



The  
Atlantic  
Philanthropies

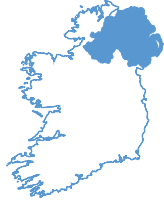
Northern  
Ireland



More than 22,000 students share classes, resources and facilities each week in Northern Ireland, bringing children, parents and teachers of Catholic and Protestant communities together. In Derry/Londonderry, these students from St. Mary's and Lisneal colleges share a citizenship class.

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The  
Atlantic  
Philanthropies



Northern Ireland

BY SUSAN MCKAY



In 2012, Chuck Feeney received an unprecedented joint Honorary Doctorate of Laws from all nine universities, in the North and the Republic, in recognition of his contributions to higher education.

## Dedication

To Charles Francis Feeney, whose generosity and vision have improved the lives of millions, on the island of Ireland and across the globe.

## Foreword

I have had the good fortune both to work for grantee organisations supported by The Atlantic Philanthropies and to have also worked for Atlantic itself. My connection with Atlantic and Chuck Feeney goes back over 20 years.

Chuck's values, style and approach to his philanthropy shaped Atlantic's approach to giving. Once he decided to support an organisation, he trusted it to get on with the work. He also placed a high degree of confidence and autonomy in Atlantic's staff charged with making recommendations on where money should be awarded.

We were all given a lot of space and trust. I know of few philanthropists who take the same approach. It felt like a huge responsibility and an even bigger privilege.

Chuck knew that not everything would work out well. Indeed, he expected risks to be taken. He also expected that grantees and those who worked for him would do their very best to extract the most value and good from the available funds. His confidence inspired us to do our very best.

Atlantic has had a long and significant relationship with Northern Ireland. No book could capture or do full justice to that relationship and its fruits, but Susan McKay, one of Ireland's most respected journalists, took up the challenge and makes a more than impressive stab at it.

One is struck by the diversity of issues addressed and by the range of ways in which Atlantic deployed funds to advance change. Investments were made in buildings, advocacy, pilot projects, research, education, leadership, human capital, convenings and capacity building. I could go on... Change is difficult, and Atlantic invested in the full suite of tools to achieve it.

If the tactics to achieve change were many, so too were the areas where Atlantic invested to make a difference. Enhancing our universities, integrating our schools, combatting cancer, tackling dementia, improving outcomes for children, protecting human rights, ending punishment attacks, integrating former prisoners, promoting equality are among several examples. The overarching priority that comes through clearly was building the peace.

Susan McKay illustrates key aspects of the work with a range of personal stories which give colour to what was achieved and the challenges faced, providing deep insight into why this work was important and the difference it made.

While capturing the achievements, the book also pays due attention to the challenges associated with investing large amounts of money in a small number of organisations over a relatively short period of time. Having a limited life, as Atlantic intended, meant that more money could be given over a fixed timespan. That's great when the money flows but is easily forgotten when it comes to an end.

The following pages clearly illustrate that Atlantic's investments—time limited as they were—secured and spurred change. I think it's also clear that the change initiated will in many cases be sustained, even if some of the organisations supported may not. Time will tell.

I'm immensely proud of what Atlantic's grantees have done in Northern Ireland. I know that Chuck is also very proud, particularly of the role they played and continue to play in moving the peace forward and cementing it.

The truly remarkable thing, however, is that the story told in this book about the impact of Atlantic's giving in Northern Ireland is replicated in many other geographies where Chuck Feeney also chose to invest. We are all the better for it.

Northern Ireland is just one part of an amazing story about one man who used his money, his brain and his heart to make the world a fairer and more decent place.

*Martin O'Brien*

*O'Brien is former senior vice president of programmes and Northern Ireland country director for The Atlantic Philanthropies.*





“Feeney’s judgement was that Northern Ireland harboured a great wealth of under-valued assets in higher education and research, and the violence hampered their potential.”

Christopher G. Oechsli, president and CEO of The Atlantic Philanthropies

McClay Library at Queen’s University, Belfast has more than 1.2 million volumes to support research and scholarship.

## Preface

**M**uch has been made of the fact that the once-multimillionaire Chuck Feeney wears a cheap watch, flies tourist class and carries his papers in a plastic supermarket bag. There is undoubtedly an element of eccentricity at play here, but it is important to remember that this is a man who was profoundly influenced by the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie's famous 1889 essay, *Wealth*. Carnegie argued that the "man of wealth" was duty bound "to set an example of modest, unostentatious living...to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent upon him and, after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer...to produce the most beneficial results for the community."

As a man of wealth who had himself benefitted from what Carnegie called "ladders upon which the aspiring can rise," Feeney, determined to use his fortune for the good of the community, set up the Atlantic Foundation in 1982. Feeney decided to give anonymously. Although not a practising Catholic, he may have been influenced by the Sermon on the Mount, in which Christ said, "When you give alms, sound no trumpet before you." Because Feeney's roots were in Northern Ireland, and because he was deeply troubled by the violence of the political conflict, a good portion of his wealth was invested here.

Today, for a range of reasons, we know who Chuck Feeney is. We know he is the man whose wealth enabled The Atlantic Philanthropies to invest in magnificent buildings and facilities at our universities, and in bravely experimental approaches to making the peace process work where it most needed to work—at the heart of the communities which were most deeply afflicted by the Troubles. This short book outlines some of the work the foundation did in NI before it put the last of its funds to work and finished its grantmaking, handing over responsibility for sustaining the work it had supported to the government and other funders.

It also captures some of the reality of what Atlantic's funding has brought about. The head of an integrated school in a tough sectarian town talking about the joy in the faces of the children of all religious backgrounds walking and talking together. The daughter of a man with dementia talking about the relief it was to have her father cared for at home as a result of a Dementia Friendly Communities initiative. The professor telling how bowled over people are by the "far out virtual worlds" he and his colleagues at the Sonic Arts Research Centre are exploring.

Not all of what Atlantic did here was well thought out and successful—but a great deal was. The professor speaks for many when he says: "We have attracted funds from many other sources now, but we would never have been able to do any of this cutting-edge work without Atlantic's initial support, without its vision and willingness to take risks."

As for Chuck Feeney, the late Martin McGuinness was probably right when he described him as "one of the most special people on the planet."

*Susan McKay*



“On the grandest scale, this was born out of [Feeney’s] belief that a strong economy would promote peace and reconciliation and that developing a knowledge-based economy was the best strategy for attracting international companies and the better jobs that would come with them.”

The University of Ulster’s Coleraine campus has three buildings from Support Programme for University Research funding, including the Centre for Molecular Biosciences.

Liz Welch in *Laying Foundations for Change: Capital Investments of The Atlantic Philanthropies*, 2014

## Summary

**F**rom 1991 through 2016, The Atlantic Philanthropies invested £351 million in Northern Ireland, providing 583 grants to 167 organisations. They have contributed to:

- promoting the peace process
- reshaping higher education
- supporting cross-community primary and secondary schools
- improving public services to tackle disadvantage
- developing social policy based on evidence of need, and demonstrable effectiveness
- strengthening independent organisations and leaders promoting and protecting rights and holding government to account.

Atlantic's involvement began with the direct, personal effort of Charles F. "Chuck" Feeney in supporting peace initiatives by both sides in the process that led to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which formally ended decades of conflict. Afterward, Atlantic helped support the process of implementing the peace agreement, with particular focus on helping to promote justice and human rights; encouraging cooperation across communities, particularly in education; and integrating marginalised groups, including former combatants, into a post-conflict society.

Feeney's interest in Northern Ireland can be traced back to his family's origins in County Fermanagh. Later in life, his commitment to promoting justice, equality and opportunity was given urgent momentum by the mounting bloodshed in the years of the Troubles. "Chuck's judgement was that Northern Ireland harboured a great wealth of under-valued assets in higher education and research, and the violence hampered their potential," says Christopher G Oechli, president and chief executive officer of The Atlantic Philanthropies.

One early Atlantic-sponsored effort involved support for restorative justice programmes, in which young or small-scale offenders were offered the opportunity to make restitution for their crimes. If the offenders complied with the programme, they would be protected from vigilante justice often meted out by paramilitary groups and also avoid criminal prosecution. The foundation's good-faith support of this idea was valuable in promoting this model over official objections from the government and wariness from some of the paramilitaries.

Feeney's greatest personal interest lay in advancing scholarship and economic development through the expansion of universities, research institutes and medical centres. As a result, university campuses across the North, particularly in Belfast and Derry/Londonderry, now feature a wide array of Atlantic-supported facilities and equipment.

*After Atlantic lifted its anonymity policy, its staff and advisors were better able to build trust and working relationships with civil society and public agencies.*

The Support Programme for University Research (SPUR) was a partnership between Atlantic and the government, modelled on a similar programme in the Republic of Ireland, to draw greater public and private investment into advanced scholarship for research. From 2001 to 2008, the programme provided a total of £46.9 million to Queen's University and the University of Ulster.

Atlantic also helped both universities become more ambitious and adept at private fundraising—something relatively rare in Northern Ireland. The goal here was not only to support the university and research sector directly, but to equip them to draw support from others long after Atlantic’s grantmaking had concluded.

**In Northern Ireland, where... many civil-society organisations subsist on small budgets, grantees were sometimes overwhelmed by the size of this support and the pressure to operate at a larger scale.**

Until 2002, Feeney and Atlantic acted anonymously, and recipients were not permitted to disclose the source of their grants. This proved more difficult in Northern Ireland than in other places where the foundation worked, given the atmosphere of suspicion and distrust left over from the Troubles. After the foundation lifted its anonymity policy, its staff and advisors were better able to build trust and working relationships with civil society and public agencies.

As part of its expanded relationship with government, Atlantic has helped to embed the principle of prevention and early intervention in public policy on children’s services. This has led to an increased emphasis on supporting families in the earliest years of their children’s lives, to avoid problems and the need for more costly services later.

Atlantic also supported innovative approaches to cross-community education. Efforts included both integrated schools, where Protestant and Catholic students enrol together, and the more widely accepted model of shared education, in which students from different communities spend parts of their day using facilities or taking classes in one another’s schools.

In all its regions worldwide, Atlantic preferred to make relatively large grants to a limited number of recipients. The foundation believed this would lead to greater impact than if smaller grants were distributed over a multitude of issues. Making fewer but larger grants also allowed for leaner staffing. But in Northern Ireland, where such large grants are rare and

many civil-society organisations subsist on small budgets, grantees were sometimes overwhelmed by the size of this support and the pressure to operate at a larger scale.

In 2002, Atlantic announced that it would distribute the full amount of its endowment and make its last grant commitments in 2016. This put a premium on accomplishing as much as possible in less than two decades. But it also imposed an extra responsibility on the organisations receiving Atlantic support: They would need to build their management skills and fundraising prowess if they hoped to continue operating at the same scale once Atlantic's support ended. Many organisations rose to the challenge, but, in the tightened economy after the financial crash of 2008, not all were successful.

Atlantic remains convinced that the benefits of large grant commitments in a constrained period of time—a practice it has referred to informally as “big bets”—far outweigh the disadvantages. Substantial grants can have a multiplying effect, in that they can be used to lever other funding in the longer term, thus producing more sustainable outcomes.

Some grantees still wonder what will happen to major public policy reforms in a few years, when the thrust of major philanthropic funding has disappeared and the principles of reform will have to stand or fall solely on the strength of government commitment. One cause for optimism came in mid-2016, in an analysis of public-sector reform in Northern Ireland by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). In its review, the OECD cited several Atlantic-sponsored reform initiatives and concluded:

- Promotion of evidence-based policymaking and service design is having a growing impact
- Atlantic's work is among the few effective cross-sectoral initiatives OECD could identify



- Focus on prevention and early intervention and on the importance of robust evaluation has been influential
- Atlantic, its grantees and the governance structures of the Atlantic/government partnerships have created capacity to take reforms forward.

## LESSONS FROM ATLANTIC'S EXPERIENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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Grantees, staff and partners interviewed for this book often noted these four lessons from Atlantic's experience in Northern Ireland:

While clarity and focus are indispensable to success, philanthropy is not a solitary endeavour; it is essential to find common ground with other funders — prominently government — on which to build a grantmaking strategy.

The value of constant, vigorous and open communication among the foundation, its grantees and other partners cannot be overstated. This includes use of online media, publications and public presentations.

Support for capital projects — buildings, equipment, offices, labs, campuses — proved to be an effective way of helping grantees with material needs, and elevating them as a presence in civil society — ensuring their continuity as forces for lasting change.

Selectiveness about grantees, persistence in pursuing a strategic agenda and willingness to persevere through tensions and setbacks can make for strained relations at times. Some groups felt pushed beyond their capacity, and that, perhaps, Atlantic did not fully grasp the difficulties they faced in their local community.

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The Atlantic Philanthropies

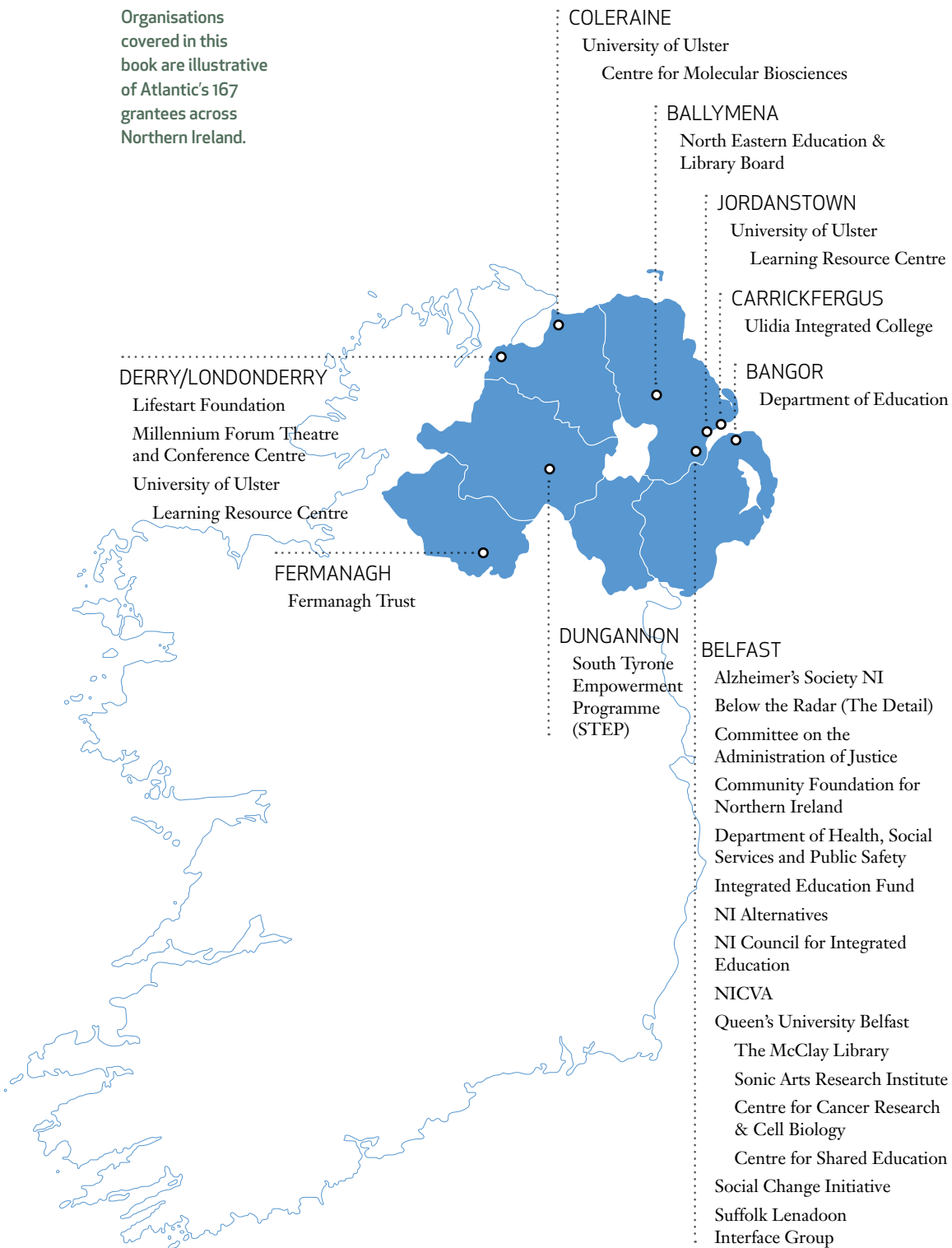
Northern Ireland



Chuck Feeney, founding  
chairman of The Atlantic  
Philanthropies

# Atlantic in Northern Ireland

Organisations covered in this book are illustrative of Atlantic's 167 grantees across Northern Ireland.



