

HOPE & AMBITION

A MOUNT STREET CLUB TRUST
INITIATIVE

*DEMONSTRATING TRUST
BASED PHILANTHROPY*

**PHILANTHROPY
IRELAND**

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Mount
Street
Club
Trust

Philanthropy Ireland spoke to the funders and grantees of the 'Hope & Ambition' project, to understand how they adopted the trust based philanthropy model and how it impacted both the funder and the grantee.

In our telling of this story, we aim to probe into the roots of trust based philanthropy and further examine the outcomes and challenges in adapting the trust based philanthropy model to the Irish context.

The motivation behind undertaking this case study stems from the need to study and explore different approaches to philanthropic practices. Traditional models of philanthropy often perpetuate power imbalances, limit the autonomy of grantees, and fall short in demonstrating sustainable impact.

Trust based philanthropy, on the other hand, offers a transformative framework that prioritises trust, collaboration, and empowerment. By examining the 'Hope & Ambition' project supported by the Mount Street Club Trust (MSCT), we aim to showcase the tangible benefits and outcomes of trust based philanthropy in action.

Further, by highlighting the principles and practices through real-world examples, we seek to ignite a broader conversation around the challenges involved in adapting this approach and how to address these challenges to ultimately drive positive change in the philanthropic landscape.

We would like to acknowledge and express our sincere thanks to all those who gave so willingly of their time and input, making this research possible.

“The Trust-based philanthropy model is not policy driven, it is practice driven. Whole-hearted engagement is the factor that defines trust-based philanthropy.”

**Dr. Liz Hayes,
Director, Corporate Community
Organisational development expert and facilitator, Hope & Ambition
Project on behalf of the Funder, Mount Street Club Trust.**

TRUST BASED PHILANTHROPY

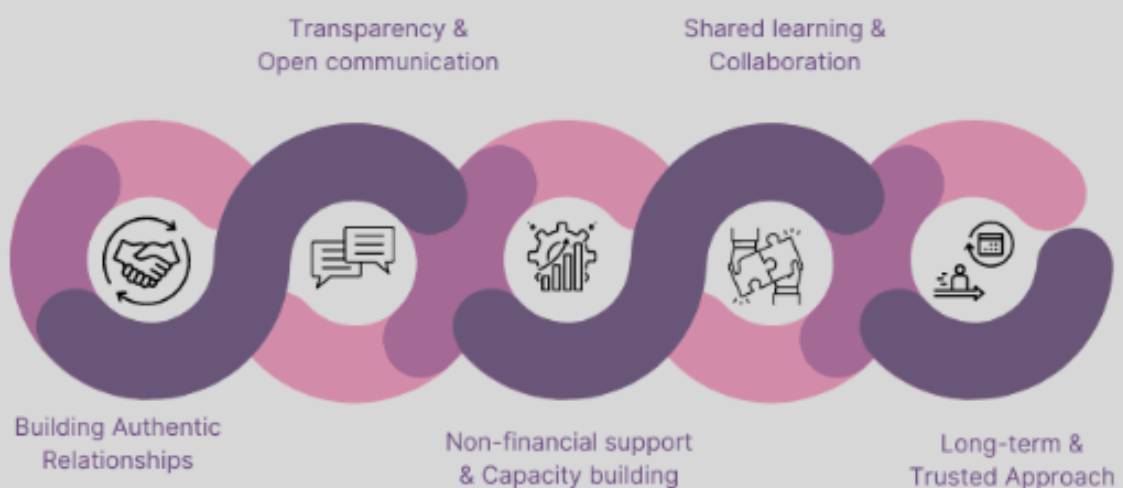
Trust based philanthropy represents a transformative approach to traditional philanthropy. The key principles of trust based philanthropy revolve around engagement, responsiveness, open and honest communication, building trusted relationships, providing long-term flexible funding, promoting transparency, collaborative action, and prioritising the needs of the grantees.

Trust is foundational in this approach, as it enables, mutual understanding, and shared accountability. philanthropic practices, aiming to foster equitable and collaborative relationships between funders and grantees.

At its core, trust based philanthropy prioritises building trust, promoting mutual respect, and empowering grantees to address social challenges with autonomy and flexibility. This approach shifts away from transactional interactions and seeks to establish long-term, authentic relationships between funders and grantees.

