

Making Change
with Government



Working in Partnership with Government - Lessons for Philanthropy

The Experiences of the
Atlantic Philanthropies & Northern Ireland Executive
Delivering Social Change Programme

April 2020





Introduction

The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic) is a global philanthropic foundation that aims to challenge destructive and discriminatory practices and tackle the root causes of inequity, especially where systemic barriers hold people back unfairly.

Its founder Chuck Feeney has long maintained that people of wealth should use it to better the world during their lifetimes. That belief led to Atlantic's decision to limit its life to a fixed term, making its last grant commitments in 2016 and closing its doors in 2020. As Atlantic's grant making drew to a close in Northern Ireland, it adopted the approach of partnering with government to sustain and embed aspects of work it had previously funded in the areas of children's services, dementia care and shared education.

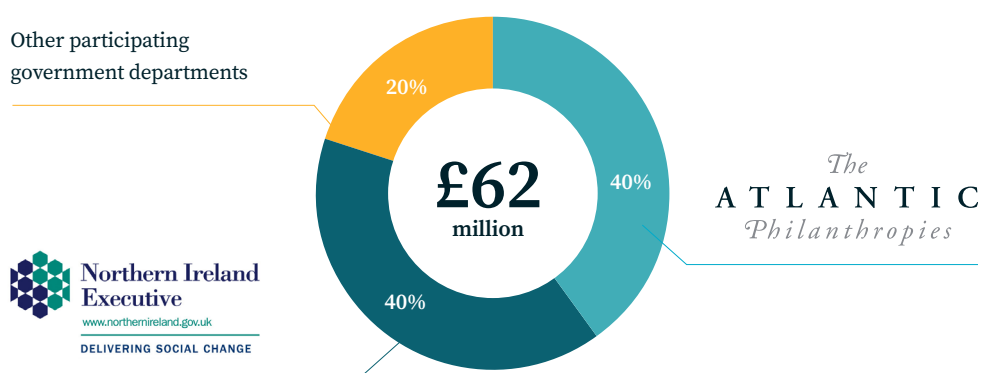
The Social Change Initiative (SCI) is an international, not-for-profit organisation that aims to improve the effectiveness of activism for progressive social change, with particular reference to how this work is funded and supported. SCI oversees the grants awarded to the Northern Ireland government by Atlantic and has an interest in learning the lessons from this partnership experience in order to improve broader social change efforts.

This paper aims to inform those interested in influencing or working with government for lasting social change, including philanthropy, academia and other non-government organisations. It provides a synthesis of the lessons learned by Atlantic (and subsequently SCI) on the process of joint working between philanthropy and government. The lessons are drawn from across the partnership experience, and focus on deal-making; programme development; and aspects of programme implementation and governance. Based on these lessons, advice is offered for others involved in or considering similar efforts.

Genesis of the Atlantic Philanthropies / Delivering Social Change Partnership

Over the 2012/13 period The Atlantic Philanthropies entered into discussions with the Northern Ireland (NI) Executive regarding the potential for a co-funding partnership in areas of mutual interest. As it was approaching the end of its grant-making in NI, Atlantic wanted to secure significant lasting change in the areas of public policy and services its grantees had been driving towards over preceding years. Meanwhile, the NI Executive had just launched its Delivering Social Change (DSC) initiative. This was designed to tackle poverty and social exclusion across NI, as well as introducing a “new way of doing business” for government, involving greater joined-up working, partnership and flexible, outcome-focused service planning. This confluence of strategic direction presented potential for philanthropy and government collaboration.

Figure 1: Total Programme Spend



By early 2014, Atlantic and the NI government had developed three co-funded partnership programmes and Atlantic’s Board had approved supporting grants of £25m that would flow directly to the central government departments leading the programmes (the Department of Health and the Department of Education). Atlantic’s contribution would make up 40% of the total programmes’ budget of £62m, central government DSC funds would make up another 40% (overseen by The Executive Office), and the remaining 20% would be contributed by other participating government departments. Delivery was scheduled over a 3-4 year period on the following three programmes:

- the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) aimed to improve outcomes for children, young people and families by embedding early intervention knowledge and evidence-based approaches to commissioning and service delivery;
- the Shared Education Signature Programme (SESP) aimed to improve reconciliation and education outcomes by developing and embedding shared education in Northern Ireland’s schools; and
- the Dementia Signature Programme – aimed to improve the lives of those affected by dementia by embedding and sustaining good practices in publicly supported dementia expenditures, policies and services.