## INTRODUCTION: 'HOPE AND HISTORY'

**I**n October 1997, The Atlantic Philanthropies' senior officer in Ireland, John R Healy, organised a dinner in Dublin for the foundation's Board and invited the poet Seamus Heaney. Chuck Feeney, the Irish-American founder of Atlantic, was to be present. Healy invited Heaney to make a speech, apprising him in advance that Feeney had by then already secretly donated hundreds of millions of dollars to projects in both Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Until that year, Feeney and his philanthropic organisation had operated in strict anonymity, never allowing their names to be attached to any grant and refusing to be acknowledged publicly. In January 1997, news reports on the sale of Feeney's business, the international retail enterprise Duty Free Shoppers, drew brief press attention to his philanthropy, but the reports were not widely noted outside of the United States. Even after that momentary exposure, the donor and his foundation remained nearly invisible. So it was natural that Heaney would need some advance briefing on the group to which he'd be speaking—though it was a group that had already had a profound effect on both parts of the island.

For this audience, Heaney was an inspired choice as the after-dinner speaker. A Nobel Laureate in Literature, he was himself a modest public figure, and understood what was required. Conor O'Clery, Feeney's biographer, tells

the story: Addressing the assembled party, Heaney spoke of “approaching my subject by stealth” and in so doing, imitating the methods of the Atlantic Foundation in its philanthropic work. He was there, he said, “To acknowledge the magnificence of its activities and the reticence of its directors, the most legendary of whom, Mr Chuck Feeney, will have to pardon me for overdoing things this evening to the point of mentioning his name.”

£351 million Total investment

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583 Grants | 167 Grantees | £602,163 Average grant

The poet went on to describe Atlantic’s work in Ireland as “epoch-making” and to praise “the great selflessness, the veritable Franciscan renunciation and Renaissance magnificence” of Feeney, and he referred to ceasefires and Atlantic as being “parts of a saving undersong within the music of what happens.” He finished by quoting lines from his play *The Cure at Troy*, which had already, not least by being quoted by U.S. President Bill Clinton on more than one occasion, become part of the narrative of the Irish peace process:

*History says, don't hope  
On this side of the grave,  
But then, once in a lifetime  
The longed-for tidal wave  
Of justice can rise up  
And hope and history rhyme.*

Feeney, a devotee of Irish culture and a fan of Heaney in particular, was, according to O’Clery, deeply moved. “As the diners thundered out their applause, he was heard to say quietly, ‘My cup runneth over.’”

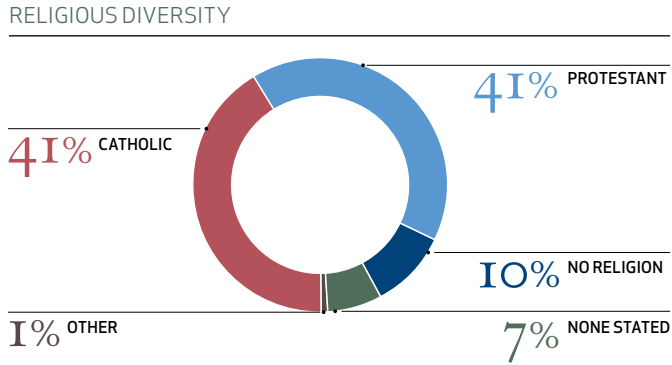
The Atlantic Philanthropies have invested more than £350 million in Northern Ireland since 1991. All of this money emanated from the fortune of Chuck Feeney, whose tax-free shopping business made billions. Atlantic has contributed to reshaping higher education, promoting the peace process, and improving public services to tackle disadvantage. It has pioneered the development of social policy based on evidence of need and effectiveness and focussed on demonstrable outcomes. And it has strengthened independent organisations and leaders promoting and protecting rights and holding government to account. The foundation has introduced the language of prevention and early intervention in relation to children's services into official policy documents and has provided major support to civil society organisations.

The foundation funded human rights organisations to enable them to have an independent voice... [and] supported efforts to break down the sectarianism built into Northern Ireland's education system.

Atlantic moved from early support for cross-community and cross-border dialogue to work on reconciliation, including controversial support for dialogue with self-appointed leaders within loyalist and republican communities. It funded ex-prisoners' organisations and pioneered restorative justice work to address antisocial behaviour in communities formerly policed by paramilitaries who used brutal enforcement methods like punishment shootings and beatings.

The foundation funded human rights organisations to enable them to have an independent voice during key debates on, for example, policing reform. It supported efforts to break down the sectarianism built into Northern Ireland's education system, firstly through integrated schools, latterly through more widely accepted shared education initiatives. Following the 2002 decision by the Board of Atlantic to spend the entire endowment by 2016, a key emphasis has been on persuading the NI Executive to "mainstream" many of the programmes Atlantic had supported.

DIVERSE NORTHERN IRELAND | Source: TheDetail



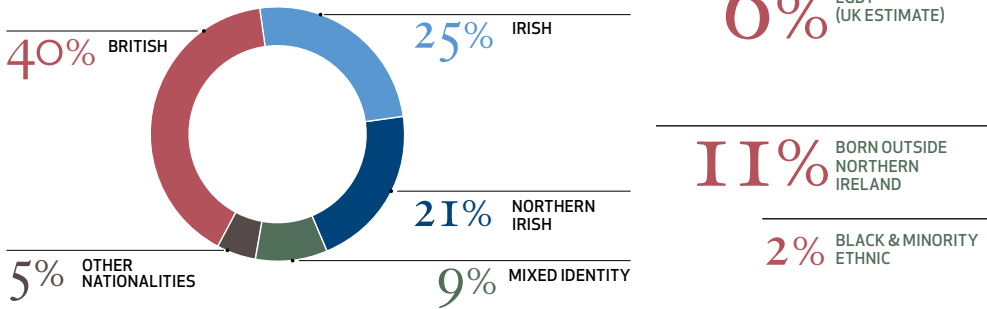
ATLANTIC IN NORTHERN IRELAND: THE STORY IN BRIEF

Chuck Feeney played a direct, personal role in initiating Atlantic’s work in Ireland, firstly in the Republic, and then in the North. His devotion to the island was rooted in heritage, and in a modest upbringing that led him to identify with those struggling to get by—a condition he instantly recognised in the Ireland of the 1980s. Feeney was born in 1931 into a classic hard-working Irish-American family in New Jersey. He was the first in his family to attend college, thanks to a government tuition grant for veterans, after serving in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War.

By the late 1980s, already a hugely successful businessman, Feeney was giving substantial amounts of money away, chiefly, at first, to Cornell University where he earned a bachelor’s degree in hotel management in 1952. He was not interested in the trappings of wealth and had been introduced to ideas about philanthropy through his tax advisor and fellow Cornell alumnus, Harvey Dale, a New York lawyer. Feeney was inclined to put funds into education and public institutions. He set up the Atlantic Foundation, the first of the institutions that collectively came to be known as The Atlantic Philanthropies, in 1982.

His Irish roots are in County Fermanagh. So it was with particular horror that he watched television news coverage in 1987 of the IRA’s bombing

NATIONAL IDENTITY



of the Cenotaph in Enniskillen, where local people had gathered to commemorate those who had died as soldiers in the First and Second World Wars. Eleven people were killed and many others horrifically injured in the no-warning blast. Feeney felt that acts of violence such as this were inherently un-Irish, and that he had a responsibility to do something to stop what he regarded as madness.

“We had an all-Ireland remit... We didn’t have an agenda of unity of the island, but we did have an agenda of peace and reconciliation.”

John R Healy, first head of Atlantic’s Ireland office

Just weeks before the Enniskillen bombing, Feeney had been in Ireland looking for investment opportunities and had met with John R Healy, the director general of the Irish American Partnership which was working to get successful ex-pat Irish Americans to invest in Ireland’s floundering economy. In 1990, Feeney asked Healy to set up a philanthropic initiative in Ireland—in the same all-but-invisible way in which his foundation conducted all its business, giving the Irish branch the inscrutable name Tara Consultants.



“We had an all-Ireland remit,” says Healy. “In those early days, we were trying to feel our way. We didn’t have an agenda of unity of the island, but we did have an agenda of peace and reconciliation. Our first grant in the North was to the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education, which was in itself a case study in philanthropic investment—it had already received support from the Nuffield Foundation and a range of other funders.”

**“Atlantic had a clear vision and the freedom to choose. We were able to fund unusual things that would not otherwise be supported.”**

Padraic Quirk, former country director for Northern Ireland of The Atlantic Philanthropies

The NI Council for Integrated Education had been set up in 1987 by parents and others who believed that the almost entirely religiously segregated education system was contributing to the ongoing conflict in NI and who wanted children to have the opportunity to get their education alongside students from all communities.

Atlantic went on to fund Co-Operation North which promoted cross-community activities, and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) that represented a wide range of community and voluntary groups. Seamus McAleavey, now NICVA’s CEO, was then its assistant director for development.

He recalls his first encounter with Chuck Feeney and his entourage: “It was all very secretive,” McAleavey says. “We got asked by someone from the Dublin office of Tara, which seemed to be an Irish-American outfit, if we could organise transport for a couple of Americans who were coming over. It wasn’t really the sort of thing we did, but we thought, well, they are a potential funding body, we’ll do this. Lo and behold, it turned out to be Chuck Feeney, Bruce Morrison, Niall O’Dowd and Bill Flynn.” Morrison was a member of the U.S. Congress; O’Dowd, the publisher of the prominent Irish-American newspaper *Irish Voice*; and Flynn, CEO of the insurance giant Mutual of America. All, like Feeney, had roots in Ireland and were searching for ways to be helpful in Northern Ireland’s struggle for peace.

McAleavey continues: “Our guide met them and took them around and came back and said, ‘They are meeting all kinds of politicians—the quiet one is Feeney, but he seems to be the one—and he’s loaded!’ Soon after that, we got a grant from Tara on behalf of ‘their donors’—that was how they put it in those days.” This was the start of a 20-year relationship between Atlantic and NICVA.

The secrecy was central to Tara’s grant-giving. From the start, organisations could not apply for funding, but had to be approached. Those selected had to promise not to disclose the source of the funds. “There were various reasons,” says Healy. “Chuck Feeney had a personal distaste for celebrity philanthropy, and he also had the desire to protect his family and lead his life normally. Being anonymous suited him. As a businessman, he had discovered a way of making humongous amounts of money and he wanted to keep quiet about it. And his ‘consigliere,’ Harvey Dale, was fanatical about anonymity.”

However, in the turbulent and anxiety-ridden world of Northern Ireland in the 1980s and 1990s, great quantities of anonymous money, especially with unspecified ties to Irish America, were bound to be an unsettling presence. As indeed, for a time, they were.



Source: [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/docs/group/htr/day\\_of\\_reflection/htr\\_0607c.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/victims/docs/group/htr/day_of_reflection/htr_0607c.pdf)

**A**fter a series of atrocities in the early 1990s that brought the Troubles’ death toll to more than 3,500, there were signs that the old enemies in the long, intractable conflict might be ready to begin to make peace. “By 1993 to 1994, it was clear we were in a period of endgame,” says Healy. “Up to that, we had just been feeling our way. In 1995, we decided to up our game and open an office in Belfast. We became serious

\* Based on population of Northern Ireland in 2003.

about promoting peace and reconciliation.” Pamela Montgomery, then the chief investigator with the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland, was appointed to Atlantic’s Belfast operation and would stay in the role for nearly 10 years.

One of those who would help shape the work of Atlantic in Northern Ireland was Avila Kilmurray, who had been a community activist since the 1970s when she was one of the founders of a women’s refuge in Derry. Today she is a central figure in community development and peacebuilding. She first heard of the organisation that would become The Atlantic Philanthropies back in 1994 when she had just taken over as the CEO of the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT). It was later re-formed as the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI).

“I found a letter from John Healy to my predecessor saying that no, he did not think his donors would consider the NIVT suitable for funding,” she says. “So I went to meet him. I said I was concerned about those communities that were not applying for grants, many of them poor, loyalist areas. I said I’d like to develop a programme that looked at why this was happening and how to do outreach work and build infrastructure so that they could engage with what was going on in the peace process.”

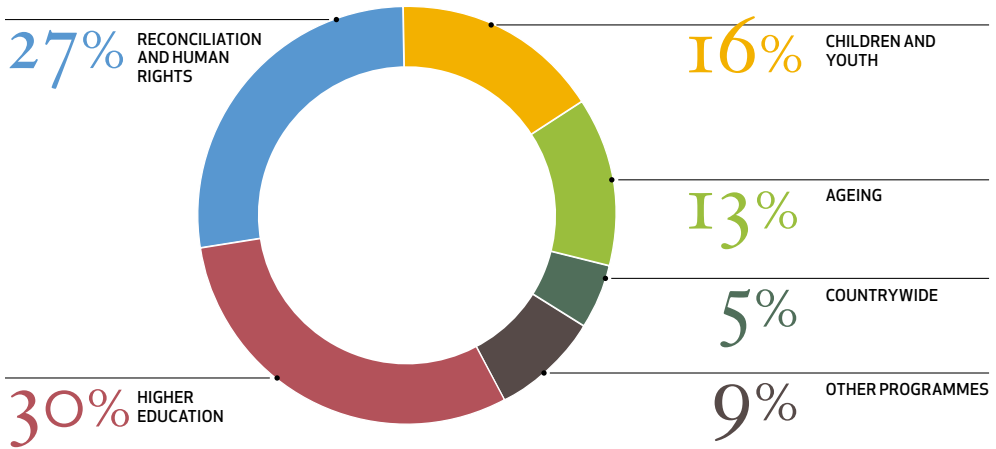
“[Atlantic] helped us work with ex-paramilitary prisoners... The monies from Atlantic enabled us to do difficult, interesting things... when the peace process was looking quite dodgy.”

Avila Kilmurray, former CEO of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland

Kilmurray went on to raise money from European Structural Funds through the Department of Health and Social Services, after which Atlantic came back and matched these funds. “We ran the programme until 1999. John always kept in touch. Later on, when we discovered that, in some communities, people didn’t form organisations because they were afraid of provoking the attention of paramilitaries, we helped set up mother-and-toddler groups. No self-respecting paramilitary was going to go near those!

“When we moved into peacebuilding, [Atlantic] helped us work with ex-paramilitary prisoners. I had been doing some of that work with Peace Programme funding, but it was quite restrictive. The monies from Atlantic enabled us to do difficult, interesting things during periods when the peace process was looking quite dodgy,” says Kilmurray.

## FUNDING BY FIELD



It is now widely recognised that this work with marginalised communities was crucial to the process. Adrian McNamee, who was a senior figure within the European Union’s Peace Programmes during those years, says that Atlantic’s role was significant in supplementing that Programme’s funding and filling gaps. “Europe set up the Peace Programme funds to cement the ceasefires and invested €500 million between 1995 and 1999,” he explains.

“The process of applying for the funds could take a year,” says McNamee, “and there were fairly rigid rules about how the money could be spent. Atlantic was useful in that they were outside the public sector—they could do things we couldn’t. They could be more reactive and more flexible. They could also take risks.”

