costs; offer workshops on grant writing; insist on inter-sectional work between different groups; build a social movement for Equality- promoting zero tolerance to inequality.

Community Engagement: Carry out more site visits; work more closely with the communities to develop a clear understanding of their needs and challenges they face.

In relation to what The Community Foundation for Ireland should *stop* doing, similar themes emerged. Participants suggested that some of our grants criteria might be too closely defined and led by thematic causes when it could beneficial to have broader, more flexible funding available. Others felt that larger and fewer grants would be more socially impactful and one commenter noted that they would like to see greater ethnic diversity on the Board of the organisation.

Recommendations

The feedback received from our grantees in 2017 has been invaluable. The positive statistics and high levels of satisfaction in relation to our service have affirmed that, in many respects, the work we are doing is informed, responsive and is delivered efficiently. We will, however, continuously strive for greater levels of excellence in this regard.

We will also, within the constraints of our own resource limitations, carefully consider the recommendations made by these stakeholders. The suggestion that we might expand our grantmaking to include the funding of capital, staff and other core costs is one that is repeated by organisations every year and we understand the enormous pressure that groups within the charity and voluntary sector are under simply to meet operating costs. However, as a relatively small grantmaking organisation, we are unable to provide sustainable core funding to organisations and instead seek to support social change by funding project-based activities that yield significant, measurable impact. In a similar vein, we feel that the size of the grants we offer (€1,000-€10,000) is commensurate with our capacity as a small funder. What we will aim to look at over the course of the next few years, however, is the potential to introduce second-year funding for projects that have been piloted, have demonstrated positive outcomes and are scalable.

As part of our current three year strategy, *Giving, Grantmaking and Growing for Social Change* (2018-2020) we are also working towards greater levels of engagement with the community and voluntary sector through increased consultation with relevant organisations and more frequent site visits with our grantees. Further to this we are looking at providing capacity building funding and guidance to organisations that are in need of support and are also carrying out an evaluation of the ways in which we measure impact to maximise efficiency and to inform future grantmaking.

Conclusion

As always, The Community Foundation for Ireland appreciates the time and effort respondents took to provide us with feedback on the various aspects of our grant application and grant making processes. This annual survey provides invaluable assessment and comment that informs our commitment to continual improvement.