Flexible funding gives grantees the autonomy to allocate resources based on their unique understanding of the challenges they face, thereby enabling them to respond effectively and adapt their strategies as needed.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE TRUST-BASED PHILANTHROPY MODEL



The 'Hope & Ambition' project

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Germinated from a 2016 conversation MSCT and five recipient organisations in place that enabled sustainability for 3 years. The project was conceptualised and codesigned by between Dr. Liz Hayes and the trustees of MSCT around the structural nature of inequality and exclusion. By 2019, it evolved into a project with a structure that were focused on supporting vulnerable and marginalised people within our communities.

The first three-year phase of the project was completed in June 2022. From June to December 2022, MSCT and the recipients engaged in a co-design process to arrive at a proposal for collaborative action and a new momentum for its next phase.

The MSCT Approach

From its experience, MSCT works from the view that organisations can seem straightforward when represented in a typical organigram or even when deliverables are set out in a strategic plan. The Trust acknowledges however, that day-to-day reality is way messier and more complex. It believes that relationships matter! It also recognises that the capacity to listen, inquire and critically reflect depends on mutual respect, learning from experience and engaging with the work and its challenges in a practical manner.

“The criteria and rationale that brought the funders and grantees of the project together was a sense of wanting to do something that was looking at patterns of exclusion in the experience of different people’s lives.”

Dr. Liz Hayes

Building Authentic Relationships

Responsiveness, compassion, open communication, affirmation, encouragement, and interest were key in building and maintaining relationships within the project. The project fostered trust by enabling funders to work closely with grantees, gaining a deep understanding of their challenges and needs. The project recognised the importance of creating a space where experienced leaders could openly discuss their challenges.

“Participating in the project and having an opportunity to share and learn from experiences has helped develop solidarity and strong bonds.”

**Maoliosa Boyle,
Executive Director, Rua Red
Grantee, Hope & Ambition Project**



The Clubs: Fostering Collaboration and Collective Impact

Hope & Ambition project offers developmental assistance to recipient organisations and their staff, with a specific emphasis on organisational growth, leadership development, best practices, well-being, and fostering collaboration across sectors.

The project facilitates sessions like the CEOs Club and the Practitioners Club, where recipient organisations come together to exchange ideas, share expertise, address challenges, and find inspiration in ways they might not have anticipated. These platforms serve as valuable support networks, promoting mutual support and encouraging innovation among participants.

The clubs established within the 'Hope & Ambition' project have played a pivotal role in fostering collaboration, shared learning, and collective impact among the grantees. By bringing organisations together, these clubs have created a collaborative ecosystem that encourages the exchange of ideas, promotes collective problem-solving, and amplifies the impact of philanthropic efforts. The legacy of collaboration established through these clubs serves as a testament to the power of collective action in driving sustainable social change.

“Being a CEO can be lonely. The CEO club is a fantastic initiative which enables meeting other CEOs and provides us an opportunity to collaborate and share concerns, issues, and learnings.”

Peter Sheekey
CEO, Intercultural Language Service
Grantee, Hope & Ambition Project.

Transparency and open communication

Transparency and open communication were integral to the Hope & Ambition Project. The project sought to redefine the grant-giving process, moving away from traditional top-down approaches. Regular and open communication channels were established, enabling honest conversations, active listening, and shared decision-making. Both funders and grantees were encouraged to voice their perspectives, challenges, and aspirations, fostering a culture of transparency and trust. This facilitated a deeper understanding of each other's needs, resulting in more effective collaboration and resource allocation.

Reporting: Focusing on learnings and reflections

Reporting for the project was not a form to fill out or checklist to tick off, instead, it was a narrative enquiry, informed by discussions in clubs. The reports captured reflections around three questions that could help frame the learnings from delivering the project:

1. What is 'unique' to each organisation, as they've come to know each other and meet other interested parties with the assistance of MSCT?
2. Where could we all go with those 'intractable' challenges, contradictions or puzzles that require a different approach?
3. What might be possible if we were to imagine that we have power to act collectively?

“Sometimes, in projects it feels like reporting and statistics become more important than the delivery of the project. On the contrary, reporting for the ‘Hope & Ambition’ project was focused on impact that goes beyond numbers.”

***Maoliosa Boyle,
Executive Director, Rua Red
Grantee, Hope & Ambition Project.***

Non-financial support & Capacity building

The Hope & Ambition Project went beyond traditional financial support by providing non-financial assistance and capacity-building opportunities to grantees. Recognising that organisational development is vital for long-term success, the project invested in building the capacity of grantees. Support mechanisms such as clubs and peer learning platforms facilitated knowledge exchange, skills development, and problem-solving. By offering resources, expertise, and mentorship, the project empowered grantees to strengthen their organisational structures and strategies.