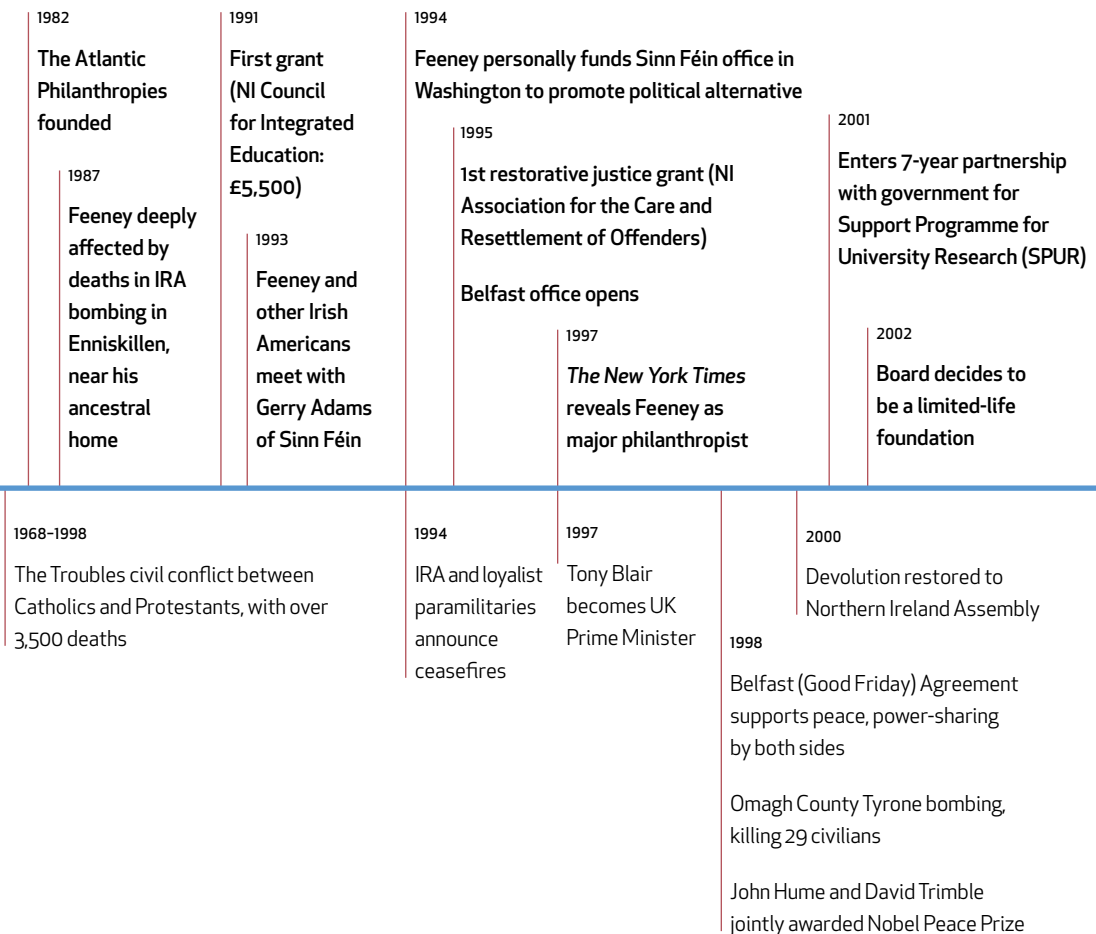
Healy admits that certain grants were made under the radar to try to build the capacity for advocacy and dialogue among groups on the “wilder fringes” of both loyalist and republican paramilitarism at this time. From his own

pocket, separate from Atlantic funding, Feeney made personal contributions to Sinn Féin to enable them to set up an office in Washington and, with Niall O’Dowd, used his influence to get Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams a visa to make a peacebuilding visit to the United States. Feeney balanced these grants with concurrent support to small loyalist parties.

In 1996, Atlantic had funded research by Professor Kieran McEvoy and colleagues at the School of Law at Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) to explore mediation, conflict resolution and restorative justice—methods of responding to community crime by enforcing constructive, nonviolent forms of restitution. The aim of the research was initially to encourage the republican movement and, later, loyalists also, to stop the horrific practice of kneecappings, punishment beatings and shootings which were carried out by paramilitaries in working-class communities. Most of the victims were young men accused of antisocial behaviour on both sides.

## Atlantic in Northern Ireland

1982–2016

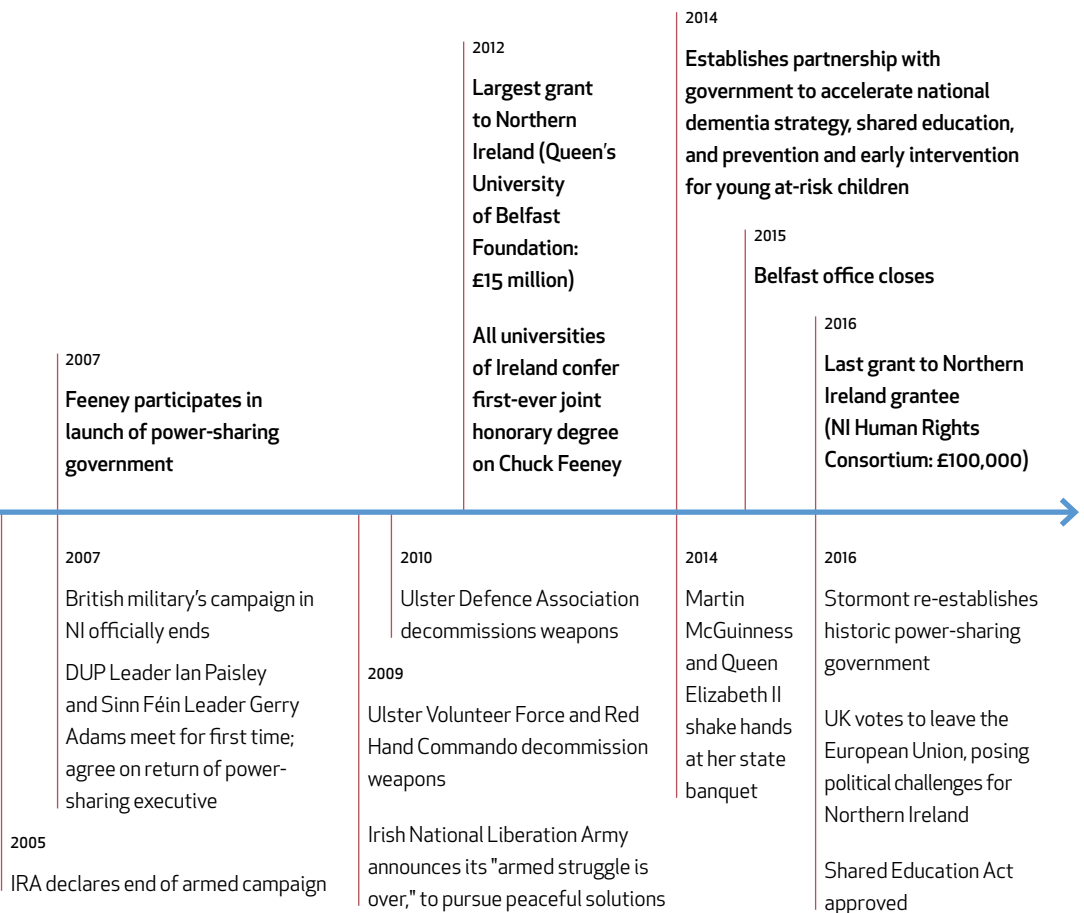


Groups of former paramilitary prisoners explored the potential for establishing informal justice systems which would ensure that offenders take responsibility for their actions, compensate the victims and the community, and demonstrate remorse—without the use of violence. Atlantic went on to fund two such projects, one in republican communities, the other in loyalist communities.

This was highly controversial work. Debbie Watters, co-director of NI Alternatives, a leading restorative-justice organisation, points out that the Northern Ireland Office (NIO)—the British direct rule department which was effectively the government of NI at the time—had gone so far as to place an embargo on state funding for the organisations. “They said we were ‘novel and contentious,’” Watters explains.

Many people, in and out of government, viewed the restorative option warily because it was typically carried out with the agreement and cooperation

## Atlantic in Northern Ireland (continued)



of paramilitaries, outside the formal criminal-justice system. But that was precisely why it was effective—it provided a means by which disaffected communities could see that social norms were upheld and crimes were punished or prevented, without resorting to violence.

TOP FIVE GRANTEES

Queen’s University of Belfast Foundation	£83 million
University of Ulster Foundation	£40 million
Community Foundation for Northern Ireland	£18 million
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	£15 million
NICVA—Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action	£12 million

Eventually the strategy more than proved its worth. Alternatives, which is largely based in loyalist areas, has flourished and is now consulted by government departments on justice issues [see page 45]. Similar work has thrived in republican areas. “We wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for Atlantic,” says Watters.

McEvoy and his colleagues have continued their research work, including making comparative studies of similar programmes in Colombia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and South Africa. In the early years of the NI conflict, Queen’s University was accused by some of “fiddling while Belfast burns.” But this work was bringing the academy to the back streets. “Our job was to make a difference,” says McEvoy.

QUB has exported similar restorative justice programmes to Colombia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and South Africa.

Such innovative work on reconciliation and human rights, drawing on advanced research and focussed on promoting innovative policy and practice, reflected Atlantic’s belief in the centrality of higher education to progress and transformation in society. And part of that belief centred on the need for high-quality facilities where thought, learning and innovation could flourish.

Feeney was, according to his children, essentially a “bricks and mortar man,” and, given the level of physical destruction that had taken place in NI during the Troubles, erecting new and architecturally significant buildings was in itself a statement of confidence in the peace process.

Belfast is now dotted with splendid buildings which include, notably, the McClay Library and Learning Resource Centre, the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology, the Sonic Arts Research Centre and the Institute of Health Sciences Centre for Experimental Medicine, while the University of Ulster has the Centre for Molecular Biosciences in Coleraine and the Aberfoyle Estate Research Village in Derry, which won a major architectural award in 2002. Derry also has the Millennium Forum Theatre and Conference Centre, crammed onto the old city walls. All were supported by Atlantic—often with the personal involvement of Feeney, who had built a retail fortune in large part on the creative use of strategically located spaces.

#### ATLANTIC-FUNDED CAPITAL PROJECTS

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£166 million | 53 grants

According to Healy, Feeney had a strong affinity for Derry, the North’s second city, which had suffered economically because of its proximity to the border, and which, with its Catholic majority, had also been seriously neglected during the period leading up to the outbreak of the Troubles. The then-unionist government had refused to locate the new university on the Magee campus in Derry—so Atlantic’s investment in it during the post-conflict period was particularly significant.

While visiting Derry, Feeney had spotted that a handsome Georgian building close to the university was for sale. “That should be part of the university,” he told his hosts, and Atlantic provided funds to make the purchase possible.

Most of Atlantic’s earliest big investments in the Republic of Ireland had been in the higher education sector. Having donated huge sums to his own alma



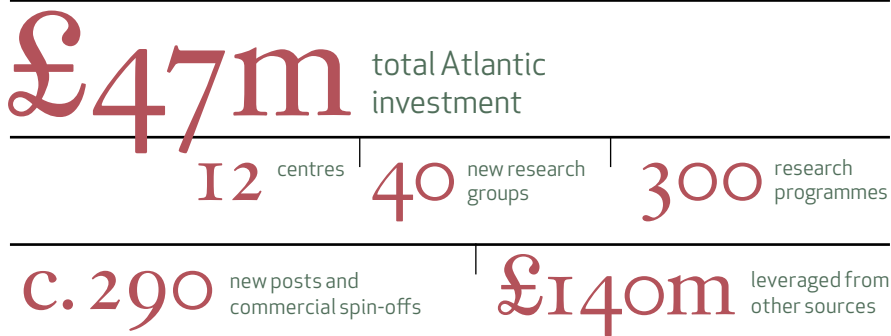


The Bod Pod at the Centre for Molecular Biosciences at University of Ulster offers precise measurements of body composition, including weight and volume.

mater, Cornell, Feeney had been astonished to find that there was no culture of alumni giving within the third-level sector in Ireland, North or South.

In the North, one of the first initiatives he undertook was to attempt to nurture such a culture by providing resources in 1999 for Queens to set up a development office, the role of which was to build relationships with major funders and set up funding partnerships for projects. In the decade which followed, the office would go on to raise \$256 million for the Queen's Foundation by 2012, much of it from Atlantic, while a second phase which aims to raise a further \$230 million was also initiated.

#### SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR UNIVERSITY RESEARCH (SPUR)



Source: Department for Employment and Learning and The Atlantic Philanthropies Review of the Support Programme for University Research (SPUR) Final Report, October 2009

The Support Programme for University Research was a partnership between Atlantic and the government to draw greater investment, public and private, into advanced scholarship for research. SPUR was modelled from a programme in the Republic known as PRTL. From 2001 to 2008, SPUR provided a total of £46.9 million to Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster.

Atlantic's strategy was to donate significant sums on the condition that the recipients raise further grants from government, private investors and other philanthropists: "On the grandest scale, this was born out of [Feeney's] belief that a strong economy would promote peace and reconciliation," journalist

Liz Welch wrote in Atlantic's *Laying Foundations for Change* book, "and that developing a knowledge-based economy was the best strategy for attracting international companies and the better jobs that would come with them."

There could be no taking such large investments for granted. The NIO would no doubt have noted that when the government of the Republic at one stage dragged its feet on its financial partnership with Atlantic, Feeney was prepared to abandon the programme.

Atlantic was there to stimulate and back up government investment, not to replace it. "Look, frankly you have got to invest in research," Feeney told Bertie Ahern, then the Irish Taoiseach (prime minister) in 1998. The results of this investment both in the physical infrastructure and in research programmes have been dramatic: Queen's rose from being rated 39th in the UK for research intensity in 2001 to eighth in 2015.

QUB's UK  
ranking for  
research  
intensity

2001  
39th

2015  
8th

"The late Inez McCormack used to say... 'Who isn't at the table?' He [Feeney] liked to bring people to the table who had been excluded by others."

Martin O'Brien, former senior vice president of programmes, The Atlantic Philanthropies

In 2002, after Atlantic had invested \$2.5 billion around the world, it made a momentous announcement: It would make its final grants in 2016 and cease to operate by 2020. Its remaining endowment at that point was \$3.5 billion.

This announcement was accompanied by news of a radical change in the way the organisation would make its grants. John R Healy had become president and CEO of Atlantic, and he led the Board of Directors into a more formal and systematic approach to making grants. It would henceforth concentrate its efforts on four initiatives—ageing, children and youth, population health, and reconciliation and human rights. Feeney, who was a member of the Board, would continue to select "big bet" projects of his own, not limited to the four focus areas. But his role would be less active and up-close in Northern Ireland than it had been.

Increasingly, Atlantic's grants programme in NI was becoming more institutional and less a personal endeavour by Feeney. It became a systematic,

strategic and sustained approach to a select group of social challenges, more than an entrepreneurial seizing of opportunities as they arose.

However, it had not lost its appetite for innovation or for backing emerging organisations and leaders. Padraic Quirk, who took over as head of the Belfast office in 2011, reflects: “Atlantic had a clear vision and the freedom to choose. We were able to fund unusual things that would not otherwise have been supported.”

**It became a systematic, strategic and sustained approach to a select group of social challenges, more than an entrepreneurial seizing of opportunities as they arose.**

Martin O’Brien had led NI’s Committee on the Administration of Justice for 17 years before joining the foundation’s reconciliation and human rights programme in 2004, and seven years later he became Atlantic’s senior vice president of programmes. O’Brien agrees with Quirk. “What is distinctive about Atlantic’s funding is its diversity. Chuck Feeney took risks,” O’Brien says. “The late Inez McCormack used to say that the question that needed to be asked was, ‘Who isn’t at the table?’ He liked to bring people to the table who had been excluded by others.”

The priority was bringing about transformation towards a just society. “Chuck was always motivated by the potential for leverage—by making significant money available provided it could be matched by others or by government, by putting in millions to influence how billions would be spent in the future,” says O’Brien.

**E**ven after lifting its veil of anonymity, Atlantic continued the practice of approaching organisations for funding rather than seeking applications. It caused considerable resentment among those not chosen and gave considerable advantage to those who were.

“Chuck didn’t agree with ‘sprinkle philanthropy,’” says O’Brien. “Atlantic made strategic grants of large amounts of money to a relatively small number

of organisations.” O’Brien and Quirk admit that some organisations were overwhelmed by the large grants they received and struggled to adjust.

“In some instances, our expectations for an organisation were not met,” says Quirk. “We tried to push them to be torchbearers when all they wanted was to bring about local change. But we saw incredible leadership and courage.”