Dementia Signature Programme

Aim: To transform the care and well-being of people living with dementia by improving publicly supported dementia care and support services

Key elements:

- Improving the range of information, support and advice available to people with dementia
- Developing the knowledge and skills of the dementia workforce & setting new standards
- Tackling stigma around dementia
- Making better use of data to support planning & improvement of dementia services

Funding: £11m (£4.7m from Atlantic)

Shared Education Signature Programme (SESP)

Aim: To improve reconciliation and education outcomes by embedding shared education into the school system

Key Elements:

- Increasing the number of schools and pupils participating in shared education
- Enabling schools to implement a progressive approach to shared education
- Integrating shared education into the core funding and strategic planning mechanisms of the education system
- Establishing collaborative professional development models for teachers that build confidence & competence to educate on a shared basis

Funding: £25m (£10m from Atlantic)

Early Intervention Transformation Partnership (EITP)

Aim: To improve outcomes for children, young people and families by embedding effective early intervention approaches into publicly supported services

Key Elements:

- Establishing more effective and better integrated antenatal services, early child development & early years education support so that parents have the support they need to give their child the best start in life
- Developing a new approach for supporting families facing social & wellbeing issues, in advance of (and aiming to avoid) a need for statutory intervention
- Developing a range of new models to intervene earlier to address the impact of adversity on children & young people involved in the care system, public law proceedings & justice
- Better equipping the health and care workforce to intervene early using a trauma-informed approach
- Introducing a more outcomes-focused, collaborative and evidence-informed way of working across services for children, young people and families and building the capacity for continued service transformation

Funding: £25.5m (£10m from Atlantic)

Atlantic had a dual rationale for investing in the partnership programmes. On the one hand, its prior grantees had built up a substantial body of knowledge and expertise in these particular areas of public policy, and Atlantic wanted to ensure that government made the most of that intellectual capital. The partnership programmes were designed to bring new and highly effective proven intervention models into targeted mainstream public services, delivering direct benefits for those most in need that would last long after the partnership programmes (and Atlantic's grantmaking).

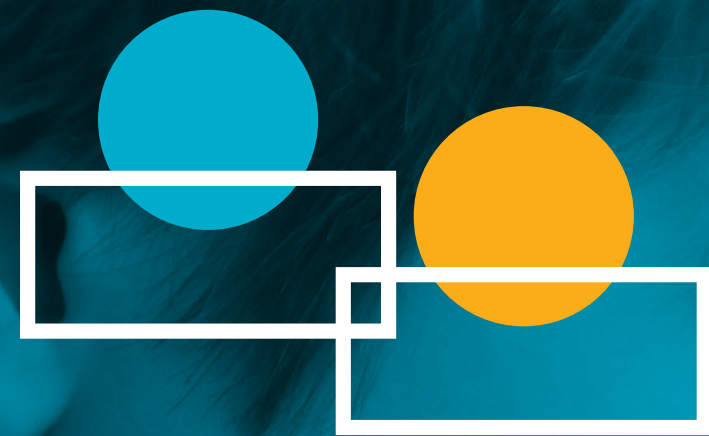
Atlantic recognised the capacity of the state to realise the systemic and population-wide changes needed to better support children, families and people living with dementia. Partnering with government had the potential to be truly transformative.

On the other hand, DSC was a mechanism through which government was trying to change the way in which it worked more generally. The partnership programmes would allow Atlantic to contribute to that process, generating worked examples of how policy and service development could be made more innovative, evidence-based and collaborative. If generalisable strategic lessons could be extracted from those experiences and channelled into core government practice, then Atlantic's investment would have had another layer of indirect impact, above and beyond the three partnership programmes.

