

# The Atlantic Philanthropies' **Investments in Higher Education**

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## The Atlantic Philanthropies' Investments in Higher Education

The Atlantic Philanthropies was founded by entrepreneur Chuck Feeney, who decided in 1982 to devote his wealth to the service of humanity. A champion of Giving While Living, Feeney has long maintained that people of wealth should use it to better the world during their lifetimes. By the time it concludes its operations in 2020, Atlantic will have invested more than \$8 billion to advance opportunity and promote equity and opportunity across the globe.

Over 35 years, the foundation made grants totaling \$3.8 billion to universities, some \$2 billion of which supported the infrastructure of higher education – buildings, faculty, and programs such as scholarships – that was underpinned by a belief that education is an essential accelerator for individuals and societies. This report was commissioned by Atlantic to tell the story of that higher education grantmaking in six corners of the world: the United States, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Australia, and Viet Nam. Atlantic also made grants to universities which advanced the foundation's aging, children & youth, population health, human rights and reconciliation and founding chairman initiatives; those investments are not covered in this report.

### An Overview in Numbers and Key Grantee Accomplishments

Total Investments	Grant Count	Average Grant Amount
\$2.09 billion	1120	\$1.86 million

#### United States

- Cornell University made use of nearly **\$1 billion** in investments to undertake transformative changes, including a targeted scholarship fund, construction of new residential housing and library, hiring of new faculty, and the first stage of a **\$2 billion** Cornell Tech campus in New York City.

#### Republic of Ireland

- The **\$177 million** investment in the Republic of Ireland's university research infrastructure helped leverage six times that in **\$1.3 billion** in government funding and a direct commercial return on investment of **\$2.4 billion**.
- The investment in higher education in the Republic of Ireland helped propel the country to a **top 20** ranking in the world in terms of scientific research and the **top five** in areas such as immunology, genetics, and nanotechnology.

#### South Africa

- A matched funding strategy leveraged more than **\$826 million** and ended a 15-year South Africa government moratorium on spending for higher education infrastructure.
- The development of the University of the Western Cape, including its Life Sciences Building, now produces the largest number of black and female graduates in South Africa, and leads the continent in physics, biology, biochemistry, molecular biology, nanotechnology, and genetics.

#### Northern Ireland

- The **\$71.8 million (£47 million)** investment in Northern Ireland's university research infrastructure to Queen's University and the University of Ulster generated **290** high quality jobs, some **£140 million** in investment.
- The investment in Northern Ireland bolstered research centers, including the Centre for Cancer Research & Cell Biology at Queen's University Belfast, and the Centre for Molecular Biosciences at the University of Ulster, both of which became top-ranked centers.

#### Viet Nam

- Four learning resource centers at major regional universities in Viet Nam – updated, modern libraries – serve as hubs for learning as well as community gathering places.
- Vietnam's first foreign-owned university grew from **31** students in 2000 to **6,000** in 2016.

#### Australia

- Building science and engineering facilities and multipurpose halls in Australia have helped students and faculty more easily collaborate and meet.

*"The university is the most significant creation of the second millennium. From modest beginnings over nine hundred years ago, it has become the quiet but decisive catalyst in modern society, the factor essential to its effective functioning and well-being. The university promotes neither political action nor government policy, but it provides the knowledge and data on which both are developed. It manufactures no products, but it creates the science and technology on which these products depend. It produces no mass circulation newspapers, magazines, or television programmes; but it trains their publishers, writers, and producers. It informs public understanding, cultivates public taste and contributes to the nation's well-being as it nurtures and trains each generation of authors, business leaders, engineers, farmers, lawyers, physicians, poets, scientists, social workers, and teachers—as well as a steady succession of advocates, dreamers, doers, dropouts, parents, politicians, preachers, prophets, social reformers, visionaries, and volunteers—who leaven, nudge, and shape the course of public life."*

Frank H.T. Rhodes, *The Creation of the Future*

## Introduction

Chuck Feeney has long believed in the power of higher education to transform lives and society, a belief also reflected in the grantmaking of The Atlantic Philanthropies, the foundation he created in 1982.

What started as a wish to give back to Cornell University, his alma mater, developed into a much larger portfolio of work. Over 35 years, some \$2 billion of the foundation's total \$8 billion in grants supported higher education across seven geographies.

Atlantic's higher education funding over the years led to an enormous boost to the infrastructure and stature of Cornell University; transformational impact in the Republic of Ireland's higher education landscape; thoughtfully-designed spaces that brought students and faculty together and sparked learning; initiatives that gave students a hand up while rewarding work and service; and new capacities in colleges and universities to raise funds to grow and sustain their mission.

Not everything Atlantic did worked. In some instances, the foundation left too soon to make a lasting difference and, at times, investments may have been guided more by personal interests of the founder and staff than an overarching plan for impact.

The story of Atlantic's funding of higher education is not one of a linear, step-by-step plan. Rather, it is one where a successful entrepreneur, aided by staff with deep experience in higher education, supported a beloved alma mater and prioritized undervalued opportunities that they came upon. It is also one where the work and investments evolved from individual opportunities to an approach that sought more systemic change.

This is also a story of how a founder and staff kept applying what they had learned when they began investing in new geographies, while continuing to adhere to the core values that first animated the earliest investments in higher education.

## Chuck Feeney and Atlantic's Approach

Chuck Feeney, who would later go on to co-found Duty Free Shoppers, and whose fortune created Atlantic, attended Cornell University on the GI Bill. He was the first person in his family to go to a university, which was an experience that changed his life. Feeney, who graduated from the School of Hotel Management, credited the experiences, networks of friends, and the self-confidence he gained while at Cornell with his later success in life.

Feeney made his first grant to Cornell after he founded Atlantic in 1982. He was more than a grateful alumnus giving back to his alma mater. To him, higher education is key to economic advancement and social change, as well as to providing opportunities for those from poorer backgrounds. From firsthand experience, he saw higher education as a conduit to transform lives.

## “Higher education as creator, conservator, and transmitter of knowledge and values”

A 2002 evaluation of Atlantic’s United States (U.S.) higher education grantmaking provides a useful way to understand its work in this area. The evaluation noted, “the source of Atlantic’s vision and explanation for many of its choices trace to a small set of core values. They are nowhere written down but are indelible parts of the organization’s culture... They included an obligation to accord opportunity for a college education on the basis of effort, ability, and character; to transform personal educational accomplishments into social capital; and a respect for higher education as creator, conservator, and transmitter of knowledge and values.”<sup>1</sup>

Over the years, Atlantic made a great number of grants to universities and colleges in pursuit of its goals. This synthesis is limited to a discussion of higher education grants awarded to advance institutions of higher education and access to higher education. It does not include Atlantic’s grantmaking to support research funded at colleges and universities in its later priority areas in aging, children and youth, population health, and human rights, or major investments in biomedical research.

Much of Atlantic’s early investments went to Cornell, but, building on what Feeney and Atlantic staff learned, the foundation’s higher education grantmaking soon spread to other U.S. universities, and then to other countries. Over time, Atlantic made major investments in higher education in Ireland, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Viet Nam, and Australia.

Atlantic’s approach to higher education—at least in the beginning—stemmed directly from Chuck Feeney’s experience as an entrepreneur. He liked to invest in undervalued opportunities that could yield big dividends. He liked to place his trust in leaders who he saw as visionary. Feeney also liked to place big bets on big things and higher education provided many opportunities to do that.

Feeney took an opportunistic approach to his gifts to Cornell and later to other universities and countries. When he came upon good ideas backed by strong leaders, Atlantic funded them. Atlantic never carried out a formal strategic planning process for its higher education work. Yet over time, as Atlantic became more deeply involved in higher education, Feeney and Atlantic leadership and staff took a more deliberate approach to making systemic change with their grants in some of the geographies where they invested.

From 1982 to 2002, the vast majority of Atlantic’s investments went to higher education throughout a number of geographies. But in 2002, Chuck Feeney and the Atlantic board decided that the foundation would become a limited life foundation, commit all its grants by the end of 2016, and close in 2020.

With that decision, the board and a new president embarked on more formal and systematic grantmaking. In addition, they undertook an investigation to determine where the foundation could make the most impact in its remaining 18 years. That process led to the decision to focus on four areas: aging, children and youth, population health, and reconciliation and human rights.

Higher education would cease as a formal program. However, Feeney continued to invest in higher education through “founding chairman” grants. In fact, Atlantic made the single largest grant to higher education years later. And while the explicit program in higher education ended in 2002, much of its impact continues.

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<sup>1</sup> Alberg Graham, P, Guskin A, Johnstone B, Smith D and Bacchetti R. *A Report to The Atlantic Philanthropies (USA), Inc on a Twenty-Year Review of its Grantmaking in Higher Education*, October 2002.

## Where Atlantic Invested

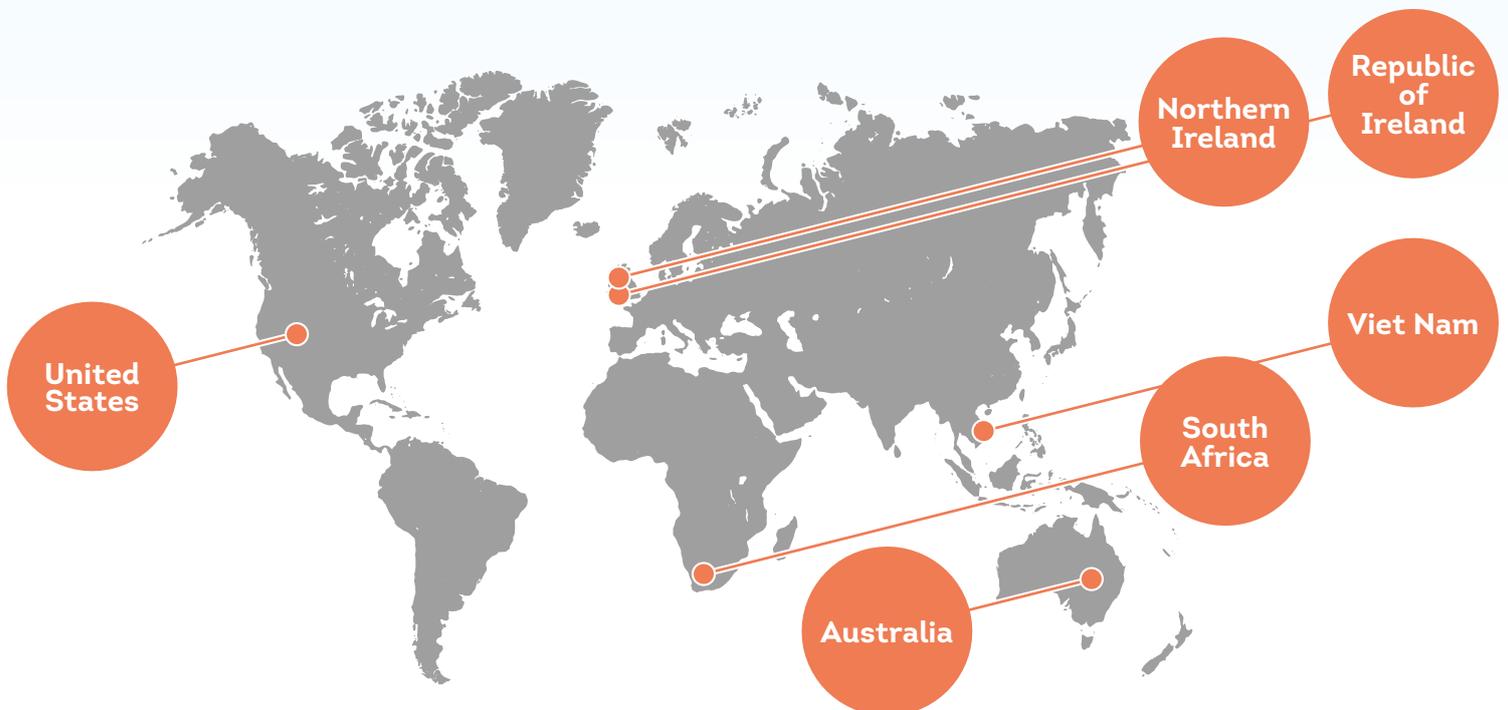
Beginning in 1990, Atlantic's higher education investments in the United States expanded to other geographies, most of which held a personal connection for Feeney.

