

Innovate Together Fund

SOLUTIONS FOR THE “NEW NORMAL”

The COVID-19 pandemic has marked the year of 2020 and has triggered a socio-economic crisis with new and complex challenges. The emergence of new **economic, social and environmental problems**, threaten the **equality, stability, sustainability and inclusivity** of our society. Many Social Purpose Organisations (SPOs), foundations or funds, as well as entrepreneurs or mature businesses are proposing mitigation measures. However, the harmful effects of the crisis are not equally distributed over sectors and groups of people. The strongest impact seems to be in **poor regions and for disadvantaged groups**; for those already in vulnerable situations. Among the countries hit by this pandemic, Ireland has begun its journey of recovery from the crisis; Rethink Ireland is one of the main stakeholders actively working in this direction. Creating “Innovate Together Fund” as a collaboration between the government, philanthropists and social innovators, Rethink Ireland believes that **innovation** and a **cross-sectoral approach** are the two keys needed to unlock solutions to address the current challenges and shape the “new normal”.

RETHINKING IRELAND WHILE INVESTING FOR IMPACT

Rethink Ireland provides **both financial and non-financial support**, cash grants and business support, to the social innovations which can bring a real difference and create a sustainable social ecosystem. Their vision is building an Ireland in which social innovators are supported to realise their ideas and **make positive societal change**. By stimulating strong partnerships among individuals, families, businesses and governmental bodies, Rethink Ireland has identified different charities and social enterprises working in communities across the country, which are making real headway and understand that new thinking is needed in Ireland.

Over the past four years, Rethink Ireland raised **€28 million** in philanthropic donations, which when matched by the Government of Ireland, created a **€56 million** social innovation fund. Out of this total fund, they structured **24 funds on 4 specific areas** (climate

justice, education, economic empowerment, health) received a collective of **1,667 applications** for funding, and backed **131 innovations** with cash grants and capacity-building support. Rethink Ireland is thereby a leading funder within the not-for-profit sector in Ireland.

The latest initiatives they developed focus on **fostering and supporting social innovators** for projects addressing various social challenges that are particularly pertinent as a consequence of the pandemic. Some of these are represented by improving access to education for students affected by disability or disadvantage, organisations that educate, train or enhance the employment opportunities of those who experience inequality or discrimination. Also, they targeted projects addressing mental health support, grief counselling, physical health and access to emergency services.

Considering all the **challenges brought by 2020’s pandemic**, for both potential investors who want to close the gap among different excluded groups of people and for these prospective final beneficiaries of their investments, Rethink Ireland has worked to find and back Ireland’s best social innovations. Hence, this summer they have initiated a new specially-dedicated fund for tackling COVID-19 consequences, called “**Innovate Together Fund**”.

“INNOVATE TOGETHER FUND” SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS COMMUNITY-LED

Rethink Ireland believes it is the time to act and to **collaborate with the Irish Government, the philanthropic, and the social innovation communities** to address the issues that have stemmed from the COVID-19 crisis and that will be part of the ‘new normal’ when the Irish society recovers.

The Innovate Together Fund **supports organisations who have developed creative responses to the COVID-19 crisis with lasting potential**. These may relate to the vulnerable Irish communities, their health, education, employability and economy. These innovations will support those who have been most affected by the crisis,

ultimately helping to make this society a more inclusive, equal and sustainable place to live. The Innovate Together Fund intends to fund organisations that are **adapting, learning and innovating** in their services and business models.

The fund was open to projects looking to make an economic and social impact that will improve the overall well-being of people and their communities. Some of the critical areas¹ the fund aims to support are:

- Online education: developing new technologies for primary and post-primary school students.
- Youth mental health: finding new intervention and prevention services.
- Environmental: promoting recycling and reuse of materials.
- Food security: improving Irish food production.

- Remote working: smoothing the transition to working remotely.
- Community outreach: inclusion and support for vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Workforce up-skills: training and educating workers responding to changes in the Irish economy.
- Physical health: innovating online medical and physical health solutions.

The awardees of the Innovate Together Fund will receive all the necessary support to bring their projects to life: including grants starting at €20,000, a business support package, access to an online accelerator programme and support in the process of project performance management.

WHAT IS UNIQUE ABOUT THE INNOVATE TOGETHER FUND?

The fund has been established in a very short period of time as a multi-sector approach, supporting social innovation projects acting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in different sectors: Education, Food Security, Mental Health, Climate Justice, Reskilling the workforce, Community Outreach, Physical Health and other cross-cutting issues.

At the same time, there is a selection of the most relevant social innovations to maximise the social impact: strong cross-government department involvement in the selection process (Advisory Board) and a selection panel composed by sector experts.

Rethink Ireland intends to reach the most vulnerable populations through community-led organisations and their social innovations, covering a high number of target groups.

Lastly, the fund is built on a strong collaboration between government, philanthropists and social innovators.