Atlantic's partnership with the NI government represented a new approach for both parties. Atlantic had previously made grants in Northern Ireland that had attracted match funding from Government, but these typically supported the work of non-government organisations. Atlantic had never made grants to a government organisation for work it would deliver itself. Similarly, there was little experience within the NI Government of partnering with an external organisation that would share decision-making authority over its own initiatives. So, while there was some history of joint working between the two partners, the Atlantic/DSC partnership broke new ground and, as might be expected, provided opportunities for learning.

We have extracted the generalisable lessons from the more than 30 evaluations and learning reviews Atlantic commissioned throughout the initiative and from the reflections of Atlantic representatives involved in the partnership programme.

This paper reflects a very particular context and set of circumstances – a well-resourced funder, seeking to put itself out of business, in a region with an accessible, but cash-strapped, devolved government. However, we hope that the resulting observations and lessons will inform others considering a similar joint working approach with government, whatever the context.



Reflections & Lessons Learned



Deciding to Partner with Government

1. Choosing the Right Moment

Atlantic's decision to enter into partnership with government in Northern Ireland was not made quickly; for around a year, there was careful consideration of the prospects to realise additional outcomes relative to its tried and tested strategy of supporting NGOs. Clearly Atlantic's plan to complete its grantmaking by 2016 was a major driver, but so too was the assessment made by programme staff as to whether this was the right moment to take their priority issues into mainstream public services.

Their analysis considered what factors might support the move, for example the existence of supportive policy and legislation, allocation of public funding, the level of interest and expertise in the system, and the weight of evidence supporting change.

They also considered the 'pull' factors that might encourage government interest. These included the opportunity to access philanthropic resources in times of constrained public finances, challenges faced in previous attempts to transform public services, an interest in trying new approaches that could better meet public expectations and deliver on core government priorities, and the potential to access the international experience and expertise of a philanthropic partner.

Atlantic programme leaders concluded that the time was right for a partnership in the three areas they wanted to pursue but that there should be different expectations about what might be achieved in each area.

In early intervention, the assessment was that the tipping point at which early intervention would become the general approach taken to children and young people's services in NI was close. Among Atlantic-supported and other initiatives, there was a strong body of evidence about the effectiveness of early intervention and a series of programmes with proven efficacy. Relationships had developed among and between practitioners, policy makers and researchers, including some prior partnership working between Atlantic and government on co-funded initiatives.

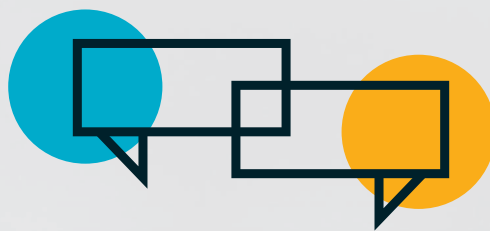
In shared education, there was also a relatively strong and supportive context. There had been several years of shared education initiatives and projects involving large numbers of schools and stakeholders. This had developed a significant level of practitioner experience and an evidence base on its impact. The NI Executive's political parties had also coalesced around moves towards shared education and there was ministerial level commitment to embedding sharing 'into the DNA of the education system'. This resulted in the later Shared Education Act (2016) and the Department of Education's 'Sharing Works' strategy (2015) providing a legislative and policy driver for education stakeholder bodies on shared education. All of this suggested that this was an opportune time to seek to translate the good practice that had been developed by non-government actors into mainstream approaches and to impact on the quality of that provision.

In dementia, there was some experience of joint working with Government via co-funding arrangements and a supportive dementia strategy had been established to guide improvement in public services. Atlantic's assessment was that the opportunity existed to accelerate the implementation of this strategy and to focus it on the aspects that seemed to offer most potential to improve the care and wellbeing of people living with dementia. However, compared with shared education and early intervention, dementia was a newer policy area still in 'start-up' and development mode. Policy implementation was taking place in a challenging context with limited regional research infrastructure, poor availability of good quality public sector data, no additional funding or staffing for strategy delivery and limited public profile and political scrutiny of the impacts being realised for people living with dementia. It seemed that a joint government / philanthropy programme not only offered financial resources to dementia policy implementation, but also a degree of political and senior official interest that could support the changes its implementers were seeking to make. But expectations for system change were lower than the other two areas.