Each time Atlantic entered a new geography, both Feeney and Atlantic staff brought along their experiences and people they had funded previously to help them. That enabled the foundation to build on what it learned from past efforts, as they tried to create larger and more lasting impact. During much of the time that Atlantic supported higher education, it operated as an anonymous foundation, which both helped and hindered its efforts, according to staff and evaluators.

Atlantic made its first higher education grants outside the United States in the Republic of Ireland. Starting with a series of smaller grants, the foundation followed with an ambitious and successful program to build a knowledge economy and ultimately spur economic growth. After that, the foundation turned its attention to Northern Ireland for a similar undertaking.

In 1991, shortly after apartheid ended, Atlantic began funding in South Africa. Its initial investments aimed at enhancing opportunities for black South Africans. In 1998, Atlantic began supporting biomedical research and—to a much lesser extent—higher education in Australia. Atlantic's higher education grantmaking in Australia centered around campus buildings. Finally, in 2000, a couple of years after Atlantic started work in Viet Nam, the foundation began funding library resource centers as well as backing an Australian-owned university in the country.

Atlantic also funded a number of projects in England, which are not covered in this review. Most of those projects supported financial aid and development efforts, and construction or renovation of new buildings.



# United States

Because of Chuck Feeney’s connection to Cornell, Atlantic’s higher education work began and ended with the university. Feeney felt an abiding loyalty and connection to an institution that had given him so much. Cornell received nearly \$1 billion of Atlantic’s total \$2 billion in investments in higher education. In addition to Feeney’s allegiance to his alma mater, Cornell had always been considered a less prestigious institution than other Ivy League schools, such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. That is because Cornell is the only one that is a land grant institution, meaning that it not only offered programs in liberal arts, but it also has state-supported colleges like agricultural and life sciences. In Feeney’s eyes, that made it an underdog—that is a person or group that is less valued than their peers—and he had a strong affinity for underdogs.

## Hoping to instill the values of giving back

When the foundation was created in 1982, its first grants went to Cornell. The foundation made what was a large award at the time—\$7 million to seed the Cornell Tradition, a scholarship program with a work and community service component. It was an idea that came directly from Feeney. Coming from a working-class background, he had paid for his expenses at the university by selling sandwiches to hungry classmates.

As conceived by Feeney and Ray Handlan, former director of development at Cornell and president of the Atlantic Foundation Service Company, the Cornell Tradition scholarship included work and community service requirements for recipients. For Feeney, work and giving back to the community were central values. Feeney hoped that the scholarship would help Cornell attract bright students interested in careers in public service or the non-profit sector who otherwise might have been unable to attend the university.

He also hoped to instill the same commitment as he had to his alma mater and encourage Cornell Tradition Fellows to give back to their university. The program represented a departure from practices at Ivy League universities, which do not give merit-based aid, just need-based financial support, according to Joanne Volpe Florino, a program associate at Atlantic during the early years of its higher education grantmaking.



## A scholarship program that required work and service

Under the Cornell Tradition, financial aid applicants are reviewed by a selection committee and chosen on the basis of work experience, community service and extracurricular activities, academic record, and overall quality and potential. Over the years, the work component has been the strongest indicator of whether a student is selected for a program.

Fellows—numbering about 500 of Cornell’s 14,000 undergraduates each year—receive up to \$4,000 annually to replace student loans. They also are eligible for up to \$3,500 during their undergraduate career for reimbursement for expenses from their work or service activities. This can include summer internships, service-learning trips, and alternative spring breaks—all of which could be out of reach to students without such support.

## Seeding a new way of seeking alumni support

In the late 1980s, in what would become a signature approach to its work in higher education, Atlantic requested that Cornell take steps to make the program self-sustaining. To do so, Atlantic funded Cornell to undertake challenge campaigns that raised funds for more than 300 additional alumni-endowed fellowships. Named for individuals or classes, these fellowships added another \$26.4 million to the university’s endowment, according to a 2016 Cornell report.<sup>2</sup>

### Cornell Tradition Changes Lives

For Katrina James, who graduated from Cornell in 1996, the Cornell Tradition’s supplemental funds enabled her to spend the fall of her junior year interning at the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, which helped set her career path. James, who has degrees in law and social work, now has a senior position at the Harlem’s Children Zone, a nonprofit organization that provides birth through college preparatory programming in Harlem.

In the *Cornell Tradition: Supporting Service Work, and Scholarships for 34 years*, James noted that without the funding from the Cornell Tradition she may not have been able to spend a semester off-campus. She also said that her time as a Tradition Fellow helped prepare her for her career in part because performing service and working consistently—requirements of the Tradition—helped instill her with the importance of giving back to her community. In 2017, James was elected to Cornell University’s Board of Trustees.

The fellowship funding was also critically important in providing James with options after she graduated, she said.

“I cannot emphasize enough the value of the fellowship funding,” James said. “I was able to graduate from Cornell with less than \$2,500 in debt. Without a heavy debt burden, I had the freedom to pursue graduate study and a nonprofit career absent the anxiety of wondering how I would repay the loans...I’m not sure where I would be without the influence that the Cornell Tradition had on my life.”

Itai Dinour, a 2001 Cornell graduate, meanwhile, entered Cornell expecting to pursue a career in corporate law. But his experience with the Cornell Tradition quickly changed his career path.

As part of the Cornell Tradition, Fellows meet and interact with leaders in nonprofit organizations and public policy. One of those who Dinour met was Michael Brown, co-founder of City Year, an organization that focuses on improving education for students in impoverished communities. After Brown’s talk at Cornell in 2000, Dinour realized he wanted to follow a new career path. He worked with City Year for 12 years, helping it grow to nearly 300 AmeriCorps members with a presence in more than 25 New York City public schools. Dinour later joined the Einhorn Family Charitable Foundation, which works to build a more peaceful and harmonious society.

“Not to exaggerate but the Cornell Tradition was life changing and career altering,” Dinour said. “I recently attended my 15th reunion and reflected on just how lucky I am to have made a career and a life doing what I love, in the spirit of helping others, while surrounded by an amazing community of Cornellians.”

2 *The Cornell Tradition: Supporting Service, Work, and Scholarship for 34 Years*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 2016

"We raised money from living donors," said Susan Murphy, vice president emerita at Cornell who oversaw the Cornell Tradition for much of its history. She said that marked a change for the university that previously relied primarily on bequests for scholarship support. "Because students were demonstrating interest in work and volunteering, it was an easy sell," Murphy added.

Surveys of Cornell Tradition Fellows indicate the program made a tangible difference in the lives of many of them, including those who said they would not have been able to afford Cornell without the program. In all, some 5,500 students have received more than \$41 million in loan relief since the start of the Cornell Tradition.

Other benefits cited by survey respondents include the ability to spend more time volunteering than their peers, feeling more confident in their leadership abilities, greater likelihood to become community leaders than their peers, and higher inclination to support Cornell. Some 64 percent of them have donated to Cornell compared to 56 percent of the overall alumni community. In all, Tradition alumni have given their alma mater \$8.5 million, according to the 2016 report.

Some students wrote to Feeney to say "how they initially felt obligated to [volunteer] and then discovered that it was a way of life," said Murphy. "That was what Chuck was trying to accomplish."

As a tribute to the importance of this program, the foundation marked the end of its grantmaking in 2016 with a \$7 million award to the Cornell Tradition—the same amount as Feeney's first grant to the program in 1982. In total, Atlantic contributed more than \$40 million over 35 years to the Cornell Tradition.

## Building new residential housing to foster student engagement

In addition to a focus on ensuring that all Cornell students would be able to attend without financial stress, Feeney believed that comfortable and sufficient student housing was a critical part of the undergraduate experience. As a result, some of Atlantic's largest grants to Cornell funded new residential housing on campus, which the foundation supported with a total of almost \$164 million.

Cornell had long struggled with providing ample on-campus housing for students. In 1996, it housed just 41 percent of its undergraduate students on campus, while Harvard and Princeton housed 97 percent. The student body was also divided, with some staying on the North Campus and the rest on the West Campus. In addition to being physically separated from one another due to the famous gorges in Ithaca, NY, they were also socially, culturally, and racially isolated. Students tended to self-select into spending time with peers from one of the seven colleges or in racial or ethnic groups their first year, and then continue running in only those groups throughout their college experience, noted former Cornell President Hunter R. Rawlings III in a 1997 report.<sup>3</sup>

Freshman choices also led to wide differences in the academic, social, and cultural environments for those students. Although the university had studied the problem for years in the late 1990s it was ready to take action under Rawlings, who had recently assumed the presidency of Cornell with the help of Atlantic.

## All freshman on the same campus and "houses" for upper class students

Atlantic funding made it possible to construct new buildings and make other renovations to create a more united campus. For example, all freshman moved to the North Campus, which included two new residence halls, a community center, and renovated dorms. Locating all freshman on one campus enabled each class to develop its own identity. First-year students also had opportunities to meet freshman from other backgrounds that otherwise might not have been possible. The new approach to freshman housing also included mentoring, academic tutoring, and writing seminars in an academic environment.



<sup>3</sup> Rawlings H. *President's Report on Residential Housing at Cornell University*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, October 8, 1997.