**“Philanthropic support is finite, and government must assume responsibility for core public service provision in interface areas characterised by high levels of social deprivation.”**

Professor Colin Knox, University of Ulster

“We put in a lot of work before we approached groups, and after we funded them we trusted them to get on with it,” says Colin McCrea, retired global senior vice president of Atlantic who was based in Dublin. “We didn’t mind if they did things we didn’t agree with.” In fact, the foundation favoured organisations with strong views and often supported them in making their views known. Among other things, Atlantic and its partners had made some trenchant criticisms of the NI government over the years.

In one of his reports for Atlantic on the work of the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG), for example, Professor Colin Knox of the University of Ulster took the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Féin to task for failing to agree on a key policy document and for having “engaged in public recriminations.” The SLIG had, by contrast, become “a paradigm for cross-community partnership.” Knox’s report then sounded a warning note to government: “Philanthropic support is finite, and government must assume responsibility for core public service provision in interface areas characterised by high levels of social deprivation.”

Other reports noted that some of the most impoverished communities in NI had seen little or no benefit from the peace process. With Atlantic’s support, human rights organisations became skilled at holding the executive and the British government to account.

Soon after the turn of the century, Atlantic was planning its final grants and preparing to exit the stage—though O’Brien suggests that this may not always have been clear enough to grantees. “There began to be more emphasis on pushing for matching funds and on sustainability,” says Quirk, referring to Atlantic’s insistence that grantees raise increasing amounts of money from other sources in the final years. “People weren’t always comfortable with that. Our vision was lasting change; Atlantic was always more about driving that than about individual organisations.”

Having supported groups that strongly challenged government in the early years, Atlantic also began to negotiate with government with a view to forming partnerships in key areas for the long term.

Billy Gamble was, until his retirement in 2007, a senior official in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. “There had been a lot of suspicion around Atlantic,” he recalls, “especially among unionists, because of the association with funding Sinn Féin in the United States. I invited them [Atlantic] in to make a pitch to all the departmental permanent secretaries, and they made a very unthreatening and balanced pitch on how we could work together. After that, we had bilateral discussions, and gradually a partnership emerged with three main strands: early childhood, shared education and ageing, in particular dementia. We agreed on an outcomes-based accountability approach.”

22,000

students  
participate  
in shared  
education  
each week.

## ATLANTIC AND GOVERNMENT

### PARTNERSHIP

	ATLANTIC CONTRIBUTION	GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTION	TOTAL
Shared Education	£10m	£15m	£25m
Prevention and Early Intervention	£10m	£15m	£25m
Dementia	£5.5m	£7.7m	£13.2m
Total	£25.5m	£37.7m	£63.2m

Atlantic’s use of rigorous evidence-based evaluation was influential, Gamble believes. “That was a big transition. Previously the politicians had gone for every fad going—this was an area in which Atlantic was very influential. They made a convincing case that there was no point in measuring activity—you had to measure the difference something made.”

Atlantic had been able to help the government in unseen ways in the past, Gamble says. “It was free to fund ex-prisoners’ organisations at a time when the government knew it was a good thing to do but couldn’t itself do it.”

If the relationship between Atlantic and the Executive grew more cooperative around 2011, he thinks it was for a simple reason: money. “The question for the government was, in times of huge financial austerity,” Gamble says, “Could we make good use of a few hundred million to deliver programmes we couldn’t otherwise afford? The First Minister Peter Robinson, to his huge pragmatic credit, decided to go with it.”

“[Chuck Feeney is] one of the most special people on the planet.”

MARTIN MCGUINNESS,  
LATE DEPUTY FIRST  
MINISTER OF THE  
NI EXECUTIVE

The late Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of the NI Executive called Chuck Feeney “one of the most special people on the planet.” Former First Minister Peter Robinson praised Atlantic profusely.

“[Atlantic] was free to fund ex-prisoners’ organisations at a time when the government knew it was a good thing to do but couldn’t itself do it.”

Billy Gamble, retired senior official in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister

One of Atlantic’s final grants in Northern Ireland was to establish the Social Change Initiative (SCI), a new organisation based in Belfast, with an international brief. SCI is working to improve the effectiveness of activism for social change and to influence the way in which this work is funded. Its priority areas for attention are migration, peacebuilding, equality and human rights, and tools and tactics for change. SCI publishes materials, convenes activists and donors, runs a fellowship scheme, and offers consultancy and advice.

A key part of SCI’s work is to distil and share lessons and insights from previous Atlantic work. It has a particular focus on catalysing new streams of activism for social change in Ireland.

SCI’s Director Martin O’Brien, formerly senior vice president of Atlantic, said: “We’re finding there is a real value in bringing activists and donors together to reflect on lessons learned and strategies for change. It doesn’t happen very often and there is strong enthusiasm for it. On a pressing

issue like migration, which is likely to be a challenge long into the future, we've decided that the best thing we can do is to improve the effectiveness of people working on the issue. Letting people reflect and learn from each other will deliver results."

Nothing illustrates the complexity of the relationship between foundation and government—both Atlantic's commitment to hold government to account and its determination to help government perform more equitably and effectively—better than the fact that the Executive was, in 2016, able to cite its work with Atlantic to deal with the fallout from a judicial review which found that it had failed to address poverty in NI. The case had been brought by the Committee on the Administration of Justice, O'Brien's former employer, which was still being funded by Atlantic.

#### FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION

	BEFORE**	AFTER	
Home on Time, a partnership of Atlantic and the Northern Ireland government, streamlined the process of finding children in foster care a permanent home.	Time in foster care	41 months	20 months
	Cost per child	£114,916	£58,876
			Children also have fewer transfers between birth family, foster care and children's homes

Source: "Update on Key Accomplishments and Successes," Atlantic internal document, 2017

During her first question time in the Executive as First Minister, the DUP leader Arlene Foster was asked about progress on the anti-poverty strategy, and in reply she cited the allocation of government funds to projects jointly funded with The Atlantic Philanthropies—in total worth almost £60 million over four years. This work has focussed strategically on improving outcomes across a range of measures, including health, education and developing the economy.

It was a curious but telling juxtaposition, fairly typical of The Atlantic Philanthropies' years in Northern Ireland—a mixture of provocation and support, confrontation and collaboration, a spotlight on problems and a nurturing of solutions.

\*\*The chart shows results before and after implementation of the Home on Time project in 2014.





Grantee Profiles

Northern Ireland

The stage and sound pit at the  
Sonic Arts Research Centre,  
Queen's University Belfast.



The Atlantic Philanthropies have funded and supported projects that provide models for how to make life better for individuals, families and communities. The following profiles reflect the wide range of work which Atlantic has made possible in Northern Ireland from the earliest grants in the 1990s to concluding grants in 2016. In some of the examples, Atlantic has provided capital funds to put up buildings, in others it has funded evaluation, in others it has paid for staff to carry out innovative peacebuilding work. In a few cases, it has funded all of these activities.

Flowers at  
Harvey's Place

# Northern Ireland Alternatives

NORTH BELFAST

**W**e were just messing about, throwing stones and stuff at windows. We did it every night. Bobby would come out and chase us, and that was half the fun of it.” Gary, a cheerful teenager in his school uniform, is recalling his days tormenting a neighbour in a tough working-class area of North Belfast. “It was only when Joan got us in here that we realised it wasn’t a game to Bobby’s family.”

Joan Totten runs the North Belfast branch of Northern Ireland Alternatives, a restorative justice project based in a maisonette in a neighbouring block. She asked Gary, his mother, Jacqueline, and Bobby to talk about how restorative justice worked for them.

**“It was only when Joan got us in here that we realised it wasn’t a game to Bobby’s family.”**

Gary, Northern Ireland Alternatives participant

“My daughter is a single parent, and my wife and I take her wee boy, Harvey, at weekends to give her respite,” explains Bobby. “Harvey has muscular dystrophy—he is terminally ill and won’t see the age of 18. His bedroom looked out onto a bit of waste ground that was the scene of all kinds of shenanigans—fights, beatings, people going to the toilet. His window was getting pelted with rocks and stones and bottles every night he was there, and he’d be inside terrified and awake half the night. I’d seen the gang that was doing it. Feral kids, up to 20 of them, with a few ringleaders. I’d chased them. I’d tried to reason with them.”

At other times, under other circumstances, it might have been the kind of crime for which a frustrated Belfast resident, lacking confidence in the police, would have turned to the local paramilitaries for help. If they had become involved, the rock-throwing would likely have stopped, but only after Gary or some of his mates had suffered horrific violence. The result might have been called enforcement, perhaps—but most people would regard it as a far cry from justice. In this case, however, as in an increasing number of others, the story ends quite differently, beginning with the intervention of North Belfast Alternatives.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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The victim's perspective is central to deciding how to repair the harm that's been caused.

- Offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions.
- The full extent of the victim's suffering is acknowledged.
- Victim's needs determine what is required to put things right.
- Restoration replaces punishment as the best way forward for all involved.

“Eventually I came in and spoke to Joan,” Bobby continues, “and she said she’d get it sorted out. She called in the wee lads and their mothers, and I told them how things were.” Gary says he was ashamed when he realised the reality of what he had been doing. “Alternatives helped us to find a way to make something bad into something good,” he says.

Joan has been working in this, her own community, for 35 years. She is a kindly, energetic and grandmotherly woman with a generous smile and a welcome for everyone entering the small community house. “When I brought them all in here,” she recalls, “some of the mothers were so upset they broke down crying. But it has worked out really well. I got the Housing Executive to give us some money to make the area outside where Bobby lives more presentable, and I sent the kids over to do a carpentry course to provide some constructive activity for the boys, to equip them with some useful skills, and to supply a positive way of making amends.” Even the choice of a carpentry programme was strategic: She chose one in a republican area so as to ease the young people, all from loyalist families, out of their comfort zone.





Harvey (left) and Bobby relaxing in  
Harvey's Place

The local school got involved and provided encouragement. Gary and his friends set to work on what is now “Harvey’s Place”—the former strip of wasteground, which had been a magnet for antisocial behaviour, transformed now into a small community garden with benches and flowers. “Harvey loves it,” says Gary. “We got to know him, and we gave him things to do in the garden. It was a far better feeling than being chased, to be honest.”

“I sent the kids to a carpentry course to provide some constructive activity, to equip them with some useful skills, and to supply a positive way of making amends.”

Joan Totten, North Belfast Alternatives

Restorative justice may be ideal for low-level crime and antisocial behaviour, but is unsuitable for complex and violent offences such as domestic violence.

Restorative justice does not suit every kind of crime, of course. It is entirely unsuitable in relation to domestic violence, for example. However, it is an ideal solution, Joan says, for “low-level crime and antisocial behaviour.” It demonstrates to offenders that their behaviour harms others and gives them the chance to make amends. It also offers a model for providing justice so that the community does not feel the need to resort to paramilitarism or violent retribution.

As local people who know the community, Joan and her fellow workers are able “to go below the surface” and look at the role models in the lives of young people causing trouble. She talks with compassion about the victims of such behaviour, but also about the perpetrators. One 16-year-old had a reading capacity of age eight, she says. He was being pursued by paramilitaries for antisocial activities, and the results were likely to be violent. “When I was brought in, he was lying under his bed having wrecked his home,” she says. “I lay down on the floor too and talked with him.” Young men who had been involved in rioting also needed to be re-integrated. “We have literacy and numeracy teachers, football and fitness—the young people train others as payback,” she says.

Although the programme gets funds from statutory bodies as well as having had Atlantic funding for its main headquarters, Joan is worried that now that the funding from Atlantic is at an end, they could lose the momentum for transformation. That funding has been crucial in proving that restorative justice can work, that it can reach just conclusions and reduce violence, and that all parts of the community—victims, perpetrators, official criminal-justice agencies, even the paramilitaries themselves—can recognise its benefits. But it is not an easy proposition to explain and promote, without years of proving the case. Joan is not convinced the government yet recognises and values what has been achieved—a problem that Atlantic has worked with Alternatives to alleviate.

Initially, there was complete opposition from the authorities. Working with ex-paramilitaries looked like giving them legitimacy, and there would have been a lot of public abhorrence for this. “They saw us as supporting paramilitarism,” says Debbie Watters, co-director of NI Alternatives who has also been vice chair of the NI Policing Board since 2015. “But part of what we did was to shame paramilitaries into stopping punishment-type attacks. We called it child abuse. [And yet] the Northern Ireland Office banned us from receiving state funding.

“Young men involved in rioting needed to be re-integrated. We have literacy and numeracy teachers, football and fitness—the young people train others as payback.”

Joan Totten

“We flourished. We proved that our work reduced recidivism and strengthened vulnerable communities, and that it was cost-efficient. Atlantic opened doors for us internationally. They lobbied on our behalf locally. We now get support from the Departments of Social Development and Health, and we are currently working with the Department of Justice to develop a strategy.



Pauline McClenaghan, executive  
director of Lifestart Foundation



The Probation Board gets us. The Criminal Justice Inspectorate recently said our data management systems were better than most statutory ones,” says Watters. In 2007, the Northern Ireland Office formally recognised Northern Ireland Alternatives as a legitimate public service organisation.

#### FEATURED GRANTS

2002–2014 Northern Ireland Alternatives received £1.7 million and Community Restorative Justice Ireland was awarded £1.4 million for core support of their restorative practices.

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## Lifestart Foundation

DERRY/LONDONDERRY

**W**e help parents to gain confidence, so that they can support their child in learning speech, language and problem-solving skills. This programme is focussed on the child, aimed at the parent,” says Pauline McClenaghan, who runs the Lifestart Foundation from offices in a small industrial estate on the edge of the city of Derry.

Lifestart’s core programme, called “The Growing Child,” sends trained visitors to spend time with parents in their homes; to engage with them and their children in play, communication and learning; and to help them understand how their child learns, from babyhood until the age of five, to help prepare the child for the more formal learning at school.

The EU Peace Funds set up Lifestart, bringing together the experience of urban children in Derry, where the legacy of the Northern Irish conflict was creating disadvantage, and rural children in Connemara in the west of the Republic of Ireland, where emigration had led to serious social problems.

In 2003, Atlantic approached Lifestart with an offer to pay for an in-depth evaluation of its work. The programme at that point was becoming more widely admired, but there was a lack of proof that it measurably improved children’s prospects for success. Atlantic offered to support the most rigorous

kind of evaluation—the so-called randomised control trial, or RCT, in which some families are randomly assigned to participate in the programme and others not, and then the experiences of the two groups are measured and compared.

“This was an opportunity to conduct a gold-standard evaluation of the outcomes of our programme using measures that were both qualitative and quantitative,” says McClenaghan. “It was a very big project for us, and in our terms very expensive. It took seven years.”

Atlantic invested in programmes designed to transform the way children receive services over the course of 10 years. It sought out services aimed at very young children that were designed to raise their chances of growing up healthy and stable and of succeeding later in school. These programmes sought to prevent problems that might otherwise impede children’s growth and development, rather than merely respond to those problems after the damage was done. This prevention and early intervention model had proven effective in other jurisdictions, but it had yet to be tested in Northern Ireland.

Atlantic’s approach, therefore, was to start by helping Lifestart prove its case, so that others—including government funders of children’s services—would know that prevention and early intervention would be a sound investment and save both lives and money.

**“This was an opportunity to conduct a gold-standard evaluation of the outcomes of our programme... both qualitative and quantitative.”**

Pauline McClenaghan, executive director of the Lifestart Foundation

By contrast, authorities in NI had long favoured the crisis-intervention model, which engages only after children have already fallen behind. The best international evidence suggests that in many cases, by the time these late interventions take place, some children will have suffered irreparable damage. But with Lifestart’s early, preventive approach, “the results

[of the evaluations] were encouraging and statistically significant,” says McClenaghan. “They show that the programme works, that it improves outcomes across the board for children and makes parents more relaxed and less stressed about their role.”

“It is about parent-child bonding and the home learning environment... things our grannies knew about—but it is important to be able to prove that it works.”