Essentially, partnering with government constituted one of Atlantic's final 'big bets' and before taking that bet we did our due diligence and slowly began to develop the relationships that would underpin a partnership. On balance, we concluded that the time was right to seek a partnership with government and that this approach offered the best prospects to make a significant change to the public service landscape for Northern Ireland's children and young people and those affected by dementia.

The Lesson Learned

Carefully analyse whether the time is right for a partnership with government, assessing the specific policy, delivery and financial context for each of your areas of interest. Be realistic about the transformative prospects that a shared programme (even a large-scale one by philanthropic standards) may have on the vast and complex public services system. Relationship development with potential partners can begin in advance of any commitment, perhaps involving some collaborative activity to gain insight into how partnership is likely to work in practice.



Deciding to Partner with Government

2. Defining a Joint Programme

Atlantic and its government partners agreed to build the shared programme around outcomes. Government had recently shifted towards this approach by developing an outcomes-based Programme for Government and introducing outcome reporting in several initiatives. Atlantic had experience in outcomes-led working that could support government's aim to shift policy and practice in that direction.

It was apparent during the programme design stage that our government partners were accustomed to an outputs-based and resource-constrained system, with limited scope for longer-term resource planning. In this context public servants were not well equipped to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the joint programme to innovate and take risks. The collaborative programme development process sought to discourage the framing of the Atlantic/DSC partnership as a means to bolster the delivery of under-resourced public services and to encourage the development of plans that would test new ideas and approaches leading to lasting system change and improved outcomes for citizens. Such system change aims included: embedding an early intervention approach into services for children, young people and families, mainstreaming collaborative working among schools, and introducing more data-informed approaches to the planning and delivery of dementia policy and services.



Working within this overall framework, Atlantic staff and government officials in dementia, shared education and early intervention defined programmes reflecting shared strategic priorities and the policy and practice context of each thematic area. They varied in the degree to which they specified the outputs and activities they would fund. While the dementia and shared education programmes defined the projects and activities they would deliver before securing funding approvals, the Early Intervention programme developed a series of broad workstreams and a project proposal process that would be applied after the programme started. Organisations across the early intervention field were supported to develop proposals that would only be approved for funding if they could demonstrate that they met agreed criteria – that they be evidence-informed, have potential to transform mainstream services and have a credible plan for sustainability. On reflection the latter approach provided better opportunity for engagement and buy-in from stakeholders across the system. They devised and took ownership of the solutions they thought would be most effective, while in the other programme areas stakeholders were engaged to deliver and support projects that had already been largely defined at the centre.

The Lesson Learned

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Crafting the Deal

3. Contracting and Approvals

The contracting and approvals process for the partnership programme was complex and lengthy, having to meet the needs of Atlantic, government departments and various public sector delivery agencies. From Atlantic's perspective the key to getting the agreement over the line was being comfortable that there were appropriate mechanisms in place to hold government to account for achieving the outcomes the partners had jointly agreed.

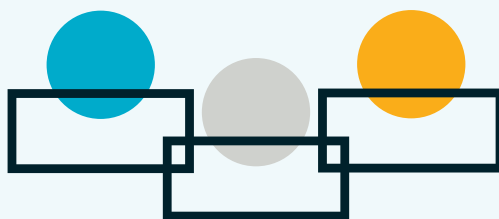
Throughout the development phase, Atlantic representatives persistently posed the questions: How will this realise system change? What difference will it make for citizens and how will we know? and How will the outcomes be sustained?