The creation of five new “living and learning” residential facilities for upper classmen on the West Campus included a tenured faculty member as a live-in dean. The dean and other faculty members gave regular lectures and others educational opportunities to students.

“On the West Campus we began to see an ability of students to interact with faculty in a much more informal way,” Murphy said. “They began to have discussions outside the classroom and they started to get to know students different from themselves.”

## Other support to Cornell

Atlantic investments in Cornell also included:

- A \$50 million scholarship challenge campaign that generated \$150 million from other donors for undergraduate scholarships.
- \$14 million for the School of Hotel Administration to create an enhanced learning environment for students, along with renovation of the Statler Hotel, construction of the J. Willard Marriott Executive Education Center, and four modern amphitheater lecture halls.
- \$51.4 million that enabled the hiring of 70 new faculty members.
- \$25 million to support an underground library to preserve rare documents; \$17.1 million for a field house for indoor sports that served as the central location for Cornell’s athletic programs and varsity teams; other fitness centers located throughout campus; and funding to help build a center for performing arts.

## Support to promote diversity yields disappointing results

Atlantic also made grants totaling \$18 million over 10 years aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for underrepresented groups and women.

The resulting programs supported recruitment of minority faculty and doctoral students, outreach to minority students, and related efforts. Despite that significant investment, the 2002 evaluation found that the results were disappointing. Unlike other efforts at Cornell, diversity efforts largely resulted from Atlantic’s instigation rather than university administrators.

The evaluation noted a lack of “well-grounded strategic thinking and clearly framed aspirations over the long term. If one contrasts the changes in residential life and the large-scale initiatives in science [another Atlantic area of support] with the unsteady movements of diversity at Cornell, the low priority and absence of focus becomes apparent.”

The evaluation also found that despite a clear connection between the Cornell Tradition and a concern for underrepresented students, none of the documentation evaluators reviewed accounted for whether the Tradition contributed to improving Cornell as a welcoming environment for diverse students.

## Cornell Tech

Atlantic’s change in programmatic focus in 2002 ended funding for Cornell for the next 10 years. Then, in 2012, Atlantic announced a \$350 million award—its largest single grant ever—to fund the first stage of a \$2 billion Cornell Tech campus. At the time, New York City had launched a competition to create a technology institute on Roosevelt Island, in exchange for free real estate and \$100 million in city capital. Cornell was one of six universities vying for the new campus.

New York City officials believed a technology institute would serve as a hub that would attract the best engineers and students to the region, and hopefully become the epicenter for a Silicon



Valley on the East Coast, resulting in thousands of new jobs. Planners envisioned a graduate school with direct ties to industry, public school systems, and government agencies, according to Dan Huttenlocher, dean of Cornell Tech.

The project appealed to Feeney for two reasons: it was the type of big bet opportunity that he liked. And he had always thought that Cornell needed a stronger presence in New York City. Shortly after he pledged \$350 million for the effort, the city awarded the bid to Cornell. Atlantic's pledge funded the first phase of the applied science and engineering campus on Roosevelt Island.

The Tech Center combines academic innovation with practical applications, and also serve as a place for thinkers from different fields to come together and collaborate. Cornell plans on constructing 2.1 million square feet of building space that will accommodate more than 2,000 students. In the fall of 2017, 30 faculty and almost 300 graduate students moved to the first phase of Cornell Tech's permanent campus on Roosevelt Island.

To some observers, the grant to Cornell Tech may be the most consequential of any that Atlantic has made. For one, the center is expected to result in the creation of 38,000 permanent jobs, 600 spin-off companies, and produce \$23 billion in economic activity.

One way that Cornell Tech hopes to make an impact is through its Runway Startup Postdoc Program, which is part business school, part research institution, and part startup incubator. Through the program, postdoctoral candidates in digital technology seek to shift their mindset from an academic one to an entrepreneurial one. They come to Cornell Tech with ideas for products or markets that have not yet been proven and receive support and mentoring from both academics and business experts.

A 2016 report<sup>4</sup> found that since the program began in 2013 there have been 29 companies founded that have raised \$12 million. Some 93 percent of those companies are based in New York City. Among those companies are Maalka, a software distribution platform that enables cities, corporations, utilities, and building owners to launch and manage successful sustainability initiatives, and Code Ocean, which makes state-of-the-art scientific research accessible and useful.

The hope is that Cornell Tech may serve as a model for other cities seeking to boost educational opportunities and fuel economic growth.

## A transformational impact

The nearly \$1 billion in Atlantic funding that went to Cornell was among the largest that any U.S. university has received from a single alumnus. In a 2002 analysis—years before the Cornell NY Tech project—evaluators cited the significant contributions from Atlantic's support for the university:

"Many of these gifts and grants altered Cornell's organizational capacity in ways that opened it up to new possibilities in increased potential for gift support, seeded multiple ways of enriching the undergraduate experience, and supported the cultivation of new academic directions. Several Cornellians considered these gifts 'transformative,' or equivalent to the initial contributions from Ezra Cornell to the fledging institution...The overall result of Atlantic funds substantially helped Cornell build toward a future of academic eminence consistent with both its history and perceived destiny. The Atlantic infusions, selected for the most part wisely and collectively by the Atlantic donors and the Cornell administration, propelled it securely into the competitive zone of the Ivies."

## Investing in other colleges and universities

Atlantic's investments to advance higher education in the United States were not limited to Cornell. It also made \$260 million in grants to other colleges, universities, and education associations.

As in the case of Cornell, these grants did not follow a formal strategic plan. Instead the foundation's program staff sought investment opportunities that mirrored Chuck Feeney's focus on undervalued opportunities, promising leaders, and the chance for a big impact. And similar to Atlantic's approach with Cornell, grants supported initiatives that were priorities for the institution. Many of these grants enabled recipient institutions to move forward with programs that had been in the planning phase, but, according to the 2002 evaluation, lacked sufficient funding.

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4 *Startup Spinout Annual Report*. New York City: Cornell University, 2016

## Pivotal Funding for Howard Gardner

Atlantic program staff constantly scoured publications, used their contacts, and attended conferences looking for promising leaders to fund. In the late 1980s, Ray Handlan, president of the Atlantic Foundation Service Company, went to a conference in Cambridge, MA, where Howard Gardner, then a young professor at Harvard School of Education, was beginning to make a name for himself in the research world for his work on multiple intelligences. He and a colleague ran Project Zero, an organization that was home to both his work and others that drew together diverse disciplinary perspectives to examine fundamental questions of human expression and development.

Gardner describes in a 2013 account of his meeting, “at the end of the conference, an attendee who had been notably quiet during the conference asked if he could hitch a ride with me from the venue to Harvard Square. On the way to the hotel, Ray Handlan told me that he was interested in our work and might be able to help with the funding. Having tried to raise money for almost half a century, I can assure you that this is a message seldom heard by the petitioners!”

That was the start of a close relationship with Atlantic. As Gardner wrote, “While we continued to secure some funding from other sources, Project Zero was fundamentally transformed by the support from the Atlantic Philanthropies.”

For more than a decade, Atlantic supported Project Zero with funding that was often \$1 million a year, Gardner noted. As part of the arrangement, Atlantic brokered an agreement with Harvard University to provide matching funds for Project Zero, which helped ensure that the university was equally committed to the work, according to Angela Covert, former program officer at Atlantic.

Gardner said the funding for Project Zero laid the groundwork for long-term stability. In the past, Gardner and his co-director either shared a secretary or worked with student assistants. Atlantic’s funding allowed the organization to hire individuals in charge of finance, human resources, technology, and other core needs of the organization. With this support, the number of staff increased from around 15 to 50 individuals. Without question, Gardner wrote, the support allowed Project Zero to focus much more on research itself, rather than the task of raising funds.

### Not sufficient to carry out “research for research’s sake”

However, while Atlantic was largely hands-off in its work with funded organizations, program officers did make clear to Gardner that it was not sufficient to “carry out research for research’s sake.” Atlantic staff wanted Gardner and his team to make a concerted effort to get their pioneering work on multiple intelligences into the hands of people who could make use of it.

As a result, Project Zero began carrying out summer institutes where they could present their ideas and practices to large group of educators. It now holds two or three summer institutes a year in the United States, which serve as the major source of income for the organization, Gardner noted. In 2013, Project Zero held its first International Conference in London and has online classes as well. Helping to spread Gardner’s ideas further, Atlantic funded the University College Cork to test the application of Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences on aspects of the Irish educational system.

The foundation’s support often focused on the higher education reform agenda, which included undergraduate teaching of learning, curriculum structure, moral and citizenship education, uses of technology, and the support of leaders.

## Supporting small colleges serving a niche

Separate from its work with universities, Atlantic made a number of grants to U.S. colleges. Some 86 percent of these funds went to four institutions: Cambridge College in Boston; Ithaca College (located in the same town as Cornell); Marlboro College in Marlboro, VT; and Muhlenberg College in Allentown, PA. These schools either were of interest to Feeney or an Atlantic board director.

The 2002 evaluation found that the grants to Cambridge College, which focuses on enrolling part-time adult students from disadvantaged backgrounds, helped the college grow from 500 to 3,000 students. Atlantic was especially attracted to Cambridge College's hands-on approach to working with students who were struggling with balancing jobs, families, and part-time school, according to Handlan.

Marlboro College is a small college with an enrollment of 300 that had been established by World War II veterans who wanted to direct their own education. That philosophy has continued with students, faculty, and staff making decisions about every aspect of the college. The college also had constant financial challenges.

Atlantic's support included a grant for a new master's degree program in e-commerce, which helped the college position itself as an innovator in higher education and led to favorable notice in leading publications such as *The New York Times*. Other grants helped strengthen the college infrastructure and underwrote capital campaigns. Over time, the college's endowment grew from \$1 million to \$7 million, and assets increased from \$5 million to \$20 million.

## Funding associations to explore big ideas and pose challenges to higher education

In keeping with Atlantic's belief that institutions of higher education are also social institutions that serve intellectual, social, and civic purposes, it funded a number of groups and individual scholars to advance these ideas. Some grants supported projects that took issue with long-standing norms, including two to the American Association for Higher Education for a series of initiatives that challenged the concept of tenure.

"Atlantic was an adept player in this domain," the 2002 evaluation noted. "It backed able association leaders willing to take on high profile and controversial issues, e.g., tenure and faculty renewal, as well as those tackling equally important but more popular agendas, e.g., service learning and quality improvement."

In all, Atlantic made 89 grants to national associations and other groups that totaled \$62 million.