Pauline McClenaghan

As Atlantic approached the end of its planned lifespan, it increasingly supported efforts by grantees to survive and grow after its funding ceased. The arc of its investment in Lifestart is typical: Atlantic started by providing more than £3 million for the extended evaluation, following the programme’s effects on children’s lives for many years and documenting clear benefits—including better cognitive development and pro-social behaviour among children, and more parental involvement in their development. With that evidence, Atlantic funded £300,000 for the organisation’s efforts to attract more support from the NI government and others, and thus to extend its services more broadly.

As a result, the Lifestart Foundation has expanded, and is now in a period of transition towards sustainability. It operates on a cross-border basis—working in Derry, in Northern Ireland, and in neighbouring Donegal, in the Republic—and has franchises in several African countries. Atlantic has covered some of Lifestart’s costs while it endeavours to use sales of its franchise to become independent and sustainable.

## FEATURED GRANTS

2003–2014      Lifestart Foundation received £3.4 million for programming and evaluation.

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Kathryn Torney, deputy editor  
of The Detail.

# The Detail

BELFAST

**W**he results were dramatic. We found that Derry and Strabane in the North West had the highest unemployment and the lowest life expectancy,” says Kathryn Torney, an award-winning journalist with the Belfast-based investigative news gathering and analysis website, The Detail. She was speaking about an investigation carried out on discrepancies between council areas in NI in terms of a range of measures, including life expectancy, employment, education and access to health services. The story achieved wide coverage in other NI media and was much discussed in policymaking circles.

*The Detail is dedicated to fair, accurate reporting while challenging dominant narratives that are at odds with the facts.*

In this case, as in many Detail investigations, the results of the reporting were not the only noteworthy part of the story. Just as significant is the way the story was reported—painstakingly, incorporating multiple perspectives and offering the kind of analysis rarely encountered in the quick-take world of contemporary news. “We do journalism differently,” Torney says. “We take our time. We are innovative. We use interactive graphics and video interviews.”

Torney leads The Detail’s Big Data project. It is a partnership with a fellow Atlantic grantee, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, with additional funding from the Big Lottery Fund. Other significant stories with a heavy use of data have included one which mapped the number of women from NI travelling to England for abortions, and one on ongoing paramilitary activity.

The Detail’s parent company, Below the Radar, started the project in 2011 as a platform for independent investigative reporting on issues of public interest. The Detail has garnered awards for its work on issues, including

health, education, government accountability and the legacy of the NI conflict. It declares itself to be “dedicated to fair, accurate reporting” while challenging “dominant narratives that are at odds with the facts, by producing reports and analysis that can change the conversation.”

In 1996, Trevor Birney and Ruth O’Reilly, both award-winning television journalists, set up Below the Radar, an independent film company, because, according to Birney, the NI communications regulator, Ofcom, was “failing miserably” in its duty to hold public service television to its commitments. At the same time, independent companies like Ulster Television were also abandoning a tradition of producing strong, challenging current affairs content.

The Detail’s principle that a well-informed society is a prerequisite for a just society resonated with Atlantic staff.

Although they managed to get contracts with Channel 4 and the Irish national television company, RTÉ, Birney and O’Reilly found themselves struggling in a dwindling market for cutting-edge independent work of the sort they wished to produce. “We were getting agitated about the narrative of Northern Ireland that was being produced by the BBC and the absence of alternative voices,” says Birney. “We became activists, lobbying Ofcom and the BBC and UTV. We told them that if they cut off critical voices, they were presenting a very narrow picture. We were patronised,” he admits.

“There is very little all-Ireland journalism...  
So we are going to become an all-island, 32-county  
operation, with a number of outlets.”

Trevor Birney, CEO of Below the Radar

In 2008, Birney and O’Reilly had a long discussion with Martin O’Brien of The Atlantic Philanthropies about their ambitions and frustrations. For Atlantic, the message resonated: A well-informed society is a prerequisite for a just society. That principle had long been at the heart of the foundation’s investments in education and research in several countries. Some months later, the head of the Belfast office, Padraic Quirk, invited them to present a proposal.

**DEALING WITH THE  
LEGACY OF  
THE TROUBLES...  
WHO MATTERS MOST?**

**VICTIMS**

OVER 3,500 KILLED  
AT LEAST 50,000 INJURED  
200,000 BEREAVED  
200,000 TRAUMATISED

**thedetail**

[@TheDetailTV](#) [See the detail for more information](#)

Source: The Detail

“We had no experience of philanthropic funding, and we had no outlet,” says Birney. “We decided to set up our own hub—what became The Detail.” It took a while to establish the venture and to build up a team of journalists. The company offered its content free of charge to other media outlets, which simply had to acknowledge The Detail as their source. There was no advertising on the site.

“This was a model which allowed us to investigate without being beholden, and then to mainstream it,” he says. Some mainstream outlets were hostile, others ignored them, but within a year, the Detail was up and running as a not-for-profit news website.

The Detail focuses major coverage on dementia, education, health, prisons and social issues.

“We’ve identified that there is very little all-Ireland journalism, and that both the BBC and RTÉ appear politically motivated to protect the status quo,” Birney says. “So we are going to become an all-island, 32-county operation, hopefully with formal agreements with a number of outlets. Our work in the North will continue as before, but we will hire new journalists to drive forward two major campaigning projects, one on dementia, one on prisons; and we will also maintain an interest in education, health and social issues.” Atlantic has already funded substantial global research and work by NGOs on dementia. “We have links with some of the other organisations Atlantic supports,” says Birney. “It is a bit like a family.”

#### FEATURED GRANTS

2010–2015      Below the Radar received £2.2 million to develop and broadcast The Detail.

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## Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group

**L**enadoon is a working-class housing estate halfway up the Black Mountain on the western edge of Belfast. Its population of around 100,000 is almost entirely Catholic. Across the Stewartstown Road, going downhill towards the city, lies Suffolk, a small enclave of similar houses in which around 800 Protestants live.



The area has a traumatic history. In the early 1960s, it was a mixed, predominantly Catholic estate. When conflict erupted in 1969, Catholics who had been evicted from mostly Protestant parts of Belfast fled up to Lenadoon, where they in turn pushed out the Protestant minority. Some of the Protestants now living in Suffolk have a view across the main road into the houses from which they were put out.

In SLIG's community building, the downstairs has shops, used by all. Upstairs are counselling rooms, offices and meeting rooms that constitute a "soft peaceline" — a point of interface for dialogue and support rather than conflict.

The fence along the front of Suffolk separating it from Lenadoon is one of 58 peacelines remaining in Belfast, anxious frontiers where nationalist housing interfaces with unionist housing. But thanks to the work of the Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group (SLIG), there is also a building on this line, where the hard boundaries soften, and the fence — at least figuratively speaking — turns into a doorway. Downstairs there are shops, used by all. Upstairs there are counselling rooms along with offices and meeting rooms that constitute a "soft peaceline" — a point of interface for dialogue and support rather than conflict.

Here, counsellors attempt to support local people from both communities as they deal with the interrelated problems arising from poverty, marginalisation and the stresses of living on an interface. The goal, ultimately, is to make the fence irrelevant by bringing people together.

To discuss the organisation's work, the chairperson of SLIG, Renee Crawford, is joined by Jean Brown, who recently retired after many years of standing shoulder to shoulder with Crawford in SLIG. The two women led a process which brought together community forums from the two estates into a single organisation. Brown's roots are in Suffolk, Crawford's in Lenadoon. They had worked together since the mid-1990s to forge a shared sense of

25

years that the impoverished Suffolk and Lenadoon had been separated when their leaders set out to regenerate the area to create a sense of community



Jean Brown (left) and Renee Crawford, longtime leaders of Suffolk Lenadoon Interface Group, have worked together for over 20 years to forge a better life for their community.

community and bring resources and jobs to the area, which is one of the most impoverished and disadvantaged in Northern Ireland. “The communities had been separated for 25 years,” says Brown. “We wanted to do something tangible, so we were looking at regeneration.”

“We made it very clear that there were a lot of sensitivities, and that we couldn’t be sure this would work. They [Atlantic] wanted to fund us to do advocacy work. We knew we needed to build capacity before that could happen.”

Jean Brown, retired leader of Suffolk Lenadoon Working Group

They succeeded in getting money from the International Fund for Ireland and the NI Housing Executive to refurbish an almost derelict block on the peaceline and turn it into a community facility. The building’s tenants are carefully selected: There is no fast food outlet, no off-licence, no bar—nothing that would encourage late-night gatherings that could turn into riots. People entering the complex from Suffolk come in the back, those coming from Lenadoon come in the front.

SLIG did not know it, but around the turn of the century its creation of a “soft peaceline” here had attracted the attention of Atlantic. The foundation was looking for established models for how, in a divided society, a small community from one background could work on peacebuilding with a larger community from the “other side.” That was precisely what seemed to be happening in Suffolk and Lenadoon.

“In 2004, I got a call from a consultant who said he was doing some research,” says Crawford. “He grilled me for about an hour and a half about SLIG and its work and me personally and why I was involved. At the end of it, he told me he had been doing this on behalf of Atlantic. Sometime later, Padraic Quirk from Atlantic came along to one of our meetings. He seemed very impressed by what we were doing and he said to us, ‘We would like to fund you. Is there any chance you would be willing to let us do this?’ We

58

peacelines  
remain in  
Belfast.

said, ‘Give us about a minute and a half!’” Atlantic initially funded them to consult the local communities and prepare a plan, which was negotiated at a residential property outside of the area.

“They asked us what we needed, and they gave it to us,” says Brown. “We made it very clear that there were a lot of sensitivities, and that we couldn’t be sure this would work. They wanted to fund us to do advocacy work. We knew there was no development going on, and we needed to build capacity before that could happen. They had a hard time getting that, but they were very amenable.”

Still, the group found the start-up process challenging. “Up to that [point] we had nothing, and suddenly we had all this [money] and no way of handling it,” says Crawford. “We were ordinary people trying to do extraordinary things. And in the background there were people who didn’t want us to succeed for a whole range of reasons. Some of them were always convinced that this cross-community stuff could only end in disaster.”

At times, it seemed it would. Atlantic produced five “Capturing the Learning” reports on the work it funded in the six years it supported SLIG. The first recognised the sensitivity of the intervention: “We didn’t want to damage

“We were ordinary people trying to do extraordinary things. And in the background there were people who didn’t want us to succeed... Some of them were always convinced that this cross-community stuff could only end in disaster.”

Renee Crawford, chairperson of SLIG

existing relations because of ‘money from America,’” a representative of Atlantic said at the time. This was “bottom-up participative planning with what appeared to be no budget guidance,” so there was “uncertainty about what was possible or realistic.”

Nonetheless, SLIG soon developed a thriving programme of community development activities, engaging marginalised youth, mothers and toddlers, and the elderly. However, in 2008, the “Capturing the Learning” report

said it was imperative that SLIG “begins to operate at a strategic level and moves out of the operational role.” Conducting individual activities in a single community was valuable, but the purpose of Atlantic’s support was to learn how the activities could be knitted together into a larger strategy, one that could be adapted to other points of interface and formalised in a wider policy on peacebuilding. The report warned of the danger that activities undertaken “became an end in themselves rather than a means to an end.”

“You can’t cure an interface. It is a set of circumstances.”

RENEE CRAWFORD

## SUFFOLK LENADOON INTERFACE GROUP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Established contact between leaders for first time in 25 years
Refurbished derelict block
Established Community Resource Centre
Provides services, jobs for marginalised youth
Helps young mothers, toddlers and the elderly

This difference in perspectives — with SLIG struggling to carry on an effective programme at the frontlines of the interface, and Atlantic pressing for more of a campaign to shape public policy — continued over the years. “We always felt that Atlantic was disappointed in us,” says Brown. “I think they overestimated what we could do and the influence we had, and underestimated the power of those who were against us in our communities. They wanted us to do big things, but we were small.” The government has not, to date, stepped in to fund SLIG in any substantial way; Crawford and Brown fear that the advocacy messages they struggled so hard to deliver have fallen on deaf ears.

All the same, Crawford sees value in what was accomplished. “Atlantic wanted us to be doing visionary things on a macro level—we were trying to hold it together on the ground,” she says. “Still, we did achieve amazing things in these communities, and it was a privilege to be able to do that.

“You can’t cure an interface,” she adds. “It is a set of circumstances. But Atlantic allowed us to dream, and it helped us to work; and it stood by us when times were bad.”

## FEATURED GRANTS

2006–2012	SLIG received €3.7 million to develop peacebuilding programmes for the communities of Suffolk and Lenadoon.
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Collette holds a photo of her late husband, Hubert, during a visit with her daughter Rosie (standing) and Heather Lundy, Dementia Friendly Community Manager Northern Ireland for the Alzheimer's Society.

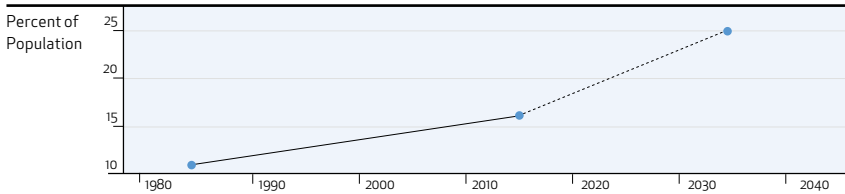
# Alzheimer's Society NI— Dementia Friendly Communities

COUNTY TYRONE

**"A**bout a year ago, Dad started having some problems with his memory. There was a marked decline over a few weeks," says Rosie. Hubert,<sup>\*\*\*</sup> her father, nods. "I was in the kitchen trying to turn on the washing machine with the TV remote," he says. "Driving had begun to frighten me. It was all a bit of a shock."

"After Dad was diagnosed, we got a call from the local Alzheimer's Society lady," Rosie recalls. "She asked if she could come and talk with us. She is the most well-informed and gentle person. She presented everything appropriately. Dad read up on everything. He's very well informed. They sent a community psychiatric nurse to see him, and carers come in four times a day on a rota. Dad gets to spend time alone, but there is always going to be someone who is going to be around soon."

## NORTHERN IRELAND'S POPULATION AGED 65 OR OLDER



Source: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Hubert listens. "I am very comfortable with them," he says. "I am happy. I want to stay at home."

"They made everything so easy," Rosie adds. "It has to do with the way they are trained. They are very sensitive, and they know how dementia affects people. They have all kinds of protocols. I could never have imagined anyone doing private things for Dad." Hubert told his daughter that he would trust the carers with his life.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Hubert died a few months after this interview, and his family has graciously allowed us to tell his story.

Hubert and Collette, both 80, grew up in Ireland: he in the North, she in the Republic. After they married, they lived in England for 30 years and raised their children there. Hubert retired at 73. A few years ago, the couple decided to return to Hubert’s “home-place,” the remote cottage in

PREFERENCES OF PEOPLE WITH DEMENTIA

Five outcomes that would make it easier to live life the way they want:

- 25% Better understanding of dementia and less social stigma attached
- 17% More public awareness of the condition
- 13% More local activities and opportunities to socialise
- 7% More tolerance and patience from others
- 7% More community spirit

Groups that need more understanding of dementia:

- 54% Family
- 58% Friends
- 51% Neighbours
- 58% Health and social care professionals
- 62% People working in banks, post offices and shops
- 54% Police

Source: UK—Northern Ireland—Dementia Friendly Communities website, YouGov poll findings

the hills of County Tyrone in which he was raised. His mother’s photo has pride of place on the mantelpiece above the stove. Collette has had multiple sclerosis for half her life and has needed a lot of care for many years now.

Atlantic started supporting programmes on ageing in 2004 after a scoping exercise established that it would be useful to strengthen NGOs already working with the rapidly growing ageing population, building a strong research infrastructure, and helping to mobilise older people to advocate on their own behalf. Ageing had never been seen as a political issue in Northern Ireland. In a 2014 report from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, it estimated that from 2013 to 2033, the number of people aged 65 and over living in Northern Ireland will increase by 63 percent, so older people will need to play a leading role in determining how public policy adapts to such a profound demographic change.

Recognising a particular gap in government policy toward dementia, Atlantic began to support improvements in dementia care in 2006, investing in awareness-raising campaigns and potential improvements in treatments. One



of the grantees in that effort, the Alzheimer's Society, went on to advise the government on its 2011 Dementia Strategy and developed community-based models of care through its Dementia Friendly Communities programme, which was co-funded by the Public Health Agency.