The outcomes agreed were written into grant contracts and government business cases. Memoranda of understanding were developed to confirm governance arrangements, the role of each party and the shared commitment to maximizing outcomes. Recognising that reducing the flow of grant funds was the only truly reliable leverage Atlantic would have, grant payments were made conditional on progress towards outcomes and provision of match funding at the agreed level. In combination these measures secured commitments from all partners and established formal mechanisms through which their continued efforts to pursue change and progress towards achieving outcomes would be assessed throughout the life of the programme.

Both partners gave considerable thought to the amount, share and source of the funding package for the joint programme. At approximately £62m, the total investment in the joint programme was significant but only constituted around 1% of annual government expenditure - would this amount warrant the attention of politicians and officials? The relative share of funding between Atlantic and government and between the various parts of government was also considered. Too great a share from Atlantic might risk lack of ownership from government and limit the ambition for transformative change; while too small a share could limit Atlantic's leverage and influence. The resulting ratio of 40% Atlantic and 60% government funding was deemed to strike the right balance, giving Atlantic a legitimate seat at the table while firmly retaining the sense that this was a programme owned by government. Similarly, the 60% of funding coming from government was shared between central transformation funds, participating government departments and delivery agencies, ensuring they all had 'skin in the game'. Financial plans also extended beyond Atlantic's involvement, showing the ongoing expenditure from government that would sustain programme outcomes. Although the careful crafting of financial plans resulted in a deal that suited Atlantic and government well, the fact that government financial management processes do not allow for absolute commitment of funding in future budgets meant there was still some degree of reliance on good faith.

The Lesson Learned

Crafting a deal with government is likely to require considerable time and effort but it is vital to give assurances to all parties involved. It is an uncomfortable fact that government bodies cannot commit financial resources beyond their current budget cycle, so a grant maker should seek the security of a publicly stated commitment to the collaborative programme and put in place a governance system that allows it to keep satisfying itself as to the continued bone fides of partners.



Crafting the Deal

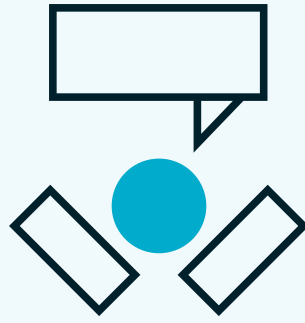
4. Involving the Right People

The three policy areas on which the Atlantic/DSC programme would focus were existing Atlantic priorities. When programme staff began to explore a government partnership, they tapped into their existing relationships with NGOs, delivery bodies, commissioners and policy makers. In parallel, overarching discussions were taking place between Atlantic leadership, politicians and central government officials. So, in each strand of the partnership stakeholders joined at different points, with some being involved from the early stages of programme development and others only becoming involved at delivery stage. In retrospect, we gave insufficient consideration to the existing patterns of behaviour and relationships in our sectors of interest and how they might enable or inhibit success, assuming that buy-in at one level of government would translate into buy-in and effective implementation throughout the system.

As programme implementation progressed we also concluded that the people who would use the services being transformed should have been better involved in defining and overseeing the programmes. There was some very good practice in the dementia programme of involving people with dementia and advocacy organisations in developing and overseeing many of its projects, providing challenge and informing the design of products and services so that they would better meet people's needs. However, this approach was not universal and the people most affected by the programme's issues were not involved at a decision-making level. We should have been more explicit about involvement as a core principle of the programme and ensured that people who use the services we were trying to transform had the opportunity to be involved in programme development and governance.

The Lesson Learned

Consider carefully how all affected parties will be involved in the development, implementation and oversight of your joint programme. Don't assume that commitment at political level will translate into commitment at delivery level or conversely that plans developed with implementation bodies will automatically garner support from policy makers. Map out the relationships and levers for change within the system you hope to influence, and pursue a participative process that ensures those most affected by transformation are involved from the outset.