Shared learning & collaboration

The Hope & Ambition Project fostered a culture of shared learning and collaboration among. Through regular interactions, clubs, and networking events, participants had the opportunity to share experiences, insights, and best practices. This collaborative environment facilitated cross-pollination of ideas, innovative approaches, and collective problem-solving. Grantees were encouraged to learn from each other, creating a supportive ecosystem where success stories and challenges were shared openly. This enabled grantees to enhance their impact and create strategic partnerships and collaborations.

Collaboration

A few key collaborations that came out of the project has been highlighted below:

- Irish Refugee Council and Intercultural Language Service are closely collaborating with each other in extending support to refugees in Ireland. The two organisations have a great working partnership and share a good number of beneficiaries who they are able to support more effectively, together.
- Rua Red and Glencree have collaborated in working with refugees and newer communities who come into Ireland. They find that the creative arts have immense potential in supporting refugees dealing with compounded trauma.
- Irish Refugee Council and Rua Red have partnered to extend support services to youth groups.



Long-term & Trusted Approach

The three-year funding duration of the project provided a valuable opportunity for relationships to develop and deepen over time. Unlike many funders primarily focused on providing financial support for projects, the Mount Street Club Trust offered organisational support, which further strengthened involvement and trust-building. Building trust was acknowledged as a time-consuming process, but the high level of engagement in the project contributed to trust-building over time. The project's three-year funding model provided the foundation and continuity necessary for trust to flourish.

“The three-year funding from the Hope & Ambition project towards the youth work in Irish Council provided the much-needed certainty, longevity, and an opportunity to plan. Three years was a significant investment and that in itself involved an element of trust.”

***Nick Henderson
CEO, Irish Refugee Council
Grantee, Hope & Ambition Project.***

Challenges faced

The Hope & Ambition project encountered various challenges that required careful attention and strategic solutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed an access challenge as it impacted people unequally. The project had to adapt to online services and explore alternative forms of collaboration, particularly for organisations working with vulnerable populations such as those in direct provision or young people with learning disabilities.

Smaller organisations sometimes struggled to meet the demands of the project, and building trust and engagement required significant time and involvement.

Above all, ensuring long-term sustainability for the project's model was identified as the most imminent challenge. The fears around sustaining in the long run became more pronounced when one of the grantees – Blossom Ireland, had to take the difficult decision to wind down its operations due to ongoing funding issues faced by the organisation.

Addressing Challenges

The clubs within the project became crucial support mechanisms while addressing the challenges faced. The project fostered a learning journey for both funders and grantees, emphasising the importance of ongoing conversations. Peer learning and support played a significant role in helping smaller organisations overcome initial challenges. Adopting a collective action and problem-solving approach enabled the project to address uncertainties effectively. While initially challenging, taking time out for the clubs proved rewarding for grantees, who benefited greatly from the engagement. The project's design incorporated flexibility to adapt and respond to emerging needs, which proved crucial in facing adversities and addressing challenges.

The 'Hope & Ambition' project is not a hand-out, but a hand up!
Peter Sheekey

***CEO, Intercultural Language Service
Grantee, Hope & Ambition Project.***

Many organisations work in a relational way, invest in partnerships and building relationships. They don't necessarily call it trust based philanthropy. The Mount Street Club Trust does not claim to be the only organisation to have built a project on the grounds of trust and relationships. But, with Hope & Ambition, the Mount Street Club Trust has been able to effectively integrate trust in the structure of grant giving.

“The motivation behind the ‘Hope & Ambition’ project is the possibility to do better and the need to rethink the idea of grant giving – both as a gift & a constraint.”

**Margaret Barry
Chairperson, Mount Street Club Trust
Funder, Hope & Ambition Project.**

Trust based philanthropy as model shows promise and could be an effective approach to promote impactful philanthropy. The scepticism around the model being too good to be true can be linked to its departure from traditional philanthropic practices, and its principles that prioritise trust, transparency, collaboration, and empowerment.

While trust based philanthropy has gained popularity in recent years, there is a strong need to have a wider conversation around the sustainability challenges associated with this approach. Addressing these sustainability challenges requires careful consideration and ongoing learning within the trust-based philanthropy community. Funders and grantees must collaborate to develop strategies that balance trust, accountability, and long-term sustainability, while also recognising the broader systemic changes needed to make trust-based philanthropy a more widely adopted approach.

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Philanthropy Ireland would welcome any thoughts or suggestions on different models and methods of philanthropy you would like us to profile. Contact info@philanthropy.ie and let us know your thoughts.



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