In 2014, Atlantic entered into a partnership with the Department of Health and Social Services to accelerate implementation of the Dementia Strategy. The foundation contributed £5.4 million, the government £8.8 million. One of the key aims of the strategy is to establish, in the mainstream of public policy, models of care that will allow people with dementia to remain independent and in their own homes for as long as possible.

Heather Lundy directs the Dementia Friendly Communities programme. "It is all about increasing understanding and getting rid of myths and stigmas around dementia," she says. "Two out of every three people with dementia here live in their own homes. This makes economic sense—it is far more costly to accommodate someone in a care home than at home—but, more importantly, it is what people want. Good care prevents a crisis arising. We aim to make people in their communities aware of the ways in which they can be supportive, and to cultivate tolerance, understanding and patience."

66%

of people with  
dementia in  
Northern Ireland  
live at home.

#### FEATURED GRANTS

2007–2012 Alzheimer's Society of Northern Ireland received £1.2 million to support dementia services.

## Sonic Arts Research Centre, Queen's University

BELFAST

**A** remarkable feature of Atlantic's work in Northern Ireland is the way that people working on projects it has funded strike up imaginative relationships with one another. In 2013, Atlantic made a grant to the NI Hospice to support its work on dementia and palliative care. The hospice was then in the middle of major re-development, including



Professor Pedro Rebelo, director of research for QUB's School of Creative Arts, including SARC, visits one of the sound gardens he helped develop for the NI Hospice.

substantial expansion of the facility and grounds. Soon afterwards, the hospice-commissioned Sonic Arts Research Centre (SARC), an institute at Queen's University, to install three "sound gardens" at its new building. The aim was to create calming but stimulating spaces for residents and their families and "to immerse each of the spaces in an ambient cloud of sound."

The SARC itself exists because of Atlantic support, set up at Queen's University under the Special Programme for University Research, commonly known as SPUR and funded by a collaboration between Atlantic and the government. In the sound gardens, Atlantic's support for advanced research would be married to its efforts to improve care and raise the quality of life of people with dementia.

"The new hospice building gives access to gardens," says Professor Pedro Rebelo, director of research for Queen's School of Creative Arts. "So we consulted with patients, staff and carers on creating soundscapes that will work with the natural soundscape and will be conducive to well-being. Then we commissioned composers to create pieces to play in sequence, and we went back to the hospice and played them." According to the SARC

**SARC brings computer scientists, electrical engineers and musicians together in one centre of excellence.**

## SARC PARTNERS

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### ACADEMIC PARTNERS

School of Creative Arts,  
Queen's University Belfast  
School of Psychology, Queen's University Belfast  
School of Electronics, Electrical Engineering  
and Computer Science, Queen's University Belfast  
University of Edinburgh  
IRCAM (Institute for Research and  
Coordination in Acoustics/Music), France  
University of Genoa, Italy  
University of Pisa, Italy  
Center for Computer Research in Music  
and Acoustics, Stanford University

### INDUSTRY PARTNERS

DTS (Digital Theater Systems Inc.)  
Collaborative Audio Research Project with DTS  
Moving on Music  
Belfast Exposed Gallery  
Young at Art  
Hewlett-Packard  
Filmtrip

Source: SARC website

website, the design “makes use of sound in a reflective manner, triggering sonic memories or transporting listeners to another place. For example, the seaside or bird calls at dawn.”

The SARC is an interdisciplinary facility—straddling the arts, science and engineering. It was a dream of Professor Michael Alcorn, who is now its director: “Atlantic put out a call to the universities, and I wrote a one-page letter of interest.”

The University was sceptical—placing his idea 14th out of 15 proposals. However, the independent international assessors who reviewed proposals for the government and Atlantic loved it. Atlantic funded Queen’s to prepare a full proposal. “I then spent nine months writing up the proposal,” Professor Alcorn recalls, “which would bring together computer scientists, electrical engineers and musicians in one centre of excellence.

“I remember the day I heard we had been successful,” he adds. “I was still only in my 30s. It was an amazing responsibility and a huge opportunity.”

**“There is nothing like SARC in the world.  
It attracts people thinking about sound,  
from music to the physiology of hearing.”**

Professor Pedro Rebelo, director of research for QUB’s School of Creative Arts

The SARC was purpose-built in what was once a car park in the university’s engineering campus. Opened by the acclaimed composer Karlheinz Stockhausen, SARC has attracted scholars and students from all over the world. In turn, its students have gone on to take up international posts.

“The Centre is unique, incredibly unique,” says Professor Rebelo. “There is nothing like it in the world. It attracts people thinking about sound, from music to the physiology of hearing. There is a tremendous vibrancy of ideas and a strong sense of building community relationships, as the hospice project demonstrates.”

“People are bowled over by the facilities we have here, like the sonic laboratory, as well as the far out virtual worlds we are exploring,” says Alcorn. “We have attracted funds from many other sources now, but we would never have been able to do any of this cutting-edge work without Atlantic’s initial support, without its vision and willingness to take risks.”

#### FEATURED GRANTS

2000–2001 Two grants to Queen’s University of Belfast Foundation, totalling £2.4 million, provided for the construction and development of the Sonic Arts Research Centre.

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## Integrated and Shared Education

CARRICKFERGUS, FERMANAGH AND THROUGHOUT NORTHERN IRELAND

“Anyone considering philanthropic investment,” says Eugene Martin, retired longtime principal at Ulidia Integrated College in Carrickfergus, County Antrim, “should not just look at our results—they should look at the joy in the faces of the children when they get them. They should look at our students walking and talking together—no name calling, no sectarian slogans—in what is still a town with problems.”

It was not always that way. The Department of Education was adamant that Carrickfergus was not a town in which it was realistic to open an integrated school, in which children of all faiths and denominations, or none, would study together for the full day. The beautiful ballad known around the world notwithstanding, the Carrickfergus of the Troubles was a tough place, 93 per cent Protestant with hard-line unionist politics and a significant loyalist paramilitary presence. Still, for some parents, that was one of several very good reasons to push for an integrated secondary school.

“We opened the school in a series of pre-fabs in 1997 with 60 students and the required balance of religious backgrounds,” Martin remembers. “The Department of Education promptly changed the criteria and turned us down.

Students at  
Ulidia Integrated  
College

1997

60

2016

600

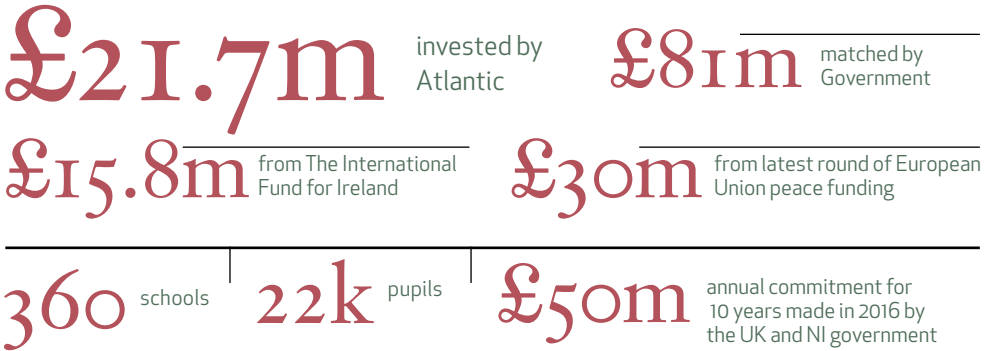
The Integrated Education Fund [IEF] gave us the funds to keep going, and we quickly gained enough students—but the department kept on turning us down.” The government’s hostility to integration was matched by opposition from the Catholic Church, which dominates education in nationalist areas.

But Martin, who was principal of Ulidia for 19 years until he retired in 2016, also had steadfast allies. In addition to the IEF, he says, “Atlantic was behind us the whole way. They had faith in the school.”

Today, the school stands proudly on a hill overlooking Belfast Lough. Now fully state-funded, it has almost 600 students from all Northern Ireland’s communities—including Protestants of a range of denominations, Catholics, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and people who define themselves as having no religion or who decline to declare a preference. Its exam results are outstanding: In 2012, the *Belfast Telegraph* stated Ulidia Integrated College was the best post-primary school in Northern Ireland based on students’ grades.

#### INVESTMENTS IN SHARED EDUCATION

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The first grant Atlantic made in Northern Ireland, in 1991, was £5,500 for the NI Council for Integrated Education. In light of grants since, it seems like a small amount, but it represented a huge breakthrough for the struggling movement to end segregated education, which might as well have been compulsory for NI children, given the absence of alternatives for the vast majority of families. The following year, the Integrated Education



Lauri McCusker, director of Fermanagh Trust, checks out a school building under construction.



Fund (IEF) was set up as an independent trust with £4 million made up of grants from EU structural funds, the Department of Education, the Nuffield Foundation and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. It reserved that sum as a permanent endowment, making annual grants from the proceeds. By 1996, there were 49 integrated schools.

That year, Atlantic—which was convinced by the arguments made for breaking down barriers by bringing children together—made an approach to the IEF which would lead to an investment over the following 18 years of £8.5 million. The Women’s Coalition party championed integrated education during negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement, which ended up including a commitment to the model. By 2010, 6.5 per cent of the school population was being educated in 90 integrated schools all over Northern Ireland.

“Even in the most divided places, people were working together on pre-school play groups and on women’s education projects. Small but symbolic. So we began to support them and to build from that.”

Lauri McCusker, director of the Fermanagh Trust

Professor Tony Gallagher of QUB coined the term “shared education” in 2005.

However, it was becoming clear that growth was stalling. “The structures of the education system are where the problems lie,” says Tina Merron, chief executive of the IEF. “They need total reform in the same way as the Patten Commission reformed the police. There is a lack of political will to integrate. We have two systems: one of Catholic schools, one for Protestant, state, schools. Each makes separate plans. We have two separate teacher training colleges. The integrated sector and the Irish language sector are out on a limb.”

While continuing to support the IEF, Atlantic began looking for other models with the potential to reach a wider swathe of the NI population. In 2001, an advisory report to the government had recommended that schools might form “collegiates” in which there would be collaboration without full integration. Professor Tony Gallagher, who had been exploring education in divided societies at Queen’s University, was approached by Atlantic.



Gallagher, in a 2005 report for Atlantic, coined the term “shared education.” It referred to a middle ground between segregated schools and full integration, in which students from one school use facilities in another, or two schools share a single campus or set of facilities. In this way, students interact, for at least part of the day, with their peers from a different community.

### Shared education:

*The middle ground between segregated schools and fully integrated schools. Students interact at least part of the day with peers from a different community. One school may use facilities in another, or two schools share a single campus or set of facilities.*

“Atlantic ran with it, and the International Fund [for Ireland] also came on board. We approached 12 schools and asked them to try it, and the results were encouraging,” he says. Gallagher now works in the Centre for Shared Education at QUB, which is funded by Atlantic.

The Fermanagh Trust, a community foundation established in 1991, has likewise taken a leading role in shared education, with support from Atlantic. The trust was created, with a grant from the Barrow Cadbury Trust fund, to try to undo some of the terrible damage to social relationships in the county’s largely rural population during the Troubles. Although Catholics and Protestants lived side by side as though neighbours, the communities were actually to a considerable degree segregated, and the decades of violence had created an atmosphere of deep suspicion and distrust.

“We were determined to bring people together,” says Lauri McCusker, the Trust’s director. “At that time, even in the most divided places, people were working together on pre-school play groups and on women’s education projects. Small but symbolic. So we began to support them and to build from that.”

For years, the state and the churches had sought support from the Fermanagh Trust for their own, separate school systems. But the Trust resisted, preferring to nurture the cross-community element of its work. At last, an ally appeared. “Atlantic came knocking at our door in 2008,” says McCusker. As the momentum for fully integrated education was beginning to slow,

Atlantic was keen to find other, complementary ways of bringing students from different communities together. That was a goal the Fermanagh Trust plainly shared.

“Shared education really has been transformative. Kids have come together and so have their parents. School communities have joined forces in the interests of the whole community... and that has carried over into life outside of the school day.”

Lauri McCusker

“We started mapping out the implications for small communities of school closures brought about because of low pupil numbers,” McCusker explains. “We saw the need for intervention to create linkages. We did significant research and consulted parents, educators and boards of governors. Then we fed it all back to Atlantic, and they invited us to make a proposal.”

With the International Fund for Ireland (IFI) also on board, a three-year Fermanagh Trust Shared Education Programme got underway in 2009 and another grant extended the work in 2012. The Trust provided small grants to enable schools to co-operate on delivering some part of their curricula, and also enabled schools to share resources and expertise. Small schools that would otherwise have been at risk of closure now have strong bonds with other local schools; and cutbacks, while still having a severe impact, are alleviated to a degree because of the sharing of resources.

“Shared education really has been transformative,” says McCusker. “Kids have come together and so have their parents. School communities have joined forces in the interests of the whole community. Principals have co-operated with one another. All kinds of relationships have become possible, and that has carried over into life outside of the school day.”

However, some have reservations about shared education, including, notably, the champions of integrated education. “My view is that ‘integrated’ is ‘shared’ at its best,” says Eugene Martin. “My fear is that ‘shared’ could become tokenism, like other projects before it.”

Some heads of Fermanagh schools are frustrated by the process of getting the education authorities to include shared education principles in mainstream public policy. “We were collaborating very well under the Trust, which gave us a lot of autonomy,” says one. “Now the department is dictating, and the system is strangling us. All the momentum has gone.”

McCusker is also disheartened by the mainstreaming process—and by what he sees as Atlantic’s failure to defend shared education from the stifling effects of bureaucracy and government control. “Shared education is about relationships, and the Department of Education doesn’t really do relationships,” he says. “Atlantic was a wonderful funder, and its investment in shared education and in the Fermanagh Trust has been very sound. But we feel they have handled the mainstreaming process badly, and we are disappointed in that.” However, he believes that the government has taken on board the evidence given by the Trust in drafting the new legislation.

“[The IFI] co-funded this approach with Atlantic. There is now legislation, clear policy, and Atlantic is backing the Department of Education to pursue it. We passed the post—it has gone beyond advocacy.”

Billy Gamble, former senior official in the NI Executive

Billy Gamble, the former senior official in the NI Executive, believes Atlantic was pragmatic in moving on from its early focus on integrated education, and that its investment in shared education has been an outstanding success. “I’m on the board of the International Fund for Ireland,” he says, “and we co-funded this approach with Atlantic. There is now legislation, clear policy, and Atlantic is backing the Department of Education to pursue it. We passed the post—it has gone beyond advocacy.”

## FEATURED GRANTS

1996–2014      A total of €30.2 million was invested in more than 30 grants for integrated (£8.5 million) and shared (£21.7 million) education. Grantees included the Integrated Education Fund, Department of Education, Queen’s University of Belfast Foundation, Fermanagh Trust and North Eastern Education and Library Board.

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# Committee on the Administration of Justice

BELFAST

**N**orthern Ireland’s peace process did not emerge solely out of efforts by international governments to persuade paramilitaries to abandon “armed struggle” in favour of political engagement. One of its precursors was the Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ), whose efforts to offer alternatives to violence and a pathway to a just society went right back to 1981. That was when a group of independent activists was formed to look at ways of effectively challenging human rights abuses that were at the heart of the conflict. The group became the CAJ, which in 1998 won the Council of Europe’s Human Rights Prize.

“Our focus is on human rights issues significant to peace or conflict, issues that are highly relevant to the success of the peace process,” says Director Brian Gormally. “Our fundamental characteristic is that we decide what we will take up, however controversial.”

## NORTHERN IRELAND’S HUMAN RIGHTS ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Human rights at the heart of the peace agreement
Policing/criminal-justice reforms
New measures to promote equality and tackle discrimination
Independent complaints mechanisms
Enhanced government accountability

In choosing its name, the organisation’s founders avoided referring to “human rights,” as certain unionists at the time might have considered the term a euphemism for republicanism. In fact, CAJ has never taken a position on the constitutional status of NI. Its stance has been to insist that the government comply with its obligations in terms of economic, social and cultural rights under national and international law. As such, its independence was always of critical importance and remains so. “We have a principle of not taking state funding,” says Gormally, “as this would compromise our intent to hold the state to account.”