Crafting the Deal

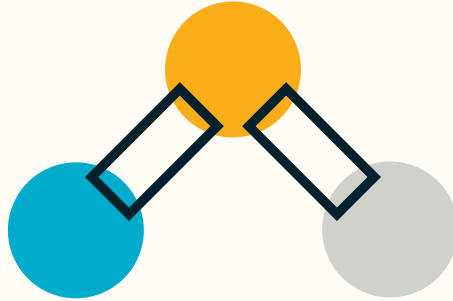
5. Deciding What Role You Will Play

Typically, Atlantic's approach to grant management had been characterised by a relatively light touch, aiming to support grantee's work and respond to any difficulties arising without becoming closely involved in delivery. In this case however, given the scale of the grants involved and uncertainty about how the partnership would work out, Atlantic decided to become an active partner, maintaining a continuous 'hands on' role in the development, roll out and oversight of the three signature projects. This was formalised through the memoranda of understanding that confirmed the roles each party would play.

This approach meant that Atlantic (and subsequently SCI) committed significant human resources to the partnership grants. At times we questioned the added value of this close involvement and the impact we were having on complex government systems but our partners were generally positive about our inputs. Atlantic was recognised as having been a positive disruptor, asking challenging questions, scrutinising progress and enabling access to external resources and expertise. We concluded that being an active partner had helped to keep programmes focused on realising outcomes, encouraged sustainability planning and enhanced impact.

The Lesson Learned

Grantmakers entering a partnership with government have a choice to make about their role, largely stemming from the level of detail and insight they want to have, and their assessment of their partners' commitment and capacity to effectively implement the programme and realise outcomes. Active management facilitates outcome guardianship but is resource intensive. A more arm's length role requires less resource but relies more on effective reporting and mechanisms for intervention in the event the programme drifts off-course. Aside from giving the required assurances on programme delivery, consider how well the foundation's role will enable it to act as a positive disruptor.



Implementing Together

6. Learning to Work Together

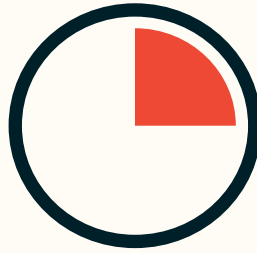
The Atlantic/DSC partnership was new territory for everyone involved and brought together partners with very different perspectives and working practices. Government departments were unused to having a partner at the table with decision making authority and there were several false starts in the early stages when Atlantic felt government was proceeding to implement aspects of the programme without its knowledge or endorsement. Our interest in getting into the details of programme implementation, making incremental improvements and planning from an early stage how outcomes would be sustained was not always matched by our government partners, who were in some cases more content to allow projects to play out, intervening in the case of delivery failure, and evaluating at the end point what would be sustained and how. At times this difference in approach led to conflict and it took some time to arrive at ways of working that met the needs of each partner.

Atlantic's grantmaking approach had generally been to invest in individuals with whom a high degree of trust had been established; people who had the potential to do something transformative if they had the required resources. These individuals tended to have a high degree of control over how the grant was used and often took great personal responsibility for realising the outcomes it was to support. In a large complex government system, individuals have less capacity to effect change and to do things differently. While the majority of the individuals we worked with shared our vision for transformation and commitment to better outcomes, their ability to make change was at times limited by their position in the hierarchy, the priority their organisation placed on the issues each programme was addressing and the time they could allocate to the shared programme in the context of a wider portfolio of responsibilities. Several people moved to other roles in the system during the programme, requiring the development of new relationships and time for them to get up to speed. It was also a challenge to keep senior decision makers engaged throughout the programme and lower grades often deputised.



The Lesson Learned

Good working relationships are an important aspect of any shared programme and it is worth spending time on relationship development upfront. This is not just about people getting along – in complex systems personal goodwill is not enough. Rather it is an opportunity to understand the motivations, intentions and perspectives of each partner and the organisations they work for. Having explicit conversations about these issues (for example the roles individuals will play, where the joint programme will sit in their personal and organisational priorities, how much time they will commit, when and how they might intervene to address issues or enhance outcomes, and what appetite for risk and mid-implementation changes they have) could help lay the groundwork for more effective joint working.