## Supporting diversity efforts

In addition to the diversity work Atlantic supported at Cornell, it made a number of grants to encourage similar efforts at other colleges and universities. The 2002 evaluation found that, compared to support for Cornell, Atlantic's grantmaking for diversity to other institutions was more sharply focused and typically produced clearer results. According to the evaluators, Atlantic's funding also seemed to quicken and move forward programs grantees already had underway, rather than instigating such efforts, as it had at Cornell.

The evaluators found that at least some of the 15 grants for national or regional projects had a substantial impact. For example, in 1994 minorities constituted 26 percent of the U.S. population, but only 12 percent of higher education's full-time instructional faculty. To address this issue, Atlantic supported the Compact for Faculty Diversity—a project of the New England Board of Higher Education, the Southern Regional Education Board, and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education—that assisted at least 200 minority doctoral students per year through financial and academic support programs.



Atlantic's \$1 million support was used to leverage additional funds from the Pew Charitable Trusts and others. An external review of the work, funded by The Ford Foundation, another funder of the Compact, "suggested that in spite of a major shift in the public policy arena away from supporting targeted pipeline efforts, the Compact has been extraordinarily successful in designing programs that ensures the success of underrepresented populations in doctoral studies and in pursuing faculty careers," the 2002 evaluation noted.

In 2002, evaluators stated that the Compact could become a national resource for faculty diversity, as well as a resource for institutions looking for strategies to diversify their faculty—a prediction that proved prescient. In 2017, the Compact was still active, sponsoring an annual Institute that "gives the issue of faculty diversity a national focus and provides minority scholars with the strategies necessary to survive the rigors of graduate school, earn the doctoral degree and succeed as a member of the professoriate."

## Summing up

Evaluators of Atlantic's higher education program in the U.S. described the two decades of investments as a nearly singular commitment among philanthropy to support and, at times, challenge institutions of higher education to provide opportunities that would help put students on a trajectory for life-long success and strengthen society. Evaluators also singled out Atlantic's willingness to back innovative thinking and seize promising opportunities. Atlantic's generous support to Cornell University was also an impressive display of gratitude and belief in a top-tier university.

The evaluators—and some Atlantic staff—also wondered if the lack of a board-approved strategy to guide this work, coupled with the foundation's opportunistic approach to grantmaking, anonymity, and reliance on a small staff, cost it the opportunity for making a greater impact. Some Atlantic staff also said that because of the close ties and loyalty Feeney and program staff had to Cornell, they may have been less rigorous about some projects Cornell leaders pitched to the foundation.

## Republic of Ireland

Chuck Feeney, an Irish-American, felt a long-standing pull and connection to his ancestral homeland. He traveled to the Republic of Ireland frequently to seek business opportunities. While he had been happy to see most of the foundation's giving directed to the United States and particularly Cornell, Feeney was also open to opportunities in others places where he could extend his philanthropy, according to his biographer Conor O'Clery, author of *The Billionaire Who Wasn't*.

Drawn to Ireland by the prospect of investing in a luxury hotel in 1985, Feeney also took note of the country's severe economic doldrums. With dismal job prospects, some three out of four university graduates left the country as soon as they graduated, O'Clery noted. Left unaddressed, such a brain drain could be devastating to Ireland's future. Yet, with little cash to invest in their infrastructure, faculty, or students, there wasn't much universities could do to prevent top-quality faculty and students from seeking opportunities elsewhere.

## Investing in a promising underdog institution

Atlantic's first investment in Ireland reflected Chuck Feeney's belief in the power of higher education to leverage societal change. At a lunch in Dublin in 1987, Feeney happened to meet Ed Walsh, head of the National Institute of Higher Education in Limerick, which was formed in the early 1970s to meet the demands for technology expertise that were unaddressed by existing universities. A few weeks later, Feeney followed up on an offhand invitation from Walsh to visit Limerick. Feeney found an opportunity tailor-made for his approach to investing.

A charismatic, ambitious, and entrepreneurial leader, Walsh was determined that his 15-year-old institute—which was not highly regarded by other more established colleges and universities—would receive full university status. To Feeney, Limerick was ripe for investment—an undervalued school on the rise with a visionary leader.

## Funding visually stunning buildings

Feeney had an eye for real estate in the right location that provided opportunity. Walking around the Limerick campus, Feeney noticed that while it was on a gorgeous site bounded by the Shannon River, the campus did not have enough buildings to provide the best learning or teaching environment. In 1990, Limerick received Atlantic's first major grant in Ireland to build a concert hall that, according to O'Clery, became a center for musical performances for both the institute and the city. Walsh successfully lobbied the government to match the funding, marking the beginning of an approach that Atlantic would use to leverage other funding in Ireland, as well as Northern Ireland, South Africa, Viet Nam, and Australia.

At Limerick, Atlantic later funded the first Olympic-sized swimming pool in the country, a state-of-the-art library, new accommodations, and purchased land for a new campus that bridged both shores of the Shannon River. Atlantic's investments in Limerick totaled \$181 million, which helped grow the campus from 11 buildings to more than 40.

The often-stunning buildings helped create a visual statement about Limerick's standing as an institution of academic excellence. In 1989, Limerick received full university status. Atlantic's funding helped the university grow its student body from 735 in its early years to 17,000 students today, many with limited means. It was named "University of the Year 2015" in the *Sunday Times* Good University Guide because of its record on graduate employability, strong research commercialization, and a €52-million project in science and engineering.



After Limerick, Atlantic's work in Ireland over the next 12 years primarily focused on strengthening the country's institutions of higher education. As it had done in the United States, Atlantic sought to make universities more appealing to faculty and students. It invested heavily in libraries, dormitories, and sports and cultural facilities.

"Chuck's whole thing was that we have to enhance the university experience for students," said Colin McCrea, a former Atlantic vice president. "They need playing fields, offices for student organizations, good dorms, academic buildings, and a nice ambience."

Atlantic also supported research, academic appointments, programs to improve teaching and learning, and provided capital grants for research facilities. In addition, the foundation assisted several universities to establish access programs for disadvantaged students.

Because Ireland's universities were almost entirely dependent on government funding with a limited endowment from alumni—there was little, if any, tradition of giving to alma maters—Atlantic invested in efforts to enhance fundraising.

At the end of the 1990s, a confluence of events led Atlantic to make even more consequential higher education investments in Ireland. As described in a 2006 article by John R. Healy, former Atlantic president, and Frank H.T. Rhodes<sup>5</sup>, former president of Cornell, Atlantic became convinced that the nation's higher education system was not sufficiently contributing to the economy that was just beginning to take off.

## Making one of Atlantic's biggest bets

The lack of government investment in basic research in universities represented the most glaring gap in support. At the time, research spending was about 11 percent of the European Union norm. Some €2 million was available for basic research grants for all seven universities in Ireland, and just an additional €2.5 million for capital investment. The Irish government had not been persuaded to invest more funds into university research, Healy and Rhodes noted.

As a result, many of Ireland's best minds were leaving to pursue graduate degrees, post-docs, and jobs in other countries.

Rose Anne Kenny, a medical doctor and native of Ireland who worked in England for 21 years overseeing a research center there, summed up the problem at a 2014 Atlantic gathering: "What I consistently saw in my time as a physician in England was the quality of undergraduates and post graduate doctors and nurses from Ireland when they came to the UK. They were grabbed up because they were well educated, they were hungry, enthusiastic, and got on with people. But they had no opportunities in Ireland to develop. It was clearly an untapped reservoir of talent who, if given the opportunity, could do great things."

Feeney was acutely aware of the need for a talented labor pool to draw from for his businesses. At the time, Ireland had high unemployment—16 percent—and Atlantic staff believed strongly that an advanced degree was a key factor in cutting unemployment. Additionally, Atlantic had significantly increased its assets through the sale of Duty-Free Shoppers, which brought a large cash infusion that Feeney was eager to put to work.

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<sup>5</sup> Rhodes F and Healy J. "Investment in Knowledge: A Case Study of a Philanthropy's Partnership with Government." *Administration*, 54(2), 63-84, 2006/

## Working with government for the first time

After some deliberation, Feeney and Atlantic staff determined that the only way for Irish universities to reach their full potential would be for the government to make a concerted and long-term commitment to expanding the sector, noted Tony Proscio in a 2011 history of Atlantic's investments in Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

Following months of negotiation with the Irish government, which was made more difficult by the fact that Atlantic was operating anonymously and that such an endeavor had never been attempted before, the government and the foundation agreed to jointly fund a plan under development to boost higher education at the graduate level. This also represented the first time Atlantic partnered with government.

## Taking a systematic approach to Ireland's research infrastructure

At the time the government had been considering making an additional \$10 million in funding available for university research. Called the Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions (PRTLTI), the initiative aimed at expanding the capacity of higher education institutions in Ireland to carry out basic research that was of international caliber. To persuade the government to think bigger, the foundation committed \$91 million to an initial cycle of funding if it were matched. The government agreed to make the match. Atlantic ultimately contributed to three cycles for a total investment of \$177 million.

Through PRTLTI, Atlantic sought to create a deeper research infrastructure, rather than fund specific research projects. PRTLTI provided funding to build research centers, purchase specialized equipment, and hire staff. Atlantic staff selected research as the focus of its investment in higher education because they were convinced that Ireland's prosperity hinged on its ability to create new knowledge, according to Healy and Rhodes.

PRTLTI's distinguishing features included:

- The program would support research strategies that the universities felt were most important—not ones selected by government or other funders.
- Universities also would compete against one another for funding—a departure from past practice where every institution expected to receive a share of new funding. This change encouraged universities to prioritize their strongest research areas and to strengthen their strategic planning and fundraising strategies, which up until that time were underdeveloped.



<sup>6</sup> Proscio T. *The Atlantic Philanthropies in the Republic of Ireland: 1988-2010*. Durham, NC: Duke University, July 2011.

Additionally, the program's design encouraged collaboration among institutions to offset the challenges of reaching scale that institutions in the small country faced. PRTLTI funded multi-institutional research that spanned a number of disciplines to help create synergy among universities through the country.

Additional PRTLTI components included a plan for assessing individual university proposals on how they would specifically impact teaching and learning—something very important to Atlantic—and another aimed at fostering potential commercial opportunities that could lead to jobs and new businesses.

## “A veritable research wasteland”

Brian MacCraith, president of Dublin City University (DCU), was a young physicist when PRTLTI started. Speaking at a 2014 meeting with Atlantic staff, he described PRTLTI's impact on him, the university, and Ireland. Noting that he had left Ireland for more promising research opportunities in the U.S. a few years before the program began, he said:

“I had left behind a scene in Ireland that was a veritable research wasteland. You had a number of smart individuals and you had very few if any research centers of any note. My own laboratory before I went to the United States was a prefabricated building with a few shelves and we were trying to do world-class research.”