Atlantic and other foundations—including the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Barrow Cadbury Trust and the Oak Foundation—have provided the means for CAJ to operate freely without government support. Deputy Director Daniel Holder points out that Atlantic’s willingness to provide unrestricted core funding, rather than supporting only specific projects, was also important. “It enabled us to re-prioritise depending on what needs to be done in response to new situations,” he says.

“Our focus is on human rights issues significant to peace or conflict that are highly relevant to the success of the peace process. Our fundamental characteristic is that we decide what we will take up, however controversial.”

Brian Gormally, director of the Committee on the Administration of Justice

Besides responding to “new situations,” another central element of CAJ’s mission is dealing with the past in such a way as to ensure that its lessons are learned. “There [were] numerous human rights abuses by the state during the conflict,” Gormally points out, “which are highly embarrassing to the state even today.” These include state-sanctioned murder, torture and collusion with non-state armed groups. Dealing with that legacy as a society—building reconciliation on a platform of honesty, rather than evasion—is part of the unfinished business in which CAJ hopes to play a constructive role.

CAJ has worked with experts in transitional justice at NI’s universities and with other nongovernment organisations, including Amnesty International, to push for legislation and the establishment of human-rights-compliant institutions. A model bill to achieve those goals has been produced, and there has been intense lobbying of the British and Irish governments as well as the NI Executive. Much still needs to be done. “We still have no Bill of Rights, no commitment to fulfil international obligations on dealing with the past, and a significant element in the NI Executive that blocks anything to do with human rights,” says Gormally.



Brian Gormally, director of the  
Committee on the Administration  
of Justice

CAJ's relationship with Atlantic has been close. The relationship has not, however, always been easy. Among other things, while Atlantic was increasingly thinking about the approaching end of its grantmaking, and seeking ways to bring its work to a productive conclusion, CAJ remained resolutely focussed on the future—pursuing new agendas and developing new strengths, but not preparing itself fully for the end of Atlantic's support. Tensions were inevitable.

Because Atlantic had given so generously, other funders were inclined to back off. “They think you don't need any of their money if you have Atlantic backing you. Then when Atlantic funds came to an end, others were not inclined to return.”

Brian Gormally

“CAJ employed a lot of staff with Atlantic funding,” says Gormally, “and looking back, it didn't always use the money very cost effectively. Then when the squeeze came, and CAJ hadn't raised the funds it had said it would, we had to slim down dramatically. In 2011, we went from having 12 staff to five.”

It proved much harder than expected to recruit other funders to replace Atlantic's support. Gormally says that because Atlantic had given so generously, other funders were inclined to back off. “They think you don't need any of their money if you have Atlantic backing you. Then when Atlantic funds came to an end, others were not inclined to return,” he adds.

This experience was a chastening one for Atlantic as well as for the CAJ. The whole point of making a large investment in CAJ had been to bolster its credibility and ability to draw support more broadly, but to some extent that plan backfired.

One of Atlantic's final investments in NI was the purchase of a large Belfast city centre office block formerly occupied by the CFNI. It now houses CAJ along with other Atlantic-supported human rights organisations, including

PILS Project (Public Interest Litigation Services), the Participation and Practice of Rights project and the Human Rights Consortium. The CFNI, also funded by Atlantic, is now a rent-paying tenant in the building. Atlantic's hope is that the shared premises will make it easier for the various rights

Atlantic's hope is that the shared premises will make it easier for the various rights groups to work together, to share some administrative functions, and to strengthen the voice of human-rights advocacy in Northern Ireland.

groups to work together, to share some administrative functions, and to strengthen the voice of human-rights advocacy in Northern Ireland. Atlantic has also set up and endowed a Human Rights Investment Fund to secure long-term funds for the human rights organisations and their work.

#### FEATURED GRANTS

1997–2013 CAJ received £3.5 million in several grants to stem human rights abuses.

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## South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)

DUNGANNON

**B**ernadette McAliskey became famous in her youth as Bernadette Devlin, the fiery student leader who went on to bring the grievances of NI Catholics to Britain's Houses of Parliament, when she was elected in 1969. She has been a vocal critic of the outcomes of the peace process, describing the power-sharing executive at Stormont as the institutionalising of sectarianism. She has continued to work as a community activist and is now director of the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) in Dungannon, the town in which the civil rights movement began.



She sweeps through the big, bright rooms of The Junction—a sleek new community centre and headquarters for STEP and two other local organisations, which opened in 2016—flinging open doors, delighted at its spaciousness, its elegant proportions and the high quality of its finishes. It is the opposite of the tiny, uncomfortable rooms in which the veteran campaigner has spent much of her working life. The building lies in the middle of a brand-new linear park that links some of the poorest housing estates in the town.

These religiously segregated estates bore the brunt of the years of conflict—now they are home also to people of other ethnic backgrounds, many of them Brazilian, Portuguese and Timorese, who have come to County Tyrone to work in local meat factories.

The European Union Peace III Programme allocated a grant of £7 million to the local council, and almost half of it went to The Junction project. “We invested £400,000 from social enterprise,” McAliskey explains, “and Atlantic provided the £500,000 we needed to complete the purchase. It was one of Atlantic’s last capital building grants.”

STEP is a not-for-profit community development organisation set up in 1997 to offer support, advice and referrals on immigration, debt, housing rights and other issues, as well as supporting community development work, community enterprise and strategic development. STEP also runs a training and learning company which is profit-making: The funds it raises go back into STEP’s work for the community.

#### STEP’S KEY SERVICES

Community development
Migrant support projects
Independent learning and training
Interpreting/translation

The organisation also has offices elsewhere in Tyrone. It aims, by its own account, to build “a rights-based, participative, peaceful and prosperous society which provides equality of access and opportunity, embraces diversity and respects difference.” It advocates on behalf of disadvantaged

STEP’s goal is to build a rights-based, peaceful and prosperous society which provides equality of access, embraces diversity and respects difference.

communities and concentrates on those most vulnerable to denial or abuse of their rights. When migrants began to arrive in the county in significant numbers, around 2001, STEP broadened its focus beyond the time-hardened duality of “the two communities” to take on an intensive programme of advocacy for migrant rights. Atlantic was prepared to help, but there was a catch: The foundation had not yet fully shed its insistence on anonymity. So STEP would have to stay silent on the source of its funds. Fortunately, that was about to change.

“Having Atlantic money meant we didn’t have to scramble for funds all the time—we could strategically plan. We were also able to pioneer the work we do firefighting abuses of the rights of migrants.”

Bernadette McAliskey, director of the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme

“Atlantic was a bizarre organisation,” says McAliskey, “like Secret Santa. We were dealing with very divided communities—the last thing we needed was money, the source of which we could not account for. So we rang Atlantic and asked them to tell us where the door was on which we were not allowed to knock. They started a conversation. We liked that approach.

“We worked with Atlantic and their experts to develop a three-year strategic proposal with a mid-term evaluation,” says McAliskey. “They were interested not just in the work we did but in understanding why we were doing it in a particular way, by building community capacity. Having Atlantic money meant we didn’t have to scramble for funds all the time—we could strategically plan. We were also able to pioneer the work we do firefighting abuses of the rights of migrants. We called it ‘free money’—we had to account for it, but they allowed us to take risks with the work.”

#### FEATURED GRANTS

2006–2012      South Tyrone Empowerment Programme was awarded £3.7 million for its community development work.

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Bernadette McAliskey,  
director of the South Tyrone  
Empowerment Programme,  
enjoys STEP's spacious new  
headquarters.

# Millennium Forum

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Atlantic funds have been used to bring former paramilitaries into civil society, to give civil society a voice capable of influencing government and to negotiate with government over future policy on social justice issues.

Sandra Biddle, founder of the Foyle School of Speech and Drama, teaches young students at the Millennium Forum in Derry/Londonderry.

**B**y the early 2000s, The Atlantic Philanthropies had changed enormously from the early days when Chuck Feeney himself had made most of the decisions about the organisations to be supported. Feeney had begun Atlantic's work with a personal, on-the-ground involvement in his philanthropy—reviewing blueprints for new buildings, visiting schools, sharing coffee with community leaders, trying to seize opportunities to advance the peace process and contribute to a knowledge-based economy wherever he spotted them.

In later years, however, Atlantic increasingly operated as an institutional foundation, with formal procedures and a professional staff. While organisations still could not apply for funds, there were well-established policies governing the types of activity that would be considered, including a tightened focus on the thematic headings of children and youth, ageing, and reconciliation and human rights.

Another change in Atlantic's operations around this time was the end of its formal anonymity. This had a significant effect in many places where the foundation operated, but arguably none more so than in Northern Ireland. Paranoia and suspicion had characterised the Troubles years in NI; and, in that environment, Atlantic's policy of insisting that its grantees maintain strict confidentiality about the source of their grants was often unhelpful.

Some groups that accepted Atlantic support feared that they would be accused of getting funds from disreputable sources.

Some even feared that this might be true. Feeney's personal support for Sinn Féin—he funded the setting up of its U.S. office in Washington in the mid-1990s—could, had it come out, have caused difficulties for groups operating in loyalist areas. It is important to note that Feeney made these contributions from his own money, not through Atlantic; he supported some loyalist organisations as well. After 2001, the foundation's willingness to speak about its work, articulate its goals and values, and engage in discussion of public issues helped, at least to some degree, in easing suspicions.

Even so, the foundation's earlier history of anonymity and the comparatively small size of its staff meant that external communications tended to be low-key and focussed on the circle of organisations and public officials with whom it worked closely. As a result, many people and organisations not directly involved with Atlantic found its activities somewhat mysterious. Even some grantee organisations in Northern Ireland—including several who speak enthusiastically about the support they received—say they never found Atlantic to be a particularly transparent or candid partner, and several were perplexed about how funding decisions were made.

Programmes and organisations that were not chosen for support naturally found the selection criteria even harder to understand. For example, Atlantic never had a funding strand for women's rights, and some women's organisations questioned why that was so—answers were not forthcoming. The fact that the foundation managed most of its already limited communications from its U.S. offices further reduced its ability to explain itself publicly in other countries.

As Atlantic concluded its grantmaking in Northern Ireland, it sometimes found that its low profile—a great asset while it was operating, supporting controversial causes and trying

After 2001, Atlantic's willingness to speak about its work, articulate its goals and values, and engage in discussion of public issues helped ease suspicions.



University of Ulster in Belfast's  
Cathedral quarter of the  
city centre.



not to upstage its grantees or other funders—later made it difficult to attract and engage other donors to help carry on the work it had been supporting.

**Atlantic’s decision not to accept unsolicited proposals or to conduct open competitions for funding was unsettling to organisations that had built their reputations on a struggle for openness, fairness and equality.**

Atlantic’s determination to distribute all its assets in a fixed time period also meant that the total amount of its annual giving was sizable—considerably larger than that of any other private philanthropy in NI. The only effective way for the relatively lean staff to deploy such outsized resources was to make fewer grants, in larger amounts, than other foundations might have done. This gave a competitive edge to organisations that could manage relatively large amounts of money. Although Atlantic did support smaller organisations with smaller grants, this was not the norm.

Yet as some observers pointed out, the introduction of so much funding, especially in the form of large grants, sometimes upset the working balance among organisations in the field, where some were favoured with major new support and others not. There was inevitably some resentment when some groups got major funding and were then enabled to eclipse the work of others in the same sector, sometimes including well established groups that were passed over.

Atlantic’s decision not to accept unsolicited proposals, and not to conduct open competitions for funding, was also unsettling to organisations that had built their reputations on a struggle for openness, fairness and equality. Bernadette McAliskey of STEP spoke wryly of asking, during the years of anonymity, the whereabouts of “the door we are not allowed to knock on.”

Brian Gormally of the CAJ expressed the concern that by not having a transparent set of criteria and by not allowing organisations to apply for funding, Atlantic gave a great deal of power to its local staff. Foundation managers counter that the Atlantic did not seek merely to spread its resources evenly across whole fields of endeavour. Instead, its aim was to create the capacity to solve problems where that capacity did not yet exist, and to strengthen the hand of leaders and organisations that had a credible approach to solving problems but did not have the resources to deliver those solutions on a sufficient scale.

These are not aims that lend themselves easily to objective, competitive scoring. They demand judgement and close observation, and an ability to respond swiftly and flexibly to changing circumstances. To those not chosen for support, the process can seem unfair or arbitrary—which, it might well be argued, would make it all the more important to explain how decisions are made, to welcome and engage with critics, and to acknowledge when some choices turn out badly. Atlantic’s preference for limited public engagement meant that these kinds of conversations took place less often, and with less debate, than some in Northern Ireland might have preferred. Atlantic acknowledges, looking back, that it might have been more transparent.

**W**ithout question, the size of Atlantic’s grants and the sheer volume of its aggregate expenditure in NI, which averaged £13.5 million per year, made it an influential actor in the fields where it worked. This was intentional: Atlantic prides itself on making “big bets”—significant commitments of money that are capable of bringing about sizable changes with long-lasting effects. Such large-scale initiatives as university research centres; major demonstrations of policy reform such as in early childhood,

Atlantic’s aim was to create the capacity, and to strengthen the hand of leaders and organisations that had a credible approach to solving problems but did not have the resources to deliver them.

£13.5m

Atlantic’s average annual spending in Northern Ireland

cross-community education, dementia or criminal justice; or ongoing support for peacebuilding and human-rights programmes would not have been possible without Atlantic's ability to commit major resources to develop them.

Avila Kilmurray, formerly the director of the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, says that Atlantic's contribution has perhaps been masked by the fact that European Peace Funds and grants from the International Fund for Ireland were also coming in during the same period. "But, by any standards, what Atlantic has given is huge," she says.

Martin O'Brien points out that Atlantic has taken the view that substantial grants can have a multiplying effect, in that they can be used to lever other funding in the longer term, thus producing sustainable outcomes. "Chuck's view was that you could have a greater impact by spending a lot in a short time," he says, "and by influencing others to spend." Atlantic funds have been used to bring former paramilitaries into civil society, and to give civil society a voice capable of influencing government. It has, ultimately, been in a position to negotiate with government over future policy on a broad range of social justice issues.

On the other hand, the presence of such large sums can create a temporary burst of activity and attention—for as long as the money lasts—and then leave a void, unfilled by other funders, when the grantmaking ends. In many cases, Atlantic's final grants were aimed at solving this problem by working with government to demonstrate and launch new solutions to public challenges, with the expectation that government would support and sustain the work once Atlantic had departed. And some government expenditures have, in fact, been increased in certain areas, with other increases proposed. For example, the British Exchequer committed £500 million towards capital provision for integrated and shared education over a 10-year period.

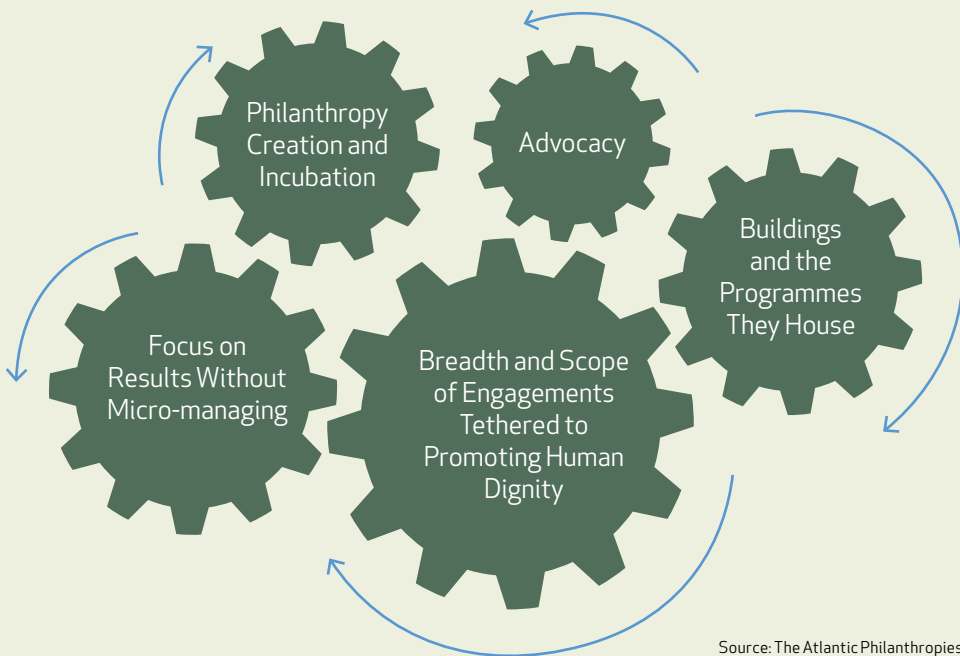
Atlantic often makes "big bets" capable of bringing about sizable changes with long-lasting effects.