Implementing Together

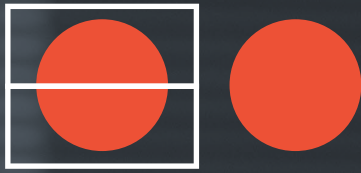
7. Managing Timescales

While philanthropic resources might provide leverage over policy direction they can do little to speed up the government ‘machine’. Programme timescales slipped significantly from original expectations. The development and approvals process took more than a year in each case and the time taken to recruit project managers and delivery leads meant implementation moved slowly at the start. Once these key delivery roles had been filled, implementation began to make good progress but throughout the programme many of the necessary recruitment and service procurement exercises resulted in major delays. Delay in activity means delay in spend and this was particularly problematic for our government partners who were faced with returning unspent funding to central finances then bidding to receive it back again the following year. The flexibility with which Atlantic funds could be drawn down and spent was hugely beneficial in addressing slippage between financial years. The strategic learning and evaluation fund that Atlantic managed outside of government also meant that short-term resources and expertise could be secured directly without relying on slow-moving government processes.

The relatively long planned duration of the programmes (initially 3-4 years) and the allocation within that timescale of a period for research, scoping and proposal development was unusual in the public sector and something that project managers and implementation teams valued enormously.

The Lesson Learned

Establishing a major partnership programme between philanthropy and government takes time. Be prepared to invest the time needed for preparation and approval of business cases, formal securing of finances, establishment of governance mechanisms and recruitment of the staff needed to initiate implementation. Build in time for the things that are often compromised, such as evidence reviews, formative learning and collaborative design. Understand that the pace of the government machine can be slow but keep pressing for timely implementation and look for ways to mitigate delays. Consider keeping some programme funding outside of the government system to facilitate easier access to external expertise and technical support.



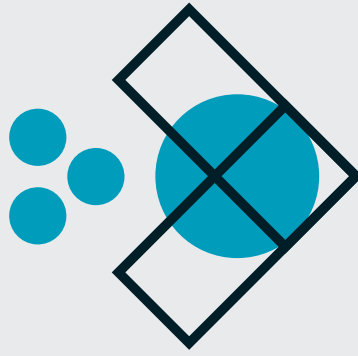
Implementing Together

8. Operating Inside and Outside the System

Atlantic had always acted as an outside advocate in Northern Ireland, working with other non-government actors to press for change in public policies and services. Working in partnership with government changed its advocacy approach, bringing access to politicians and officials at the highest level (at least until the suspension of the NI Assembly in 2016) and offering Atlantic new opportunities to influence on its issues of concern from within the system. On reflection though, more attention should have been paid at the outset to preparing for this change via communication with non-government partners and building external scrutiny into programme governance arrangements. Atlantic had made a separate grant controlled outside of government for programme learning and evaluation. While the primary motivation for this was to ensure a formative evaluation and learning approach, the access it provided to external expertise also proved valuable in retaining an independent, outsider voice.

The Lesson Learned

Entering into partnership with government can impact on a foundation's advocacy approach. As well as taking advantage of the new opportunities it brings for influence within the system, work with existing partners and think about how governance and advisory arrangements can best sustain an independent, external voice.



Realising Lasting Change

9. Mainstreaming Programme Outcomes

Atlantic's concept of 'mainstreaming' the partnership programme was not about securing continued funding by government of as many of the short-term interventions it supported as possible. Embedding those models that were effective into core services was important, but the ambition extended to changing mindsets and building the capacity to deliver services differently, and effecting a systemic change in how government goes about the business of transformation. The thinking was that the funds available through the joint programme would incentivise the creation of 'protected space' in the system within which new approaches could be taken to the three targeted policy areas. Worked examples of how system-wide change is achievable could be created.

In practice, achieving these aims was challenging. There was uncertainty within the system as to the process for introducing new service models into business as usual, and little experience of making the broader changes in ways of working that the programme hoped to achieve. Constrained public finances, a lack of strategic financial management and the absence of a functioning government in Northern Ireland all presented barriers to transformation. Without political leadership there was little incentive in the system to prioritise change and no-one to take the difficult decisions needed to shift resources or decommission services. The day to day challenges of implementation meant that programme oversight boards spent significant time dealing with delivery rather than attending to the more strategic issues of embedding and sustainability. Atlantic used its externally held resources to encourage this longer-term thinking, by commissioning sustainability preparation exercises and project learning reviews that highlighted the deficits in longer-term planning and potential ways forward.