In the United States, MacCraith worked in the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory's state-of-the-art facilities to develop technologies that would detect biowarfare agents. At the time, the country had experienced terrorism involving ricin and anthrax, both of which are deadly forms of biological agents. MacCraith and his colleagues focused on developing technologies that could be used to detect those forms of bioweapons—immensely satisfying work because it was contributing to an immediate need and would be used.

Shortly after learning about PRTLTI, MacCraith returned to Ireland to oversee a proposal for DCU to develop a National Center for Sensor Research. Sensor research focuses on developing applications that can lead to safer food, a cleaner environment, more accurate medical diagnoses, and more efficient energy use. Although DCU had eight scientists working on that kind of research, they were scattered across the university.

DCU won PRTLTI funding, which enabled it to bring together those academics and others into one world-class facility equipped with the specialized equipment required to pursue their research. By having academics from a range of specialties—physics, chemistry, biotechnology, engineering, and others—working in the same space, they could begin collaborating and creating new ideas and innovations, MacCraith said.

## Funding grows small center to one of the largest in the world

“The short history is that we grew to be one of the largest sensor technology centers in the world,” MacCraith added. “We have 240 researchers, we have had over 1500 peer reviewed publications, 350 PhD students, multiple patents, and spawned three more centers. Financially, we have attracted to DCU over €200 million in research. We have transformed the university from an initial seed funding of €11 million from PRTLTI.”

In one of the most practical examples of PRTLTI's impact, MacCraith said that the center developed and launched a bowel cancer test that is less invasive than previous methods and that can lead to much earlier detection of the disease. Bowel cancer, the second deadliest cancer in Ireland, claims about 1,200 lives annually.

As another example of impact, PRTLTI provided funds for the construction of the Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience, which today is a worldwide leader in brain research. As a testament to its prominence, in 2015, Atlantic awarded the Institute and the University of California, San Francisco \$177 million to establish the Global Brain Health Institute, a groundbreaking initiative that aims to tackle the fast-growing dementia problem.

Additionally, Rose Anne Kenny, who spoke of her dismay at seeing so many promising young Irish students emigrate to England, was lured back to Ireland to lead her own PRTLTI grant proposal that resulted in the construction of the Mercer's Institute of Successful Ageing. Over the years, Mercer's has raised standards and care for elderly people while creating a hub for innovative care and services. It also provides advanced training for health professionals, providing the kind of opportunities for talented Irishmen and women that Kenny had hoped they would have in their own country.



## Impact of Atlantic's investment

Overall, PRTLTI helped seven Irish universities and the Royal College of Surgeons develop into international quality research institutions. Atlantic's funding of PRTLTI supported construction of about 1.1 million of square feet of new research facilities; 46 research institutes or programs, 1,000 research positions, and 1,600 new postgraduate positions. The foundation's investment of \$177 million helped leverage nearly six times that amount with \$1.3 billion in government funding.

The government continued funding PRTLTI after Atlantic's exit. In November 2017, the government announced plans to create a successor program to PRTLTI.

Among the impacts of PRTLTI:

- Ireland is now ranked in the top 20 countries in the world in terms of scientific research outputs, and in the top five in areas such as immunology, genetics, and nanotechnology.
- Ireland's commitment to research and its output of doctoral students helped the Industrial Development Authority and Enterprise Ireland to persuade multinational corporations that Ireland possessed the capacity to carry out the research and development these businesses required.
- According to evidence cited by the European Commission, PRTLTI was "integral to the transformation of Ireland to an innovation driven economy."
- PRTLTI resulted in a direct commercial return on investment of \$2.4 billion, according to a 2011 independent study by PA Consulting.

All told, these investments better placed the Irish higher education system to provide the graduates, faculty, and researchers who helped stoke the engine for the emerging Celtic Tiger economy of the late 1990s.

## Summing up

In all, Atlantic's \$656 million in higher education investments in Ireland represented half of its total grantmaking in the country. The combination of seeking out visionary leaders and taking a big bet on a crucial underfunded part of higher education led to real and lasting impact in the country.

"[PRTLTI] is the most significant thing that Atlantic has done in Ireland," said a high-ranking member of the civil service in 2011 quoted in Tony Proscio's review of Atlantic's investments there. "And probably the most significant act of philanthropy in the history of this country has been the creation of a globally-competitive advance-research capacity in Ireland...The truth is that the government never would have done this on its own. Research would never have risen to the priority status it ultimately reached without Atlantic's commitment of money and leadership over a sustained period of time."



## Northern Ireland

Chuck Feeney, whose mother's forebears came from County Fermanagh, has a strong attachment to Northern Ireland. While scouting opportunities to invest in Ireland in 1987, he was horrified to see news coverage of an IRA bombing that killed 11 and permanently injured many others in Enniskillen, a town near his mother's ancestral home. The blast was just one more deadly result of the decades long conflict known as "The Troubles" between nationalists (mainly self-identified as Roman Catholic) and unionists (mainly self-identified as British or Protestant).

As an Irish-American, Feeney felt compelled to respond. So, in 1991, Atlantic began making grants in Northern Ireland. The foundation's early work mostly focused on fostering peace and reconciliation, including in primary education.

### Investing in a neglected city

Feeney also continued to be keenly interested in higher education. He felt a deep connection with Derry, Northern Ireland's second largest city, where the large Catholic population had been neglected and the region had suffered economically, as a result of the Troubles. The foundation's first grants for this purpose helped transform the face of the University of Ulster's Magee campus in Derry.

Atlantic funded the purchase and development of a nearby estate that Feeney spotted on a visit. Because of space restrictions on the city-based campus, this investment was crucial for the development of Magee, according to findings of a 2004 evaluation.<sup>7</sup> Acquisition of the 6.5-acre site, which adjoined the existing campus, expanded the Magee campus some 50 percent. The University of Ulster developed the estate and its grounds into a research village where research-based firms were located.

Atlantic supported further campus enhancements. Among them: funding a state-of-the-art library and the first ever center for creative and performing arts on the island of Ireland. With the center in place, the campus began offering a dance undergraduate program, which was also a first on the island of Ireland. That program and others at the performing arts center gave the campus a significant competitive edge in attracting students, the evaluation noted.

The foundation provided similar support for libraries, academic buildings, dorms, and access for disadvantaged students to Northern Ireland's other university—Queen's University Belfast (QUB)—as well as other branches of the University of Ulster. Feeney was also concerned about the lack of alumni development in universities, similar to what he saw in the Republic of Ireland. In 1999, Atlantic provided funding for Queen's University Belfast to set up a development office to build relationships with funders and set up partnerships for projects.



<sup>7</sup> Roberts D and Higgins T. *Review of Grantmaking to the Higher Education Sector in Northern Ireland 1995-2003*, February 2004.

## Launching a research program

Following the success of PRTL I in the Republic of Ireland, Atlantic launched a similar program in 2001 in partnership with Northern Ireland's government. The Support Programme for University Research (SPUR) aimed to strengthen the universities' competitiveness and ability to carry out cutting edge research.

At the time, the two Northern Ireland universities competed with other UK universities for funds, receiving less than one percent of research grants from Research Councils and UK charities, according to the evaluation. Atlantic believed that boosting Northern Ireland's research capability would support economic and social development, and help it recover from the damage the Troubles had caused. The universities also wanted to increase their competitiveness in attracting faculty—a major difficulty in the midst of the unrest.

## A potentially groundbreaking discovery

From 2001 to 2008, Atlantic provided £47 million (\$71.8 million) for 13 projects in the two institutions. Funding focused on areas where the universities could compete on a global scale.

Among the key accomplishments from SPUR:

- The \$12.6 million awarded from Atlantic in 2003 to the Centre for Cancer Research & Cell Biology at Queen's helped it become the leading center for cancer research and care throughout the United Kingdom. One breakthrough is the discovery of a drug that may eliminate the need for preemptive surgery to remove the breasts or ovaries for women with the deadly cancer gene BRCA1. For women of child-bearing age who are carrying this gene, this is an especially significant development. Drug trials began in 2014. This discovery, along with others, resulted in some £16 million of research funding each year.
- Queen's also developed precision medical tools that are licensed worldwide, said Patrick Johnston, former president of Queen's and the first director of the cancer center. He also noted that by developing a high-quality research structure Northern Ireland was able to start attracting top academics from around the world. At the cancer center alone, there were some 38 different nationalities working there.
- The Sonic Arts Research Centre at Queen's, which received almost \$3.5 million in SPUR funding, is home to 50 researchers who are experts in the fields of music, electronic engineering, and computer science. The center has become a magnet for students across the globe to study creative arts, music, and psychology as well as to develop new technology. Projects supported by the funding included installing three "sound gardens" for NI Hospice, another Atlantic grantee, meant to be calming and uplifting spaces for patients and their families.
- SPUR also funded the Transitional Justice Institute at the University of Ulster. Transitional Justice is the study of law in societies emerging from conflict and repression. The Institute carries out and shares research from Northern Ireland at local and global debates, and its scholars provide research and analysis of conflicted and transitional societies including Chile, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Israel-Palestine, and Colombia, among other work.
- Throughout this work, the research centers used their SPUR funding to gain additional funding. At Queen's, for example, the university leveraged Atlantic's funding into close to £350 million, Johnston said.
- At the University of Ulster, meanwhile, SPUR funding paid for the construction of a new, standalone Centre for Molecular Biosciences. The center concentrates on degenerative diseases and their interaction with nutritional factors. It is the top ranked biomedical sciences research unit in the United Kingdom.

The evaluation found that Atlantic's funding provided for (or resulted in):

- Provided over **£12 million** worth of new research equipment.
- **10,000** square meters of student accommodation and **1,700** new bed spaces for students.
- **30,600** square meters of new library space.
- **13** new chairs.
- **240** post graduate and post-doctoral positions.
- **4** hectares of new land for critical campus expansion.
- **2,700** square meters of business incubation space, which has assisted 25 start-up companies and provided employment for 133 people.



Not everything Atlantic funded through SPUR has had the lasting impact the foundation hoped for. According to news accounts,<sup>8</sup> Ulster University has pulled back on its investments in the Magee campus in Derry including a long-planned for medical school. Additionally, Ulster University has previously said it planned to increase student numbers at Magee to 10,000 by 2020, however less than half of that number were enrolled in 2019.

## Summing up

Speaking of all of Atlantic's investments in higher education in Northern Ireland, the evaluation stated: "The outcomes have been hugely positive, highly visible and much needed and have had a transforming impact on the institutions. Fundamentally, the interventions in this portfolio of grants have enabled the universities to implement their ambitious strategic plans. This has helped greatly to invigorate two institutions that will be key to the future development of Northern Ireland's damaged economy."

A follow up 2009 report stated<sup>9</sup> that 290 high quality jobs and commercial spinoffs, and some £140 million of investment, have been generated since the beginning of SPUR.