However, some grantees are sceptical about the real enthusiasm of NI's politicians for Atlantic and the projects it has funded. They have doubts that the NI Executive has discovered a true commitment to learning from the NGO sector, believing instead that the lure of large matching funding from Atlantic lies behind some of the commitments made in relation to education, health and other social issues. Atlantic personnel are not naïve about this. It is simple: "Money talks," says retired Atlantic Senior Vice President Colin McCrea. The challenge for the philanthropist, he pointed out, is to make sure that when money talks, it is speaking at least partly to people who can be persuaded to contribute some resources of their own.

Still, it is reasonable to wonder what will happen to major public policy reforms in a few years, when the thrust of major philanthropic funding has disappeared and the principles of reform will have to stand or fall solely on the strength of government commitment.

#### ATLANTIC'S DIFFERENTIATING FACTORS

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Source: The Atlantic Philanthropies  
Stakeholder Assessment by  
Artemis Strategy Group, 2014

One source of optimism came in mid-2016, in an analysis of public-sector reform in Northern Ireland by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In its review, the OECD cited several Atlantic-sponsored reform initiatives and concluded:

- Promotion of evidence-based policymaking and service design is having a growing impact
- Atlantic's work is among the few effective cross-sectoral initiatives OECD could find
- Focus on prevention and early intervention and on the importance of robust evaluation has been influential
- Atlantic, its grantees and the governance structures of the Atlantic/government partnerships have created capacity to take reforms forward.

However, some NI organisations have also warned that very large grants can sometimes overwhelm grantees and enable them to get too big too quickly, leaving them vulnerable when Atlantic leaves the stage. Even grantees who express unreserved praise for Atlantic and its support acknowledge that it will be hard—maybe impossible—for them to carry on at the same level now that the foundation has wrapped up its giving in NI. In several cases, Atlantic has worked with grantees to help them both seek new sources of money and adjust to smaller budgets where necessary.

Norma Sinte is the director of development and alumni relations at Queen's University, which, along with Ulster University, is one of the biggest recipients of Atlantic grants for buildings and research. She has no doubt about the transformational impact of receiving more than £83 million from Atlantic. "Queen's has reached a defining moment," she says. "It is a world-class university, with an exciting future." Over the last 15 years, Atlantic has enabled the university

What will happen to major public policy reforms when the major philanthropic funding has disappeared?

to “build capacity for groundbreaking research and scientific innovation; accelerate excellence as recognised by the rise from 39th in the UK in terms of research intensity in 2001 to 8th in 2015; establish philanthropic fundraising which has leveraged support from individuals, companies and charitable trusts and foundations; and reduce dependence on government.”

Sinte is, however, concerned about how to replace Atlantic and maintain the global status it has allowed the university to achieve. “We don’t have a tradition of philanthropy in NI and certainly not on a visionary scale,” she says. “Getting £5,000 over a period of time is good in our terms, and we struggle to get people to commit to that.”

**“We don’t have a tradition of philanthropy in NI and certainly not on a visionary scale.”**

Norma Sinte, director of development and alumni relations at Queen’s University

Representing such a huge donor, with major resources focussed on a relatively small number of strategic objectives, has also given Atlantic staff an unusual degree of influence over the work of its grantees; some organisations have chafed under the pressure. As a strategic funder, the foundation could be interventionist. While Atlantic is known for leaving grantees alone, there were cases where it chose to push grantees to pursue particular lines of work and specific outcomes, rather than standing back to let organisations carry on by their own lights.

Atlantic’s rationale was that, given that its operating life was limited, it had strategically chosen goals that could be reached during its limited life, supported organisations committed to achieving those goals, and funded the activity that they and Atlantic jointly determined would help

them succeed. This kind of relationship between funder and grantee is sometimes fraught with diplomatic and management challenges. But, in Atlantic's view, it is the essence of strategic philanthropy.

Such challenges shouldn't be minimised. Renee Crawford of SLIG, for example, expressed the view that Atlantic always seemed disappointed in her organisation's work, because the foundation was continually pressing SLIG to build on its frontline accomplishments with a stronger, more assertive advocacy for policy reforms. Given the difficulties SLIG faced, Atlantic's constant drive towards policy outcomes may sometimes have felt harsh amid the dangerous and challenging realities of working in volatile and deeply divided communities still significantly dominated by paramilitary factions.

The unique scale at which Atlantic operated inevitably led to some feelings of pressure, dependence and, sometimes, resentment. Such tensions can be eased with steady communication and candour—but a good level of understanding may not be reached, and, in any case, they can rarely be eliminated entirely.

**F**or Atlantic, the ability to make larger than normal grants is partly a function of its decision to put its full endowment to use over a limited period and then close. Unlike a perpetual foundation, Atlantic's limited life expectancy has allowed it to distribute a large portion of its assets year by year, in addition to their annual earnings. However, the decision for a limited lifespan was not made solely for budgetary reasons. Instead, Feeney and the Atlantic Board reasoned that more social benefit could be accomplished by tackling problems today, and either solving them or setting major improvements in motion, than by tending to them slowly with smaller annual sums.

The scale at which Atlantic operated inevitably led to some feelings of pressure, dependence and, sometimes, resentment.

For Feeney, the reasoning was also partly personal. He enjoyed seeing his money put to charitable use, and he believed other philanthropists would enjoy it just as much. He likes to quote the old Irish saying, “There are no pockets in a shroud.” In 2007, speaking of giving nearly his entire fortune to charity, he told Eamon Dunphy of RTÉ, “I’ve been relatively unwilling to tell people what they should do. But I guess my attitude today is—try it, you’ll like it. Secondly, Giving While Living has got to be better than Giving While Dead.”

Feeney reasoned that more social benefit could be accomplished by tackling problems today than by tending to them slowly with smaller annual sums.

John R Healy, first head of Tara Consultants in the Republic and former president and CEO of Atlantic, remembers the pleasure Feeney took in seeing children working together in a classroom in an integrated school in Derry that had benefitted from Atlantic funds. Feeney had himself spoken of his satisfaction on the day in 2007 when Sinn Féin and the DUP joined forces in a new power-sharing regime to govern Northern Ireland. The Atlantic Philanthropies, and Feeney personally, had by then invested tens of millions of dollars in the Northern Irish peace process. “It’s rare in life you get to write ‘finished’ to a major undertaking in such a satisfactory way,” he said. “Today is that day.”

“I’ve been relatively unwilling to tell people what they should do. But... Giving While Living has got to be better than Giving While Dead.”

Chuck Feeney, to Eamon Dunphy of RTÉ

Feeney also had other, related reasons for giving away most of his wealth. He has explained that he was driven by the desire to lead a normal life, to work hard and to help people. “I had one idea that never changed in my mind—that you should use your wealth to help people,” he said.



There was also the desire not to make his wealth a burden for his children. “I believe that people of substantial wealth potentially create problems for future generations unless they themselves accept responsibility to use their wealth during their lifetime to help worthwhile causes,” he wrote in the margins of a draft press release in 1997, the point at which he first decided it was necessary to go public about his philanthropy.

**“It’s rare in life you get to write ‘finished’ to a major undertaking in such a satisfactory way.”**

Chuck Feeney

A group of extremely wealthy Americans, including Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and David Rockefeller, were inspired by Feeney’s example. In 2010, they approached other rich individuals asking them to sign a “Giving Pledge,” which would commit at least half of their wealth to philanthropy either during their lifetimes or in their wills.

Still, the Giving While Living philosophy is not universally accepted as the most effective approach to philanthropy. For example, the other philanthropic institution which has donated substantially to social justice and human rights and reconciliation work in Northern Ireland is the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust (JRCT), one of a group of charities whose funding comes from the fortune left by the chocolate magnate when he died in 1904. Its former director, Stephen Pittam, publicly debated with Atlantic’s Healy over the merits of operating a foundation on a limited timeline. Pittam argued instead for the Rowntree model of a perpetual endowment, with grants funded solely from the earnings on the trust’s assets.

Celia McKeon was responsible until 2016 for the JRCT's Northern Ireland grants programme. "Our philosophy is that it is a long game," she says. "Even huge advances can be rolled back, and we feel the needs of the future may be just as pressing as the needs of today." JRCT spends a maximum of £500,000 per year.

"It is a great shame that Atlantic is going," she concludes. "There is a particular challenge when you are far and away the largest funder in a place like NI, where there is no strong tradition of philanthropy. It is different in the U.S., where there are other philanthropic organisations that can take over. It also presents a dilemma for us [the JRCT]—we can't possibly replace the scale of funding they provided. But a lot of the organisations they funded are turning to us now."

Atlantic and Rowntree shared many core principles in relation to work they considered worth supporting, and McKeon has no doubt but that Atlantic has been a force for good in NI. "They made a crucial investment during a very important

**"Our philosophy is that it is a long game. Even huge advances can be rolled back, and we feel the needs of the future may be just as pressing as the needs of today."**

Celia McKeon, former head of Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust's grants programme

time after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, when it was vital to keep human rights on the agenda. They also helped create an independent civic infrastructure," she says. "I like that they combined work on legacy issues with creative stuff about economic and social rights. They have made a great contribution to the quality of democracy in Northern Ireland by promoting restored relationships."

It is certainly true that the decision to operate for a limited time and then close can place added pressure on other funders and on grantees. It is essential to prepare both groups early and consistently for the day when a large source of philanthropic capital will depart the scene—both to help grantees adjust and to avoid provoking a sudden clamour for other funders to fill the void. Atlantic executives past and present agree that planning in earnest for the end of their grantmaking should have begun much sooner and that the message about when and how grants would end could have been delivered more persistently and forcefully.

“They made a crucial investment during a very important time after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, when it was vital to keep human rights on the agenda. They also helped create an independent civic infrastructure.”

Celia McKeon

“We said we were leaving the stage,” says Healy, “but we didn’t act like it.” Martin O’Brien agrees: “Grantees won’t act like something has limited life if staff don’t. When I became senior vice president, my job was to develop ways of bringing things to an end without causing mayhem.” That mission was accomplished—mayhem did not ensue—but O’Brien believes that a firmer, more consistent message about precisely when and how support would end, and exactly what the foundation planned to do in the interim, would have been helpful both to Atlantic and to its partners and grantees.

Atlantic executives agree that planning in earnest for the end of their grantmaking should have begun much sooner.

In the final years of Atlantic grants, buildings have been bought and given to a number of groups, some through the NI Council for Voluntary Action, whose own building along the peaceline in North Belfast—an example of the creation

of a “soft peaceline” —was paid for by Atlantic during its earlier years. Among the final grants Atlantic has given in NI is a fund of £6.8 million to the Community Foundation for NI to support a cluster of human rights organisations over the next 10 years. The CFNI is contributing £1.3 million of its own to the fund, and more is to be added through

#### HUMAN RIGHTS FUND AT CFNI

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£10m	funding goal	£6.8m	Atlantic support	£1.3m	CFNI contribution
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fundraising. This is an example of the effort to provide for a “smooth landing” for grantees as they adjust to life without Atlantic’s support: The arrangement not only extends financial support for some additional years into the future, but it provides a building for shared offices, in which the organisations can work more effectively together and perhaps find ways to economise on shared services and staffing.

**A**tlantic’s efforts in Northern Ireland, though relatively brief in comparison with some longer-lived institutions, have been influential and far-reaching. Any attempt to accomplish enduring social change in a brief period—especially on terrain as unsteady as that of Northern Ireland around the turn of the 21st century—is certain to create some pressures and tensions as well as to elevate some hopes and ambitions beyond what may be realistic. None of that was unexpected, and some of it was unavoidable.

Along the way, however, remarkable work was launched and nurtured, great institutions enriched, coalitions formed and strengthened, cross-community relations deepened, and indelible lessons about the effectiveness of government services—particularly for children and older people—embedded in public policy and professional practice. Both in these

achievements and in the difficulties Atlantic encountered in pursuit of them, it is possible to discern some lessons that may be useful to other philanthropists, present and future.

First, all good philanthropy requires the careful selection of goals, formulation of strategy and then a patient pursuit of that strategy over time. But the decision to operate for just a limited period places an even greater premium on clarity, focus and persistence. While some in NI found it unsettling that Atlantic did not open its grants to wider competition and fund a broader selection of organisations, Padraic Quirk argues that the foundation was intent on achieving a few articulated goals in a short time. This would not have been possible, he says, if it had “spread the resources around, supporting everything everyone was doing.” Selectiveness about grantees and persistence in pursuing a strategic agenda despite tensions and setbacks were central to Atlantic’s success, he believes.

Second, while clarity and focus are indispensable to success, philanthropy is not a solitary endeavour; and it is essential to find common ground with other funders—prominently including government—on which to build a grantmaking strategy. Collaboration, particularly with government, has been a distinctive feature of Atlantic’s activity across the whole of Ireland, though some of its staff members believe more could have been done to integrate other NI foundations and donors into the work.

This is a difficult balance to strike: Other funders have their own objectives and may have different principles, methods and priorities. Compromise too much, and one’s own focus and strategy can begin to erode. Compromise too little, and opportunities to pool resources and build coalitions and movements may be missed. For a foundation with a limited

Much of Atlantic’s formal communication was managed from New York; some observers believe that a more localised capacity for strategic communications would have served the foundation well.

time horizon, however, the need to establish some common understanding with other funders is paramount. They are the ones who will be needed to sustain effort and to complete unfinished work when the time-limited institution is gone.

Third, a consistent theme in grantees' assessment of Atlantic, both favourable and otherwise, has been the importance of open communication among the foundation, grantees, and other public and private actors. Atlantic's early years of anonymity are widely seen as having impeded some of its efforts to build trust and strengthen coalitions for change, especially amid the inflamed sensitivities of Northern Ireland. Since at least 2001, staff members have taken pains to undo that tradition of secrecy and to explain their goals and methods, build rapport with grantees, and articulate a clear policy message. Even so, there are still some—both inside and

#### TRAITS OF THE ATLANTIC PHILANTHROPIES

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outside the organisation—who would have recommended a greater effort. The value of constant, vigorous and open communication can't be overstated.

Another communications challenge, critical for an effective philanthropy, is the use of more formal information channels, such as online media, publications and public presentations, to disseminate what the foundation has learned. Especially for an organisation like Atlantic that invested heavily in evaluation and research to determine the effectiveness of its programmes, a critical component of success is publicising the results of this research and promoting the most effective practices to government, practitioners and other funders. While Atlantic has invested increasing resources in dissemination in recent years, much of its formal communication was managed from New York; some observers believe that a more localised capacity for strategic communications would have served the foundation well.

Finally, in addition to supporting programmes, action, advocacy and communication, Atlantic devoted a considerable share of its resources in Northern Ireland to capital projects—buildings, equipment, offices, labs, campuses. The effect on NI universities is unmistakable. But these efforts also helped smaller organisations by supplying them with facilities in which to operate and collaborate—and sometimes additional space that could be leased out for added revenue. This proved to be an effective way not only of helping grantees with an important material need, but also elevating them as a presence in civil society—raising their visibility and stature and ensuring their continuity as forces for lasting change.

Good philanthropy requires careful selection of goals, formulation and patient pursuit of strategy. The decision to operate for a limited period places an even greater premium on clarity, focus and persistence.

Colin McCrea urges other philanthropists contemplating investing in NI to do so, and to think carefully about what they would like their investments to accomplish. “There is no point in being generous if you don’t have a plan,” he says. “If you are rich, you need to be strategic about how you give your wealth away. You need to set achievable targets and stick to them. You have to work on policy. You need to be passionate, compassionate and patient. Nothing in a place like Northern Ireland happens quickly. But it happens.”



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