

8th January 2021

Dear Commissioners,

The Community Foundation for Ireland is pleased to make the attached short submission in response to the public consultation underway.

As a foundation which has provided €65 million to communities, many of which have struggled to have their voices heard, we welcome this opportunity to share our views.

We have partnered with over 5,000 voluntary, community and charitable groups during our 21-years of operation.

We are proud to be a strong supporter of community radio through Craol, Community Radio Ireland and partner with other media to promote awareness on issues which need to be addressed in order to achieve our goal of equality for all in thriving communities.

Two of our most significant projects in terms of media engagement during the Covid-19 Pandemic are RTÉ Does Comic Relief, which has seen €5.8 million provided to communities with over 600 grants, as well as the Late Late Toy Show Appeal which has raised over €6.5 million.

Both represent impactful public service broadcasting. The impact is beyond the monies raised and extends to greater awareness, understanding and acknowledgement that the current national crisis discriminates against people who are already vulnerable.

It is noted that the Commission has presented three-questions in its guide to making a submission, some raise issues on which we would not have a view. We have limited our commentary to reflect our experiences in terms of media.

Yours faithfully,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the representative of The Community Foundation for Ireland.

The Community Foundation for Ireland.

8th January 2021

**Submission to The Future of Media Commission
by The Community Foundation for Ireland**

Introduction

The Community Foundation for Ireland and its partners believe in equality for all in thriving communities. We work with individuals, families, corporates and other trusts and foundations as well as Government to translate giving in the moment to giving that is **strategic, sustainable and impactful**. We use our **skills and knowledge developed over 21-years** to help donors turn aspirations into effective investments.

In 2020 alone we provided over €15 million in grants. At a time of national crisis we have adapted and responded forming new and unique partnerships, including a **Covid-19 Emergency Fund, RTÉ Does Comic Relief** as well as the **Late Late Toy Show Appeal**. Together we have given **frontline organisations and lifeline services the resources for digital transformation** so their vital work can continue throughout the Pandemic.

Since our establishment we have provided in excess of **€65m to communities** through strategic investments. **Our Donors provide leadership and support across areas as diverse as engaging communities on climate action, restorative justice for young people, human rights as well as identifying future priorities**, including support for **all-island civic society engagement**.

In addition the issues of **climate change, domestic violence as well as rights for minorities such as travellers, migrants and LRBTI+** still need to be urgently addressed. **Brexit** and the **post-Covid** scenario will also present their own challenges.

We have a dedicated and committed team; they have extensive experience of grant-making from working with over 5,000 non-profit organisations at a national, regional and local level throughout Ireland and overseas. With over 1,800 community foundations globally, the community foundation model is proven and effective model for social change.

Public Service Media

The provision of Public Service Media is crucial to ensure that minority communities are not silenced in terms of the national debate in Ireland. The public service element of broadcasting, primarily but not exclusively through RTÉ, TG4, RnaG and Community Radio, plays a significant and important role to ensure such communities can increase awareness, educate the wider public and use their voice to achieve positive change.

In other jurisdictions where such a public service remit is not protected and securely funded these voices have been silenced – as media solely driven by profit races towards high audience entertainment content often supplemented by news and current affairs which does not offer plurality of voice.

The Community Foundation for Ireland and its partners regard such access to public service media as key to achieve the goal of equality for all in thriving communities is achieved.

As a funder of Craol, Community Radio Ireland, the Foundation acknowledges the role of community radio and would welcome any commitment to expand the current range of services. An area worth exploring would be the expansion of community broadcasting beyond the geographical definition of community to consider services which support minorities who may live nationally but are bonded as a community.

Recommendation: In order to ensure access for all communities to media a Public Service element needs to be resourced and protected. The unique roles of RTÉ, TG4 and RnaG should be recognised in all future policies. The current community radio network is expanded not just geographically but also to include minorities, such as Travellers, LGBTI+, Womens Rights, New Communities etc.

Supporting Public Service Media

Future media policy needs to ensure security of resourcing and funding for a public service remit. The current TV licence fee which has been used to ensure the development of programming which at its cutting edge has consistently put a spotlight on issues which otherwise would not be covered has provided a public service safeguard.

Future proposals to amend funding from the licence fee or the implementation of an alternative revenue source from Government must include solid commitments to content which reflects all aspects of modern Ireland and its people.

Minorities need to be assured in future funding policy that their contributions are more than accommodated but are welcomed, and welcomed not just in specialised outlets or off-peak programming but are reflected in the mainstream.

Recommendation: Future funding needs guarantees that public service media will represent a true reflection of modern Ireland and its communities. Such inclusion must extend to mainstream media and not be solely confined to specialised or off-peak productions.

Ability to unite the nation

At its most impactful public service media has an ability to unite the nation. In sports, the arts or through current affairs there are moments when we come together. The role of a national broadcaster in these moments is unique.

At The Community Foundation for Ireland we have recently partnered with RTÉ for two powerful moments which united the country during the Covid-19 Pandemic. RTÉ Does Comic Relief has provided over €5.8 million to communities while the Late Late Toy Show Appeal generated €6.5 million for children's charities.

Looking at both of these productions as fund-raising opportunities does not capture the full impact. Both were primetime broadcasts which delivered important awareness raising, education and understanding of the issues facing vulnerable groups, including children, at a time of crisis.

The testimonies from both nights have remained in the Irish consciousness. The impact of the stories relayed has continued long after the fund-raising efforts closed. This is public service broadcasting at its most impactful.

Such events would not be possible unless there is a truly national medium, such as RTÉ, which can draw in an audience and unite it for events which are truly Irish. This is a resource which other media, whether traditional or social, cannot fulfil.

Recommendation: The protection of a national public service media service in all future policy. The media outlet to have a remit to foster, resource and platform public service content. The national media outlet is sustainable but is not profit driven.

Social Justice and Investigative Journalism

The benefit of having national media outlets with a strong investigative journalism commitment has been central to advancing key social justice issues in Ireland.

The Áras Attrachta investigation by RTÉ nearly seven years ago, the States of Fear documentary by Mary Rafferty in 1999 and more recent investigations, including those on rogue landlords, whistleblowers and on environmental issues, have all had a major impact on Irish society.

Any future proposals on media should ensure that we continue to have broadcast, print and online media which can commit resources to detailed and lengthy investigations.

Such an ability is key to shining a light on parts of our society which are overlooked and forgotten. Not only have such productions in the past increased awareness they have led to positive change for people who otherwise may not have a voice. They also importantly hold policymakers to account.

Recommendation: Future policy to recognise the unique role of investigative journalism in advancing social justice issues. A commitment to protect such journalism by ensuring the continued provision of adequate resources.

ENDS

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