In response to that report, Sir Reg Empey, Employment Minister, said to the *Belfast Telegraph*, "The research centres established by SPUR are now integrated into the universities' structures and all are competing on the international stage. These centres will enable us to move forward with confidence into a future where society, industry and business are increasingly aware of the importance of a strong and innovative knowledge base."

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/derry-medical-school-not-financially-viable-says-northern-ireland-civil-service-head-sterling-38463618.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/business/news/glowing-report-for-university-research-programme-28507642.html>



## South Africa

Atlantic's work in South Africa came at the instigation of Harvey Dale, Atlantic's founding president. Shortly after the end of apartheid, Dale, a former attorney and law professor, saw that Atlantic could help foster the country's nascent democracy.

By the time Atlantic began investing in South Africa in 1991, its staff had extensive experience in higher education and continued to see it as a way to provide empowering opportunities for young adults. Coming out of years of apartheid where blacks and students of color attended less well-funded schools that were largely aimed at producing clerks and teachers, Atlantic staff believed South Africa was ripe for investment in its higher education system.

It was also relatively easy to map the needs of South Africa's 17 institutions of higher education at the time (compared to the United States' 4200), Dale noted. He and John Healy met with the heads of several of those institutions to learn about their needs.

A 2003 review of Atlantic's grantmaking<sup>10</sup> noted that its overall goal in higher education was to "assist selected universities, and—if possible—the university system as a whole, to transform themselves into institutions capable of serving the needs of the new South Africa without compromising their standards."

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<sup>10</sup> Sogge, D *Grantmaking in Transition: Report of a Review of The Atlantic Philanthropies Programme for South Africa 1994-2002*, October 2003.

To reach that goal, Atlantic focused on three main areas:

- Promoting faculty diversity
- Helping improve university management, infrastructure, financial sustainability, and cooperation among institutions
- Enabling growth and innovation in intellectual life

Out of \$422 million Atlantic granted in South Africa, about \$56.7 million went to higher education—a smaller proportion of the total similarly invested in other countries. Still, Atlantic can point to impactful investments, particularly in its later years of funding.

## Expanding the number of black faculty and role models

Many of Atlantic's early grants went to institutions that had been historically white universities during apartheid—University of Cape Town, University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, Rhodes University in Grahamstown, and University of Natal (now the University of KwaZulu-Natal) in Durban. Atlantic supported university presidents eager to expand the numbers of black faculty so they could serve as role models for students.

In its support to attract more black faculty, humanities was a priority because it was receiving less attention by other funders. But Atlantic's funding also included some universities in which women and blacks were underrepresented in their science departments.

The support typically came in two steps. First, black students received a scholarship to help them attain a doctorate. Then successful candidates secured a provisional teaching appointment subsidized by a grant, at times with a faculty mentor, for up to four years. The goal was that the program would foster a cohort of young black academics to replace aging white faculty.

These programs have long gestation periods. As of the October 2003 evaluation, most participants were still in the preparatory stages. No further evaluation has taken place. But in 2013, Atlantic staff said they had observed success in training and retaining black faculty. For example, the science department at the University of Cape Town was able to retain most of the faculty recruited under this program. Much of this work has been extended by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

## Advancement and fundraising

Like their observations on the island of Ireland, Atlantic staff found that South African universities had limited fundraising capabilities. Vice-chancellors (presidents of universities) carried out most development, which was not a practical way to engage in ongoing fundraising. More so, at the time Atlantic began working on higher education the new government was pulling back on its funding to focus on shoring up primary and secondary education. That situation made the foundation's involvement critical.

For instance, government support for The University of Cape Town (UCT), the oldest university in South Africa, dropped from about 80 percent to around 40 percent of its total funding, said Shelagh Gastrow, former head of fundraising at UCT. That resulted in a spike in university fees because they had no functional alumni programs to help make up the gap in funding, Gastrow said.

Beginning in 1997, Atlantic provided a variety of support for the four universities in which it had invested earlier, including funding new positions in development offices, seeding capital campaigns, and implementing new organizational funds.

UCT received the largest share of Atlantic's funding—more than \$2 million—which the university used to create a development office and recruit a top-tier director of development. The funding also supported an initial operating budget, the hiring of additional staff (including Gastrow initially as major gifts officer), purchase of fundraising software, and development of a donor and alumni database. At the time, Mamphela Aletta Ramphela was the vice chancellor of UCT. A medical doctor and anti-apartheid activist, Ramphela became the first black female vice chancellor in South Africa when she was appointed in 1996.

Ramphele wanted the university to have a much-improved campus that required reconstructing the entire upper campus, with the addition of a library, student center, and administrative buildings. The project represented a massive fundraising undertaking, particularly in those early days of development. Atlantic's core support for the development office enabled the staff to successfully meet the campaign goals, with 60 percent coming from corporate donors, Gastrow said. Eventually, the development office grew to 20 staff.

## Funding a new center to encourage fundraising in South Africa

After leaving UCT, Gastrow and a colleague went on to found Inyathelo: The South African Institute for Advancement in 2003. Inyathelo focused on expanding philanthropy and advancement capacity in South Africa. Atlantic's core funding for the organization made it possible for Inyathelo to provide technical assistance and training to a number of South African universities as well as nonprofit organizations.

Once established, Inyathelo was able to lead a multi-year, Kresge Foundation-funded initiative to build the advancement capacity at nearly a third of South Africa's universities. This, in turn, helped bolster the advancement capacity of the entire South African higher education sector, which became much more sophisticated at this work, Bill Moses, managing director of the Kresge Foundation's education program said. Several other institutions, including Wits University and the University of the Western Cape, leveraged this training to conduct successful capital campaigns, often with Atlantic support.

"Atlantic helped to soften the ground in South Africa and created experiences for people to learn about advancement," Moses said. "People didn't know how to raise money strategically and systematically and said it couldn't be done in South Africa. But [people like Gastrow] proved it was possible. They would not have proved it if they had not had the capacity that Atlantic had given them. Atlantic raised the profile of advancement as a concept. Then with Inyathelo, those lessons could be shared. I don't know if we at Kresge would have invested in South African university advancement without Atlantic's earlier core funding to Inyathelo and Atlantic's reinforcing investments to these additional campaigns."

## New centers focused on public policy

To build the capacity of universities to provide cutting-edge research that would be useful both in academia and public policy, Atlantic also funded a number of new institutions that took multi-disciplinary approaches to addressing key social and economic issues affecting South Africa. The institutes focused on timely issues, such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, children and poverty, and access to information. The 2003 evaluation noted that few other donors pursued the inter-disciplinary approach Atlantic supported.

For example:

- In 2001, Atlantic funded the establishment of a research and advocacy organization, the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town. Evaluation findings show that the institute had contributed substantively to public policy affecting children particularly in school health, social security, and management of orphans and other vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS. Institute staff also quickly built up effective relationships with the government, civil society organizations, and researchers. In 2017, it was continuing to produce policy reports, including the *South African Child Gauge*, which is the only publication to track the status of South Africa's children on an annual basis.
- The Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Witwatersrand, an interdisciplinary institute that produces academic work on contemporary South Africa and hosts journalists, writers, and public intellectuals in conversations and debates, would have likely folded if it had not received Atlantic support, according to Michael Savage, who consulted on Atlantic's higher education grantmaking.

In all, Atlantic helped found or provide critical support to half a dozen university-based centers that generate and share new knowledge in timely areas of public debate. Because no recent evaluation has taken place, it is unclear if all of those centers continued after Atlantic's support ended.

As it had done the United States, Atlantic also supported institutions or researchers to take on controversial issues that others shied away from. For example, Atlantic funded a conference on race and racism, which was the first time that this important but taboo subject had been publicly debated by academics, according to the 2003 evaluation.



## Propelling historically black\* university into top research ranks

In later years, Atlantic grants aimed at strengthening historically disadvantaged universities. One grant that had the greatest impact was made to the University of the Western Cape (UWC), which had been created to prepare people of color for jobs as clerks and teachers. However, under the visionary leadership of Brian O'Connell, researchers at the university were producing internationally recognized work in science. This accomplishment came in spite of working in outdated facilities with limited funding. At the time, UWC researchers were conducting Africa's leading groundwater data collection and analysis, and developing the first side-effects free male contraceptive pill.

On a visit to South Africa in 2005, Chuck Feeney met O'Connell, whose family had been forcibly removed from their home during apartheid. Feeney immediately recognized him as just the type of leader of an institution on whom he loved to place big bets. O'Connell dreamed of building a flagship Life Sciences building to accommodate the institution's research capacity, attract top scholars, and serve as a symbol of both outstanding research and the new South Africa.

Not long after, Atlantic helped fund a state-of-the-art Life Sciences Building with almost \$15 million in funding. That facility, which opened in 2010, soon housed several research centers, including a United Nations global center for the study of traditional medicines, a Bioinformatics Institute, and a Male Fertility Research Center, the only one in South Africa when it opened. Researchers also carried out pioneering work in geographical information systems and geological monitoring.

## Government ends a 15-year moratorium on funding

As Atlantic had done in Ireland, the foundation asked that the South African government match Atlantic's grant. The Department of Education did so, ending a 15-year moratorium on spending for higher education infrastructure. That change was the beginning of the government starting to invest in infrastructure again, O'Connell noted.

In 2013, O'Connell said, "The state began to take infrastructure very, very seriously. To date, [the government] has spent close to 7 billion rand [\$826 million] on assisting with new buildings and refurbishing the old."

UWC now produces the largest number of black and female science graduates in South Africa, and leads the continent in physics, biology, biochemistry, molecular biology, nanotechnology, and genetics. In the end, the University of the Western Cape became Atlantic's most well-funded grantee in South Africa (including later grants for population health), securing some \$36 million in investments.

That, in turn, has increased the stature of UWC. The South African National Research Foundation has ranked the university first in research impact in physics, biology and biochemistry, and molecular biology and genetics. In 2018, the *Sunday Times* ranked UWC in the top 10 universities in Africa, and in its top 5 percent of the 2,000 universities in the emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

\* Term used in South Africa for colored, Africans and Indians

## Summing up

Atlantic's investments in South Africa's higher education system emphasized the foundation's belief that a strong and well-funded university system was a crucial linchpin in the transition to a new democracy. While later funding in population health and reconciliation and human rights eclipsed Atlantic's higher education support, the foundation can point to some demonstrable impacts that it helped instigate. These included:

- Fostering of black and women faculty.
- A new and more sophisticated approach to fundraising for universities.
- Development of research centers that are contributing to public policy debates, and a world-class university whose facilities match the excellence of its researchers and leaders.