INCENTIVISING PRIVATE CONTRIBUTION WHILE CREATING STRONG PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION

Rethink Ireland has **collaborated with the Irish Government's Department** of Rural and Community Development to create the Innovate Together Fund. The Fund is supported by a commitment of €5 million from the Department of Rural and Community Development through the support of the Dormant Accounts Fund. At the same time, **the public investment is complemented by the private sector contribution** bringing considerably higher impact. Rethink Ireland had pledged to leverage this funding to **raise additional philanthropic**. As of August 2020, they had received more than €600,000 in

philanthropic donations from donors such as foundations or companies.

While the public sector brings their expertise in identifying the issues which need to be addressed by community-led organisations, the private sector provides non-financial technical expertise, given directly to these selected projects. This innovative approach highlights **the importance of non-financial support** received through the public-private partnership facilitated by Rethink Ireland. At the same time, it emphasises the increased attention offered to the **non-monetary impact over building a sustainable investment eco-system** and contributing to capacity building.

¹ <https://rethinkireland.ie/call-for-new-donors-as-e5-5-million-innovate-together-fund-reopens-for-applications/>

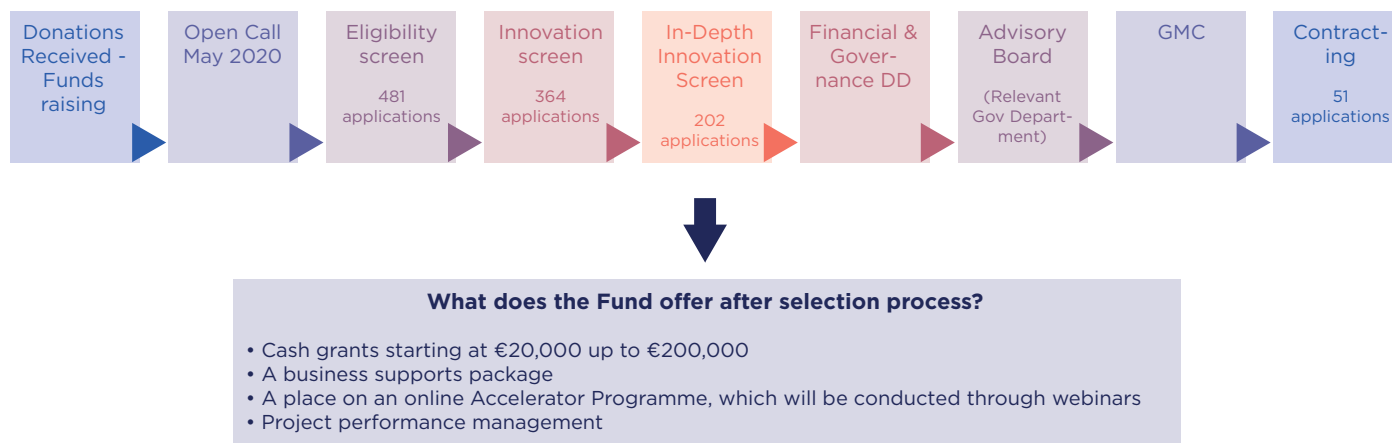


Figure 1. Selection Process specially designed to respond to the sectoral challenges identified by the Government

The **selection process** of the projects is specially designed to facilitate **both a bottom-up and a top-down approach**, strengthening the connection between government departments and community-led organisations. On one hand, the government is involved in the assessment of applications as to their suitability for the issues they identified at the national level through strategic analysis and planning. By forming an Advisory Board composed by different representatives from relevant government departments, the public actors choose from a cross-sectoral perspective the initiatives which need the most urgent funding.

Also, the public sector is willing to support this initiative as **the management of the risk of their investment is transferred through Rethink Ireland to private investors**. They are interacting directly with community-led organisations, which are at the core of the problem understanding the targeted population, and they have the knowledge for pushing towards innovation.

BENEFICIARIES AT THE CENTER OF SOLUTIONS

Round one of Innovate Together opened for applications for two weeks in May 2020. Over this period, 481 applications from 26 different counties were received, with a total funding request of €27 million. Out of this

record-breaking number, 51 projects with potential social impact will receive the funding and the business support. These projects were recently announced. More information on each can be found at https://rethinkireland.ie/awarded_fund/innovate-together-fund-2020/.

The small initiatives selected have **the potential to be scaled up** at the national or even European level, putting the final beneficiaries at the centre of solutions. The main targeted groups impacted by the future innovative projects are : travellers, young people, people with addiction issues, LGBTI+ Community , people with socio-economic disadvantage, people and children with long term illness, people with a physical disability, prisoners, sexual assault survivors, migrants, unemployed, people suffering from homelessness, disadvantaged communities, Gaeltacht communities, NGOs and civil society.

MORE INFORMATION

Learn more about the Innovate Together Fund on the Rethink Ireland official website, [here](#).

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