Several aspects of the joint programme are still operational and work continues to embed new services and transition to new ways of working. However, independent reviews have concluded that, at this point, the programme has realised change at the three levels described above.

1. More effective service models have been introduced in each policy area, for example:

- improved approaches for ante-natal care, children's pre-school development and adoption are being rolled out across Northern Ireland.
- more than half of all schools are now involved in high quality shared education and the transition to mainstream government support is underway, so that all pupils will eventually have the opportunity to engage in shared education.
- new post-diagnostic support services for people with dementia have been absorbed into mainstream dementia services.

Each of these cases involved re-design of services with pre-existing budgets or support for the development of new services to which government had already made a commitment (policy or budgetary). In cases involving new service models that would call for additional resources or the cessation of funding for other services, mainstreaming was less successful, even where there was evidence of effectiveness.

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2. The capacity has been developed to plan and deliver services differently within the specific domains of dementia care, children and young people's services and shared education. New standards have been set that will embed those capacities in each respective workforce on an ongoing basis.

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3. Finally, systemic changes are emerging in how government approaches public services, with efforts being made to sustain the model adopted for the Atlantic/DSC programme¹, specifically:

- the joint management arrangements - enhanced collaboration between different parts of government;
- involvement of a party external to government – positive disruption and financial flexibility;
- an outcomes-focused, early intervention approach – collective, evidence-informed decision making using pooled funding.

¹See SCI & Deloitte's Shifting Gear report for more analysis of the challenges and enablers of public service transformation <https://www.socialchangeinitiative.com/shifting-gear-accelerating-public-service-transformation-opportunities-for-northern-ireland>

The Lesson Learned

The Atlantic/DSC partnership met Atlantic's aim to extend the reach of its work. Although the total investment in the programme was small by public sector standards, it had a catalytic impact in our areas of interest. Philanthropic funding leveraged public resources into areas that had previously been poorly supported, reaching more people and improving mainstream services. While it remains to be seen what the longer-term impact of the programme will be on mainstream public services, it has enabled the development of knowledge, capacities and new models of working that are beginning to support further transformative change.

Realising lasting change in public services is a messy, slow and difficult process. The active involvement of philanthropy as partners with government can try to move that process forward by providing the space to transform existing services and develop new ways of working, outside of the pressures of day to day service delivery. In doing so it must instil an early and persistent focus on long-term change, even when implementation crises might distract.

An approach that prioritises systems change over individual policies or short-term interventions is likely to reap most rewards. As one government official involved in the Atlantic/DSC partnership put it:

“The quickest way to waste philanthropic money is to fund ‘good works’ and not go for transformation. The multiplier for philanthropic money is transformation, hence sustainability must be judged against this single criterion”.



Making Change

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The A T L A N T I C *Philanthropies*

Atlantic Philanthropies is a global philanthropic foundation that aims to advance opportunity and tackle the root causes of inequity. Over its lifetime it awarded grants of more than 8\$bn in 8 countries. Atlantic operated in Northern Ireland for 25 years, investing 570\$m of grants to cement peace, improve public services, and protect and promote human rights. Among its final investments in Northern Ireland was a collaborative initiative with the NI Executive that aimed to improve services and outcomes for citizens – focusing on shared education and services for children, young people and families, and people with dementia - and develop more collaborative, effective and outcome focused ways of working.

Social Change Initiative collaborates internationally with activists, policy makers and funders to deliver lasting social change. Established in 2015, it took on responsibility for Atlantic Philanthropies' remaining commitments in Northern Ireland and has a particular interest in extracting and sharing the lessons from its partnership with government. This report is one of a series exploring how this experience can support broader social change efforts.



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