## Australia

Chuck Feeney and his wife Helga lived for months at a time in Brisbane, Australia, beginning in the 1990s, while he worked on development and real estate projects. In 1998, after the sale of Duty Free Shoppers substantially increased Atlantic's corpus, Feeney began looking for opportunities to invest in Australia. Brisbane, while often in the shadows of Sydney and Melbourne, was the home to two major universities—the University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology. As was his habit, when scouting for Atlantic investments, Feeney would first meet with officials from institutions of higher education. There he learned that, like Ireland, these institutions lacked the funding to perform to their potential.

After meeting John Hay, vice-chancellor of the University of Queensland, and hearing of his ambitious plans for the institution, Atlantic provided funding for an institute of molecular bioscience. As in Ireland, that funding was conditioned on receiving matching funding from the government, as well as from the institution. That became the first of several more investments in biomedical research in Australia, the primary focus of Atlantic's funding.



“Every country had a different strategy,” said Dave Kennedy, former director of Australian Philanthropic Programs for Atlantic. “What does the country need? When Chuck came here, it became apparent to him that the Australian federal government had done a good job of giving research grants to universities but an inadequate job of giving money to infrastructure. That tied into his experience. He wanted to build buildings.”

In all, Atlantic invested \$368 million to develop Australia’s medical research, higher education, and leadership capacities. The bulk of those investments funded capital projects, largely to support biomedical research. Just 12 percent of those investments went to higher education. However, those investments often enhanced the infrastructure and campus life of the institutions that Atlantic was supporting in its biomedical research grants.

## Funding a new art museum and center for events

Feeney and Hay shared a belief that an institution’s aesthetics mattered, and that thoughtfully-designed spaces were integral to the learning and well-being of students and faculty. For example, at the University of Queensland, where Atlantic helped fund four research institutes, it also backed two significant architectural projects. The first was a multi-purpose hall begun in 2000 to provide a modern venue for a range of academic, cultural, and sporting events, including graduation ceremonies and banquets. The new hall has become a popular gathering place for students, faculty, and staff.

Once that center was created, Mayne Hall, which previously served that purpose, was converted into an architecturally noteworthy art museum and cultural facility, including a gallery of self-portraits donated by Australian artists. It was the first of its kind in Australia.

## Creating a new center to foster interdisciplinary work

At the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), where Atlantic also invested in several biomedical research institutes, Feeney wanted to help create a more campus-like feel that would also connect the university to the city of Brisbane, as well as residents to the university. At the time, the school’s science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) disciplines were housed in five different buildings, which limited interdisciplinary collaboration.

Because QUT focused on applied research, some of which could lead to commercial applications, fostering such teamwork was vital to its mission. In addition, students and faculties lacked amenities in their buildings, such as restaurants and fitness centers. Finally, the campus was located in the heart of Brisbane’s business district, which meant that a more welcoming hub could serve as a destination for residents as well.

QUT’s solution took the form of a science and engineering center on Gardens Point campus that brought the STEAM disciplines together under one roof, enabling them to more easily collaborate and learn from one another. In 2009, Atlantic provided \$16 million for the project.

The result was two 10-story towers linked underground. The new structures also featured a recreation center with a swimming pool and plaza that includes a bookstore, restaurants, and day care. Office spaces surrounding laboratories were designed on an open concept plan to encourage collaboration among researchers from different disciplines. The new Science and Technology Precinct is envisioned as a center to develop solutions for climate change, global sustainability, and Australia’s emerging green workforce needs. In 2016, the science and engineering department saw its highest demand for enrollment, with some 10,000 students signing up for courses.

One tower has an open atrium, known as “The Cube,” which is one of the world’s largest digital interactive learning and display spaces. The Cube consists of 48 multi-touch screens across two stories and displays projects underway at QUT. For example, a Virtual Reef display offered an immersive, simulated underwater experience that introduced users to the Great Barrier Reef’s ecosystem. The Cube is a popular destination for Brisbane families to come and participate in the changing, interactive displays.

## Scholarship program for students from disadvantaged backgrounds

In addition to funding stimulating learning spaces for students, QUT also established a Learning Potential Fund to provide scholarships to promising students from disadvantaged backgrounds so they can complete their education. The fund, which Feeney's giving inspired, had attracted more than 700 staff donors, and raised nearly \$50 million of its \$100 million goal by mid-2017. QUT will match every donation.

## Summing up

Atlantic's investments in higher education in Australia, while a relatively small percentage of its overall work in the country, spurred the construction of significant buildings that helped bring new energy and needed amenities to Brisbane's universities. Chuck Feeney's belief in helping students who wanted to help themselves also catalyzed a new scholarship fund at QUT that has provided scholarships to more than 15,000 students. The retention rate for these Learning Potential Fund recipients is 88 percent, which is higher than their peers.

## Viet Nam

Atlantic began investing in Viet Nam in 1999 after Feeney read an article about a charitable foundation called East Meet West that had been working in the country to improve the health and well-being of the poorest Vietnamese. While the article piqued his interest, Feeney also felt strongly that the country had gotten a bad deal after the end of the Viet Nam war. Because Viet Nam was in the midst of changes that brought promising new opportunities for the country while also triggering new challenges, Feeney thought the time was right for Atlantic to get involved.

At the time, the country's higher education system faced serious challenges. The central government had under-invested in it for years, particularly in provincial and regional universities. That resulted in the collapsing of infrastructure and a rote style of learning instead of fostering critical thinking. The health system faced similar difficulties including depleted local health centers and severely overcrowded hospitals. In response, Atlantic largely focused its Viet Nam grantmaking on improving higher education and population health.



Feeney, who liked to connect people in the hopes that they could collaborate and help one another, brought two Irish university presidents, Danny O'Hare and Ed Walsh, with him to Viet Nam to meet with higher education leaders.

As in other countries, Atlantic started with focusing on infrastructure as a first step in a process of investments that could lead to influencing more system-wide change.

In Viet Nam, Atlantic wanted to help spark the development of a modern, student-led learning environment that would produce leaders who could foster the country's social and economic development. In all, Atlantic invested \$92.7 million in higher education, or 24 percent of its \$381.6 million total funding in Viet Nam.

## Funding modern learning resource centers

One of Atlantic's earliest investments in Viet Nam came in 1999 when it funded a modern library, called a learning resource center, at the University of Da Nang. Located in the central part of the country, Da Nang was the most affected by the war and the least developed. On his first visit to Da Nang University, Feeney saw an old library in desperate need of renovation.

"[Feeney] walked around the [university] and was struck by an old French library that was probably 150 sq. m with just a few desks and bundles of newspapers strung together," according to a 2014 article in *Outlook Business*. "Not much research was being done there. Students would visit the library and sleep on the wooden tables because the dormitories were unlivable. While the university leadership wanted to renovate the room and bring in new equipment, Feeney decided to take down the entire structure and build a new university block. The library is now 30 times the size of the initial structure."

Atlantic later funded learning resource centers (LRCs) at three other major regional universities in Viet Nam—Can Tho, Hue, and Thai Nguyen. LRCs are designed as hubs for active learning. They are an updated, expanded model of the university library that incorporates computer and telecommunications centers, audio-visual resources, open access to materials for students, and meeting places for students to gather and learn together.

These new learning resource centers were built in a country that lacked the infrastructure or expertise of library services found in countries in the U.S. and Australia. In Viet Nam, university librarians struggled to provide basic requirements such as places to study, access to computers, or consistent internet connection. Librarians were also used to acting as custodians of collections rather than as a facilitator of access to information, which was at the heart of the approach of LRCs.

## Providing training in modern library practice

Atlantic's grant included an explicit program for developing the new facilities, including IT infrastructure, recruitment, and training of staff and operational services. To oversee this work, Australian-based Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), which Feeney was familiar with from his investments in Australia, received several grants to bring engineers and librarians to design, coordinate, and manage the construction and running of the LRCs in Hue, Can Tho, and Thai Nguyen.

Atlantic also provided funding for country-wide training of librarians and standardization of practices. For example, an Atlantic grant for RMIT helped facilitate the country's first standardization of library classification and adoption of the Dewey Decimal System in Vietnamese.

Most Vietnamese librarians did not have experience in managing these new LRCs, so in addition to the training some received from RMIT Australia, Atlantic funded additional schooling in the U.S. in 2005. Simmons College in Boston received a grant to prepare a new generation of Vietnamese librarians to run some of the country's largest university libraries. The grant supported 25 Vietnamese librarians to study for their master's degree at Simmons College's Graduate School of Library and Information Science.

Once completed, the LRCs provided new facilities for students to pursue learning. For example, at Hue University, the LRC enabled many students and faculty to use personal computers for the first time. The facility also served as a meeting place for students, faculty, and staff. At Can Tho University, the new library became a hub that business and government leaders used for research and meetings for business development.

As noted earlier, Atlantic ceased its higher education program in 2002 to focus on new program areas, a change that came shortly after Atlantic had begun funding its higher education work in Viet Nam. That meant that, unlike in other countries where Atlantic had invested for long periods, there was relatively little time to try and secure sustainable change in Viet Nam. In the case of the LRCs, the universities where they were based had to take over their management and financial support once Atlantic left. However, the foundation did not spend much time working with university administrators to ensure that would happen or to try and integrate the LRCs into the higher education environment.



“We came in too late and didn’t stay long enough,” said Le Nhan Phuong, former Atlantic country director in Vietnam. “When you talk about a learning resource center, you need more than a building, you need to work within the system. The system in Viet Nam was not addressed. The libraries are part of a university system and the continued sustainability comes from the university. And there is an elaborate faculty that needs money for upkeep and they are fighting for a limited piece of funding. These are lessons we are learning. If you are going to do it, be prepared for the long haul and address sustainability.”

## A new foreign university

One of the goals of the LRCs was for students to move away from the rote learning endemic in Vietnamese universities and take an active role in their education. But for a real change to take place, a new approach to teaching and learning needed to take root in the universities themselves. And employers needed to be able to trust that university degrees that potential employees presented were based on merit and not from paying professors for passing grades, as was the case among some Vietnamese universities.

In 2000, RMIT Australia was in the process of establishing Viet Nam’s first foreign-owned university. RMIT had the backing of the government, whose officials noted the strong preparation of Vietnamese students who had attended RMIT in Australia, according to Michael Mann, former ambassador to Vietnam from Australia. A cornerstone of RMIT Vietnam’s approach is to encourage students to engage in critical thinking in their studies. RMIT Australia emphasizes studies in business, technology, design, and engineering, and providing students with practical experience during school so they are ready to enter the work force, which was a good fit for a rapidly developing country like Vietnam. But it needed funding to build the university.

After Feeney read a newspaper article about RMIT’s plans, he visited a local office. That was followed by a \$15 million grant from Atlantic to RMIT in 2000 to build a campus. Atlantic’s largest single grant in Viet Nam helped leverage the additional money needed to establish Viet Nam’s first 100-percent foreign owned university campus, which is located in Ho Chi Minh City (it has since added a campus in Hanoi), said Mann, who became founding president of RMIT Vietnam. Atlantic later gave a \$6.5 million grant to help fund a recreation and student accommodation complex to enhance student experiences at the university.

With Atlantic’s seed funding, the campus grew from 31 students at its inception in 2000 to 6,000 in 2016. It has had more than 10,000 graduates.

## Supporting Vietnamese students to study abroad

Atlantic also provided \$9 million in support for more than 250 Vietnamese students to complete their master's degrees or doctorates at The University of Queensland in Australia between 2000 and 2006. The master's program was open to Vietnamese citizens employed in any sector—government, non-government, higher education, or private/corporate sector. A condition of the scholarships was that recipients return to Vietnam when they finished their studies.

A 2016 evaluation<sup>11</sup> of the program found that participants had succeeded at accomplishing a key goal of the program. After returning home, they applied their new knowledge and skills to influence local, provincial, and government policy in Vietnam in a range of development areas. In addition, a majority of the master's degree alumni reported that on their return to Vietnam they received salary increases and promotions within a year, and had more senior roles in government, universities, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

## An English Language Institute

Additionally, the University of Queensland carried out a partnership with the University of Da Nang to create an English language training center for students in Da Nang and Central Vietnam. Feeney had conceived of the program out of concern for the limited language ability of so many academics in Vietnam, said Christine Bundesen, a former director of the Institute.

Atlantic funded a 12-story building and underwrote operational expenses. The goal was to help teachers and students gain English-language proficiency, which can enhance their career opportunities as well as Viet Nam's economy. In 2008, the English Language Institute trained more 270 students each month. The institute also developed and delivered a number of customized training activities for government and corporate personnel, and carried out bi-monthly International English Language Testing System test administration.

## Building dorms and sports centers and supporting disadvantaged students

As was done with RMIT Vietnam, to enhance the student experience, Atlantic supported the construction of a number of dorms and recreational facilities at other universities. Atlantic also gave a grant to help universities attract students from some of Viet Nam's most disadvantaged and marginalized populations. Schools established an office to recruit students from such populations, and guide them through their studies.

## Summing up

Atlantic's investments in higher education in Viet Nam came late in its overall support of the field, which limited its impact. While foundation support spanned 20 years in the U.S. and Ireland, it was less than half that time in Viet Nam. Atlantic staff said that a more sustained focus on higher education in Viet Nam might have led to a more lasting impact.

Still, Atlantic can point to areas where its investments made a difference, including the construction of new library resource centers and funding overseas training of librarians and other professionals to gain skills to put to use in strengthening the country's social and economic fabric. The Atlantic-based RMIT Vietnam is also producing professionals who are leading or creating new businesses.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Atlantic Philanthropies University of Queensland Vietnamese Scholarship Program 2000-2006: Assessing the Impact*. Carisgold Pty Limited, 2016.

## Learnings

These are some of the key learnings gleaned from Atlantic's work in higher education:

- **Investing in under-resourced or under-valued environments where transformational change is possible can pay huge dividends.** A lot of Atlantic's grants resembled classic value investing. Atlantic's investments in Ireland—a small country with a handful of universities and a government ready for change—made a real difference. Because the conditions were right for such a change, Atlantic's money went further than had the foundation attempted something similar in the U.S.. The same was true of under-valued universities and leaders in which Atlantic invested. Atlantic saw, through its hits and misses, that when the foundation focused on under-resourced environments—and the conditions exist for change—its investments had a lasting impact.
- **Leverage is one of the most powerful tools to achieve large-scale impact.** While Atlantic's resources were significant, the foundation felt it had the most impact when it partnered with others, particularly government, as well as universities and other grantees. Atlantic's partnerships with governments in Ireland, Australia, and South Africa led to significant shifts in how they approached their funding. Atlantic also found that asking universities and later donors to co-invest in projects significantly extended the reach of these investments.
- **However, using leverage through matching requirements can have some downsides as well.** At times, tilting government dollars to capital projects with the attractive lure of foundation matches can shift public policy away from funding human capital, such as faculty and teachers, which are also crucial components of higher education. Atlantic learned that matching should be done with an appreciation of trade-offs and an informed rationale for making its choices.
- **Atlantic found that some of its most impactful investments came when the foundation supported leaders to help them make *their* vision a reality and help build capacity.** Following the founder's example, program officers listened, asked a lot of questions—often hard ones—did their due diligence, and then let the grantees carry out the work they thought was most important. Initiatives that seemed to be more long lasting started with a grantee's passion for change, not Atlantic's.
- **Investing in an initiative over time—at least five years and often longer—made a much bigger impact than shorter investments.** Trying to make any change is difficult, particularly in institutions and systems. Investing for only a few years is simply not long enough to secure lasting improvements.  
  
Atlantic's investments in higher education in Ireland and Northern Ireland led to substantial changes in part because its funding spanned nearly 20 years. That gave Atlantic the opportunity to understand the environment in which it was funding, as well as allowed grantees sufficient time to make real changes. Similarly, in South Africa Atlantic provided core support initially for a few universities to develop fundraising capability. Atlantic later funded a leader of one of those universities to develop an institute—Inyathelo—to help other universities to learn how to raise funds. That support, over more than a decade, helped create needed expertise at South African universities in development, and provided opportunities for other foundations to confidently support major capital campaigns that helped transform South African universities.  
  
Conversely, Atlantic's investments in Viet Nam came near the end of its higher education work. Because of the decision to stop funding higher education in 2002, those grants ran for a much shorter period of time. As a result, Atlantic left its higher education work in Viet Nam before it could make a sustained impact there as it had in other locations.
- **Buildings can transform a university experience and attract world-class talent.** A cornerstone of Atlantic's funding in higher education was helping create iconic buildings to better allow students and faculty to pursue their work, as well as to serve as a symbol for a university's aspirations. At Cornell, Atlantic funded a number of such buildings including new freshman dorms and upper-class houses that helped create a sense of community and cohesion among students, which Atlantic's founder knew was crucial for getting the most out of college life.

- **Letting others name a building builds value.** Forgoing the opportunity to put a donor's name on a building makes it easier for the institution to seek additional funding with the prospect of naming rights. For example, Atlantic's \$350 million funding for the first phase of construction of Cornell Tech came without naming rights, which helped attract \$133 million from Irwin Jacobs for the Jacobs Technion-Cornell Innovation Institute.
- **Anonymity had some pluses but in the main likely may have had more drawbacks than positive aspects.** For nearly the whole duration of Atlantic's higher education work, the foundation operated anonymously. Anonymity in the early years enabled staff to scout promising opportunities without being barraged by unsolicited requests and allowed the foundation to bring in other donors who wanted naming rights. But it also limited Atlantic's ability to partner with and exchange ideas with other funders. Grantees also could not use the credibility of a major funder backing them when soliciting additional funds. Additionally, Atlantic's anonymity made it difficult for grantees to connect with each other and draw synergies from their work. Atlantic also may have had more success in replicating some of its early programs if it had not been operating as an anonymous foundation.
- **At times Atlantic may have given too much money to Cornell without enough assessment or oversight because of Chuck Feeney's deep ties and affection for the university.** The founder's affection for his school may have led to Atlantic making some grants that were not as strategic as they could be. Even the savviest entrepreneurs may not apply the same rigorous rules to their alma mater or other organizations with which they have an emotional connection as in other business decisions. The larger question it raises when seeking to bolster a beloved alma mater is how much is enough to make an impact and were there ways that Atlantic could have been more effective in achieving its goal of building the institutional capacity of a worthy university?
- **Atlantic's focus on funding infrastructure and leaders might have led to some missed opportunities in funding efforts to increase access to higher education.** Like all funders, Atlantic knew that by making its strategic choices it was choosing not to fund other worthwhile opportunities. Still, in retrospect, some foundation leaders said it might have been wise to put more emphasis on access to education. While the foundation did make some investments in this area, its focus overall was not directly on increasing access for those who may have needed some assistance in attending and graduating from college. Atlantic primarily supported large private universities with full-time students in the belief that that is where changes would come.

When Atlantic's founder asked for a visionary plan for Ireland's higher education system, Atlantic's country director prepared one that included a major focus on increasing access to college. That proposal did not go forward largely because the work of bolstering university research in Ireland—which involved complicated negotiations with the government—became Atlantic's primary focus. As a result, other issues related to higher education in Ireland got pushed to the side. In retrospect, Atlantic staff said they regretted not putting emphasis on increasing access to higher education in the country. Even today, the composition of the Irish university population continues to largely skew towards the "haves" to the disadvantage of the "have nots."

- **Atlantic purposely had a small staff and that meant that the foundation could not always follow through on grant effectiveness.** The evaluators of Atlantic's U.S. program said that its approach to staff size seemed to be more of a reflexive aversion to infrastructure than a result of assessing what a successful implementation of Atlantic's vision and mission would require. Atlantic's approach to evaluation was also sporadic and the foundation did not typically carry out follow up studies to learn about the lasting impact of some of its investments. In hindsight, a more systematic and ongoing approach to evaluation could have given the foundation a clearer picture of how the work was going in some geographies, whether it needed to make mid-course corrections, and the impact of its investments.

## Conclusion

Chuck Feeney's belief in the centrality of higher education to the future of individuals and societies served as the cornerstone for much of Atlantic's work.

As a result, much of Atlantic's support was meant to strengthen universities and colleges to better serve students, and to provide them—particularly ones coming from less advantaged backgrounds—with opportunities to better their lives and give back to society as Feeney has done.

Atlantic's funding of higher education was often opportunistic, pegged to the dreams of visionary leaders. But as Feeney and Atlantic staff gained experience over the years they also frequently looked for ways to leverage their investment so their impacts could be multiplied and lasting. And a number of these investments helped spur long-lasting impact, most notably at Cornell and in basic research on the island of Ireland.

Atlantic's ongoing belief in the importance of betting on far-sighted leaders to help strengthen society culminated in its biggest bet ever—the Atlantic Fellows program. This \$700 million program over the next two decades will support some 3,500 emerging leaders who are working to advance fairer, healthier, and more inclusive societies. The areas these leaders will focus on include racial equity, social equity, brain health, global inequality, and health equity. The Atlantic Institute, based at the Rhodes Trust in Oxford England, serves as the convening and knowledge-sharing hub for the global network of Atlantic Fellows.

Investing in higher education formed a foundation of Atlantic's work, not only for its first two decades, but also in ongoing support Chuck Feeney initiated. Its impact can be seen in the visually stunning buildings that became a hallmark of these investments, and the lives of students, faculty, and staff who were impacted over the course of more than three decades.